

Sermon Archive 264

Sunday 6 October, 2019

Knox Church, Christchurch

Lesson: 2 Timothy 1: 1-14

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



I'm not all that good at playing the piano, but the other day I set up the wee camera in my phone next to the piano at home, and took a one minute video of me playing "A nightingale sang in Berkeley Square". The performance was far from perfect, but I posted it on facebook anyway. With the video, I posted the following comment:

"It's called home-based creativity - not meant to be polished. Post your own low-tech Saturday night creativity at home thing, if you care to . . . Some of my friends sing, play, act, speak poetry. All creative - why not?"

Fairly quickly I got a response from Marion. Marion's a potter, and always has a pot "on the go". She posted a picture of one of her latest. I clicked "like", and then things got a little quiet. Trying again, I posted a second video: an even less perfect performance of "We'll gather lilacs in the Spring".

Well, this time Deirdre posted a painting she'd done a while ago of her grandson, Sam. Von sent a photo of a poster she'd made for her community choir, and told me she and some friends had sung along to the "Lilacs" piece. Mike wrote a poem. Graeme said that he'd gone looking for his bagpipes, and when he'd found them under a great blanket of dust discovered that his chanter had no reed in it. So he gave up on that idea. A day later a video appeared of Chris playing his violin, with Barry in the background on the piano. Thom sent a picture of some prints he'd done, and said that he planned to make some more soon. Harry posted an image of a line drawing. The accompanying message explained that this was the first one he'd drawn for ages, since a while back he'd become busy and a bit discouraged - but that it felt good to be drawing again. Jesse confessed that he's really missing doing woodwork - but that in his current living arrangement he can't set up a workshop. Another friend said "I'm just not creative". He's wrong. He speaks three languages. His conversation is enjoyable because his mind is

quick and makes fun, lateral connections in company. I wonder what happened. And how sad that he insists that he's uncreative!

Another group of people not really participating in the "creativity drive" were those friends who are professional musicians. Best equipped to express creativity at a high level, they were silent. I think I've worked out why. Perhaps it's just not appropriate to circulate low-tech, "Saturday night at home" material when you're spending the rest of your week trying to build a quality musical reputation. I guess it's only sensible to want to protect the career you're trying to make. Creativity is fun, but work is important. One needs to be practical / realistic / responsible.

Here's a little theological reflection on a reading not chosen for today. In the creation stories in Genesis, by the time that God makes the human being in God's image, all that God has done, up to that point, is be creative. God has made everything - and it's good. If we were made in the image of *that* God, then surely we'd have to say that deep within the human being, we find a basic creativity. That is at least part of what we should understand as the "original image" in which we were made. The Spanish artist Pablo Picasso is often quoted as having said "All children are born artists; the problem is to remain an artist as we grow up". The career concerns kick in and we become reluctant to create. The criticisms sting, with the discouragements arriving; and eventually we say "I am not creative". There is a wearing down of who we are born to be - a discouraging of the original joy - with which we might have sung in celebration of the gift of the original image. The problem is to remain, or to find again, what we were born to be.

-ooOoo-

In the second letter of Paul to Timothy, Paul is presented as someone who has some idea of what he was born to be. He was born to be a herald - one who announces news. He was born to be a teacher of the gospel. That's why he's travelled about, announcing the good news, setting up new communities, writing letters, staying in touch. This is what he was created to do and be. But now it's kind of fallen over. The time of his imprisonment is dragging on, and he's finding there's less and less he can do in his confinement. Prison, as a residential address is also giving a kind of moral advantage to his critics. Paul, the prisoner! The guilty one. Who is *he* to

talk to us about God? The concerns kick in. The criticisms sting. The discouragements make it difficult for us to keep being who we were born to be. Paul says he's not ashamed. I don't imagine he'd say "I'm not ashamed" unless there was some suggestion circulating that maybe he **should** be. A traveller confined. A speaker robbed of his voice. A hoper burdened with discouragement. He says he's not ashamed. He also says that he can't wait to see Timothy again. Whatever you make of the literature, the historical fact was that Paul never did see Timothy again. He was beheaded in Rome sometime around the time of the great fire. Failure is taking on a more hard-edged shape in his life - and that has to be hard.

Taking on its own hard-edged shape in Timothy's life is discouragement. Paul tells the youngster not to be ashamed. He tells him he's aware of his tears - why is Timothy crying? He tells him that some people are cowardly and letting go of what should be held close - as if they have become tired (the problem is to remain what we were born to be). Timothy is presented as someone, here, as losing his grip on the original gift. Paul says to him "re-ignite the gift of God that is within you". As surely as you are your mother's son, as surely as you are your grandmother's grandchild, and as surely as you are my beloved friend, rekindle that sense of being a beloved child, made in the image of God. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you with the help of the Holy Spirit living in you.

One needs to be practical / realistic. Someone says "I'm just not creative", but is wrong. He speaks three languages. His conversation is enjoyable because his mind is quick and makes fun, lateral connections in company. I wonder what happened - and how he insists that he's uncreative!

Guarding the good treasure, with the help of the Holy One who lives in you. Do not be discouraged. Rekindle the gift of God. Advice sent from prison to the one who's struggling to hold on to (or to discover for the first time through the caring of a friend) who he was born to be - who he most originally *is*.

-ooOoo-

Hoping not to ruin the sermon at this quite late stage, here's a thought on

literary criticism. Everyone kind of agrees that the **first** letter to Timothy is authentic, original Paul. The writing style, the vocabulary, the little asides that demonstrate quirks and affection, all claim it's so. It's definitely a letter from one old individual, Paul, to one young individual, Timothy. The **second** letter is different - different style, different mood. The fact that first copies of it didn't start appearing until about forty years after Paul died - all makes it look like it's someone writing in the name of Paul. Sometimes when letters get written in the name of someone else, it's in order to get noticed, or to claim some un-earned authority. The name-claiming is ambitious. But sometimes it's not ambitious. Sometimes it's because a community is going through something big, and is wondering "what might Paul say?" Big names get rolled out because there are big questions, or common experiences, that the community is struggling with.

So, (for your consideration), if this letter wasn't actually by Paul, then that means it's not private advice from one person to another. It's a community reflecting on something that concerns a lot of people - a common experience. In this case the common experience is of being discouraged, or losing track of who we are or of the good gifts that are in us. If this letter isn't by Paul, perhaps we're learning that it's quite a common thing for people to become too busy to create, too criticised to hope, too discouraged to stand. It's a common thing. I shouldn't be surprised, then, that some of my friends stopped creating. I shouldn't be surprised that a talented man can't see his talent. It's only to be expected.

So maybe I need to become a good response to that common thing. Maybe I need to learn how to say, in my own way, to my own friends, "rekindle that gift of yours". Maybe I need to be ready to encourage, to remember the tears, to name the people who have blessed us, to do all those other things that Paul did for Timothy - as if Timothy is all around me - as is the hope of God.

Soon we will pray; but for now, we keep a short moment of quiet.

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