

Sermon Archive 326

Sunday 3 January, 2021

Knox Church, Christchurch

Lessons: Revelation 21: 1-5

1 Corinthians 13: 1-13

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



Hugh Wilson was a wee boy who grew up in a manse provided by Knox Church, Christchurch. Having more than grown up, the adult went off to Banks Peninsula to regenerate native bush on a ruined soil. His technique of dealing with invasive gauze, and of allowing the earth to heal naturally, caused initially skeptical local farmers to say "God save us from fools and dreamers". I imagine the phrase "fools and dreamers" was borrowed by the local farmers from somewhere else, but I've not been able to find the original speaking of it.

Anyway, whatever the origins, spiritedly applied to the local dreamer, the expression suggests that people with a new vision for the world, foolishly, are dreaming! It's foolish to hope for a better world - particularly through any unorthodox, non-commercial machine.

We, however, as a community of Christian people, are encouraged by faith, to pursue a hope for the world - to believe ourselves towards a new and better world - and all that through the exercise of faith, hope and love.

So, on the first Sunday of the year, starting with what the secular promises recently have been, let's indulge ourselves in a wee bit of hope (and later a bit of faith and love, if you want). Here's a 2021 wish-list of fools and dreamers.

-ooOoo-

2021: Houses - physical structures within which to live. I bought my first one in 2008, and paid a mortgage to the National Bank, that then was swallowed up by the ANZ. In the commercial world, big fish eat little fish, and the logos on top of the bank statements change. I carried on paying. Somewhere in the passage of life, and the shifting of "being at home", I sold the first house, and bought another one here in Christchurch. Something in the heart shifted, and my plans for the future shifted. So, relatively, I'm safe as houses here. Many aren't. The first manifestation of our current Labour government was elected in 2017, with a promise to provide many, many extra houses. It didn't quite happen. Phil Twyford was moved sideways, and

new goals were set. Praying for progress, that fewer people will be homeless, and that fewer people will be crowded, and fewer people will be paying rent when they might be paying mortgage, would it be the domain for fools and dreamers to imagine anything else? 2021.

2021: Child poverty

Well, following the 2017 election, the newly elected Prime Minister took on the portfolio of "Child Welfare Reduction". And that showed, through the top person's appointment, that our government, like us all, wanted to create a future world in which children wouldn't live in poverty. Fools and dreamers?

Statistics NZ, (Tatauranga Aotearoa) produced nine different measures for child poverty, hoping that the nine measures would provide more nuance for describing and attending to what poor children in our country are experiencing. Good on the statisticians!

The Department of the Prime minister and Cabinet reported in July of last year, that nearly a quarter of our children and young people are living in poverty, when the cost of housing is taken into account. (<https://dpmc.govt.nz/publications/child-poverty-related-indicators-report-html>)

"For individual children, poverty is about growing up in a household that experiences financial hardship and the stress that arises from having to make decisions that involve trade-offs between basic needs. The experience of poverty can involve various forms of hardship, such as going hungry, living in cold, damp houses and foregoing opportunities, like school outings and sports activities."

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2021: Covid

Another big one: Health amid this thing called "Covid-19" Currently the global death toll is 1.76 million. That's a huge number. Given how the lesser population of Europe understood the boundaries of its world during the time of the Black Death, it's nowhere near the devastation and fear that old Europe dealt with. The Black Death took out between 75mill and 200mill. Pandemics come in, kill people, raise superstitions in the survivors, leave all remainders frightened.

We didn't ask for it. Some of us responded to it better than others. Some mustered community response better than others. With new, rather more infectious strains developing in Europe, dare we imagine anything better for 2021? A world where we can come and go, and breathe and live. A world where we don't need to be frightened of those around us? A world where company innocently can be embraced? Fools and dreamers: Christian hopes for 2021.

2021: Ecological restoration

On election in 2017, the new government promised the planting many trees, and various other measures to tackle climate change. Not as many trees as planned have been planted. A Zero carbon Bill was passed - goal for neutrality: 2050. New permits for off-shore oil and gas explorations were frozen. Mentions were made of providing support for reduction of emissions from farming, industrial energy and transport. Tuvalu continues to sink beneath its friend, the Pacific Ocean. If they lived in Tuvalu, or were socially responsible Christians living anywhere in the world, what might fools and dreamers hope for 2021?

2021: Kindness

Still within the realm of current Kiwi political discourse, we welcome this odd, particularly non-political matter of being kind. One of our politicians introduced it into our community discourse, so we need to deal with it here. "Be kind to one another" she said.

This caused ripples of laughter among the ranks of those who only could see politics as push and shove, argument and counter-argument, "yes' and opposing "no". That anyone in political office ever would suggest that kindness was right for the time, was a fool and dreamer! FOOLS AND DREAMERS!

I'm not sure how such old fashioned qualities ended up finding place in political discourse. Be kind to one another. Consider, for a moment, that our Westminster system of government is about argument and counter argument. Arguments and counter-arguments are offered in the hope that the opposing speaker might lose, and you might win, and keep your advantage. It's about power, ascendancy and being right. The last thing you'd want is some sense of people being kind to you, listening carefully to what you say - if indeed you say something to make things better.

That, within our political processes in 2021, competition might become kind collaboration! No, that's the stuff of fools and dreamers. But, maybe, a hope for 2021?

2021: Peace

It was reported on Radio New Zealand the other day, that one Syrian child was asked by a friend of Father Christmas, what he or she wanted for Christmas. The answer, of course, was "peace". How surprising was that? The child of war wants peace.

Is that foolishness and dreaming? A hope for 2021.

2021: Giving thanks for the dead

Those we love die. Each year, those whom we have come to know, some of whom have nurtured us, some of whom have just joined us for recent we stretches of the road, get into our hearts, help us, move us, form us, bless us, grow us - then go to God. Might fools and dreamers wish to be such people to those around them? Might fools and dreamers wish to farewell the good ones with love and dignity? As death is part of life, as saying "goodbye" is part of what we need to learn to say, do the fools and dreamers need to learn to say a good "goodbye", while always being foolish enough to cling to something called resurrection? Foolishness and dreaming for 2021.

2021: Faith, hope and love

And now, into what already is foolish and dreaming, enters something completely absurd. It's a wee reflection from someone called Paul, who sincerely believes that while all things come and go, and all things mark our lives as **we** come and go, three things touching us are lasting.

He says it's faith, hope and love. If we're looking to build a new world, inject worthy things into our current world, that will have an everlasting effect on the world, then let's go with faith, hope and love.

What would your life be like, if you were to grow in faith - to live less cynically, more hopefully, more open to the better things of God being made manifest in human life? More open to Christ being alive among us? And what would your life be like, if you were to grow in hope - not to give up, not to resign, not to say "OK" to the obvious, to let yourself grow in something called resurrection? And what would it be like if you were fully to be loved? Isn't that the condition within which all human life flourishes and becomes wonderful?

Or maybe those sorts of ambitions are only for fools and dreamers!

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A place to live. Food and warmth for our children. Freedom from sickness. Our ecology healing. People being kind. Peace in the world. Thanksgiving for our dead. The lasting significance of faith, hope and love.

Is that pure dreaming and foolishness? Or could that be 2021?

Ah, perhaps I'm a fool and a dreamer. But now let's keep a moment of quiet.

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