

## Sermon Archive 261

Sunday 15 September, 2019

Knox Church, Christchurch

Lesson: Luke 15: 1-10

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



I used to have 100 sheep, but now I only have 99. Would you like to come with me, and help me search? Or do you not care?

I used to have ten silver coins, but now I only have nine. Would you like to help me turn the house upside down, looking for it? Or do you not care?

-ooOoo-

Here's a wee sequence of events.

- In March, in our city, one person shot to death 51 other people, simply because they were Muslim.
- In May, Jacinda Ardern went to Paris to meet with politicians and social media moguls, to talk to them about how to manage the hate speech that encourages hateful and destructive acts. The meeting was called "the Christchurch Call."
- On Monday, the CEO of Twitter (how many tweets are circulated each day around the world?) came to the Beehive, for follow up talks with the Prime minister.
- On Wednesday, Simon Bridges said that it was simply a talk-fest, **and that "everyday New Zealanders" don't care about the Christchurch call.**

Do you remember, after the attacks, a lot of us took to saying "they are us", and "we are one". There was a widespread affirmation that humanity, in all its cultural, ethnic and religious diversity was one family. There was a passion to protect one another from forces that would cancel us out. There was a renewal of determination to know our neighbours, to watch out for our neighbours, to care for our neighbours. If anyone was

vulnerable to hatred, then that was our concern, together.

Well, according to Mr Bridges, we don't care about that.

And not only do we not care about it - we don't care about it because we are "everyday New Zealanders".

Who are these "everyday New Zealanders"? And in this phrase, "everyday New Zealanders", are we not meeting another expression of divide and conquer? Or if not "divide and conquer", then "divide and shun". For if we, non-caring as we are, are "everyday New Zealanders", then (on the outside of the everyday, the authentic, and the real) who are the rest? Muslims? Refugees? Rainbow people? The disabled? The homeless? No, these people are not everyday New Zealanders; they are **not** us; and about **them**, we are said not to care.

Hiding in the words of the Leader of the Opposition, is something destructive and hateful. So it might be just as well that we don't care.

To a people, purported not to care, come a couple of parables. They seem to be about sheep and coins, but they're really about people. These parables are about people who ought to be safe in the fold, but somehow have become lost (missing pieces). And although we don't care, the shepherd cares. Although we don't care, the woman cares. The shepherd and the woman go out in search of who is lost. She lights a light, and searches every corner of the house. He races out into the realms of wolves and dangers, risking himself. And when each finds what (rather **whom**) has been lost, they come home, announce the restoration, and call upon the people to rejoice. It's just a shame that the people don't care.

Whether we care or not, the God-figures in these parables care. Where God is present, there is care. Where care is present, God is there. Do we care? Is God here? The missing piece is found, and we are called to rejoice.

I've been thinking lately about caring and missing pieces.

It now is widely acknowledged that New Zealand has a huge problem with

suicide. Frightening numbers of people who should be with us, safe in the fold, are now missing pieces. In the year to 30 June, the number was 685. Of those 685, men were over-represented, as were Maori. God help the Maori man! Out there in the wolves, dropped into the darkest corner of the house, the people are going missing. They're becoming missing pieces. Do we care? Although some may not, the shepherd does; the woman does. Where God is present, there is a seeking, a searching. Mike King, a Maori man, travels the country, talking particularly at secondary schools, reassuring young New Zealanders that there is hope and help. The government establishes a Suicide Prevention Office to assist people in distress. A suicide bereavement service is being established to help the people left behind. From my wallet of ten silver coins, some are being directed towards assisting the distressed. Do I care? The God figure says to me "Rejoice with me, for the lost is being found."

More missing pieces. It recently was reported that large numbers of British people, who had hoped to make Aotearoa New Zealand home, are giving up and going back to Britain. 6000 of "them" left in the last twelve months - an increase from the previous year of 200. Many are citing "rental costs" and "heavy traffic" as reasons for leaving. But more and more are saying that this is just not a friendly place. One leaver said: "It was hard to make friends. The cliques are so hard to break into". Feeling a similar lack of welcome, a number of refugees can't afford to leave. But because they can't cope with the unfriendliness, they just stay at home. From our community, our public space, they become missing. They become an empty space where there should be a person. (Mind you, I don't know what they're complaining about. I find it friendly here. Could that be because I'm an everyday New Zealander - on the outside anyway?) Sheep are lost, and coins are missing. There are spaces where there should be people. Do I care? Each year, hundreds of thousands of hours are given by volunteers to make refugees welcome. Dunedin, Wanganui, Invercargill and other cities recently have asked for refugees to be settled in their bounds. And recently one family known very well to me gave thanks to God, that

one particular Irishman who arrived in this country with one suitcase, became very well loved by his community here on the other side of the world - blessing and blessed. People **do** receive others. Community **does** form. People **do** call others into the places that should not be empty. One by one, there is one less missing person. This is gospel work - and the God figure says to me "Rejoice with me, for the lost is being found."

The people of Jesus hear that call to rejoice. They allow themselves to notice the missing pieces. They allow themselves to be made alive that others may come. It is said that we don't care. It is said that **we** are **us**, and **they** are **them**.

I used to have 100 sheep, but now I only have 99. Would you like to come with me, and help me search? I used to have ten silver coins, but now I only have nine. Would you like to help me turn the house upside down? Maybe Simon could come along too.

A moment of quiet.

-ooOoo-

Day after post-script:

A number of people suggested that the sermon should be sent to Simon Bridges, so I sent it. Mr Bridges responded quickly. This is his response:

**From:** Hon Simon Bridges <[Simon.Bridges@parliament.govt.nz](mailto:Simon.Bridges@parliament.govt.nz)>

**Subject:** RE: A sermon preached at Knox Church, Christchurch, this morning

**Date:** 16 September 2019 at 6:51:52 AM NZST

**To:** Matthew Jack

Dear Matthew,

I have never said NZers don't care about the Christchurch call.

Regards,

Simon Bridges

Sent with BlackBerry Work

The Knox Church website is at: <http://www.knoxchurch.co.nz.html> . Sermons are to be found under News / Sermons.