

Sermon Archive 329

Sunday 7 February, 2021

Knox Church, Christchurch

Lesson: Mark 1: 29-39

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



There's no date on it, just a label, so I don't know when it was produced. Maybe it was made for another time, or maybe (for some reason I haven't fathomed yet) it was made exactly for **this** time. (More pondering about that soon!) It's a two minute video clip, the first line of which, delivered by a young brown man in a black t-shirt, twirling a basketball on his right index finger, is "This is a message from New Zealand".

What follows is a series of quick clips of ethnically and culturally diverse, age-diverse, linguistically diverse people, all adding their two-cents-worth to the second speaker's line "If I could encourage the world to do one thing, it would be . . ."

Well, what would we encourage the world to do?

- The sharply dressed man on the paepae says "to listen very carefully to one another".
- The man in the car workshop says "to take a look at what's going on around you, and see if you can do something about it".
- The young Maori boy, seemingly half-way through a growth spurt, says "Go to the library, you know".
- The little blond boy in green gumboots, sitting with his dogs on a hay bail, says "always be a good boy".
- The young woman in the café says "to know our neighbours, and to be a part of a community".
- The middle aged man with the large bone carving around his neck, in te reo Maori (with subtitles) says "seek the treasure of your heart, and bow to none but the loftiest mountains". (Sounds like a whakatauki.)
- In Mandarin, with subtitles, the teenager on his BMX bike says "be honest; go out and ride with your friends". In the background his stunt-performing friend falls off his bike.
- The young woman in a school uniform looks straight down the barrel of the camera and says "don't be an egg".
- Peter Gordon, in his kitchen, says "cook with love".
- The old kaumatua with not many teeth says "the right path in life is learning and

getting on together". The kuia with moko kauae on her chin adds "so that we don't get in the wrong place; amene".

Well, that's what New Zealand would ask the world to do. I'm left wondering who made this video, and why. It's nicely produced and would have cost money to make, but what's it for? Why has someone decided that the world needs a message from New Zealand?

Well, right at the very end of the video, comes a closing frame: "100% Pure New Zealand". That's a slogan adopted a while back by Tourism New Zealand. The video doesn't say "come and visit New Zealand - especially you top-end, well-endowed tourists with lots of money". It doesn't push a specific product. It just presents our country as a community of goodwill and the pondering of wisdom. It doesn't ask for anything, doesn't suggest any specific response from the viewer.

As I said at the start, it doesn't have a date on it, so I don't know whether it was made for some time now gone, or for now. I suspect it's not for now, because there's little point in presenting New Zealand as an attractive place to visit when tourists are currently banned from coming here. Who would spend money producing a video that's not going to make money. If it **was** made for this time, then it can't have been made with profit in mind. It could only have been made as a word of encouragement to a world that needs encouraging - a kind of sharing of hope from a community that knows, in terms of the state of the rest of the world, how tremendously lucky we are. Why send a message from New Zealand? Why address the world? Why extend greetings and hope - - - ? No, without a date on it, I suspect the video must be a left-over from another time.

-ooOoo-

In the privacy of a private home, behind the closed doors, Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law. She's had a fever and gone to bed. Maybe she went to bed, not knowing that a bunch of hungry men were about to arrive at her house. Certainly, within First Century Middle Eastern culture, she'd be the one whose duty it was not so much to do the welcome at the door, but certainly to make sure the food and drinks, all of the realities of hospitality were provided. (Peter Gordon said "cook with love". She'd certainly have cooked with responsibility.) If she's gone to bed while guests are arriving, we know that she's far from well. Indeed, in a time before antibiotics, getting a fever was serious. If you want to get all symbolic and metaphorical about it, this is humanity finding herself disabled from doing what she expects herself to do, what she wants herself to do; it's humanity who's become unable to welcome the other; it's humanity who's ground to a halt, been arrested by a fear of dying. I don't know! To present her like that is pushing it too far

allegorically! Maybe she's just tired and sick.

Whatever the case, Jesus takes her by the hand (he extends a hand, offers a hand), and she's well again. In other healing stories he speaks. There's a word, a greeting. This one has no script; it's just the extending of a hand, so she can be well. This is good news. This is life, giving life.

Well, before long, the word is out, that life is giving life, and the whole city is knocking on the door. It may have happened in private, behind the closed doors of Peter's domestic domain; but others now want in. And we're told that he "healed many who were sick".

In the morning, they look for him, but Jesus isn't there. He's gone away to a deserted place. When they find him, he's praying. They try to talk him into coming home, back to Peter's place - because everyone there is searching for him.

But he answers "Let us on to neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that's what I came to do".

Although all is well at home, although there is good reason to stay here and enjoy the blessing, Jesus feels a responsibility to greet the world beyond the well known and successful "here and now". There's a bigger world out there with which he knows he needs to share his life - extend the hand, pronounce the blessing, light the hope. It's not a private treasure - it's a global calling. Well, something that's come to Jesus in his praying moves him to believe that. It seems to him just natural, now, to greet the world beyond the house.

-ooOoo-

At this point in the writing of the sermon, I went off to make a cup of tea. Coming back to the computer, I typed into Google search "a message from New Zealand / 100% Pure". That was easy. It seems that Tourism New Zealand posted the video onto Youtube in July of last year - well into our season of closed borders, with no light at the end of that particular tunnel. This greeting for the world, from **our** world, wasn't designed to increase visitor numbers - because the borders were already closed. Maybe it was posted so that people in the future might say "remember those greetings from New Zealand - let's go there now the borders are open again". That would be some kind of financial rationale for making the video. But for now, with borders closed, it just floats around cyber-space - this greeting from a relatively unrestricted community where mainly we can enjoy a life that others don't have. Why are we sharing it? Why are tax-payers' dollars bothering to greet the world? Is it because something within us knows it's right, when you **have** hope and life, to

share hope and life?

Enough about the advertising example! Consider, simply, whether there is something we have found in our community of faith that is healing, that is restorative, that is kind to hope. What do we do with that? In his prayer, Jesus discerns that good things are broadly to be shared. Not a party-line rammed down the throats of others, not a private blessing that we cleave to ourselves, but a becoming well, a life, a vision of things being healthy and free, all offered to others in a spirit of love.

As Jesus went over there to pray, I might just do the same.

In his prayer, maybe Jesus thinks of Peter's mother-in-law, remembers how just yesterday he was able to make her well. Does he remember holding out his hand, and how she responded? Does that form part of what he knows he needs to do next?

SHOW US, O, GOD, WHAT TO DO NEXT.

Does he remember the food they then shared together, the relief of the family that the crisis had passed, the fear had gone? Does that form part of what he knows he needs to do next?

SHOW US, O, GOD, WHAT TO DO NEXT.

In his prayer, does he hear the world calling? Does he know that all humanity needs care reassurance in times of fear, a vision of life that is working well? Does that form part of what he knows he needs to do next?

SHOW US, O, GOD, WHAT TO DO NEXT.

Does he know that while we plant seeds, and that while we water the shoots, it is the Spirit who brings growth - and God who blesses the deed. Does that form part of what he knows he needs to do next?

SHOW US, O, GOD, WHAT TO DO NEXT.

In our prayer, O God, we consider the sick, the anxious, the hemmed-in and depressed, and we consider for them Christ's concern that they be healed. Indeed, does that concern form part of what he knows he needs to do next?

SHOW US, O, GOD, WHAT TO DO NEXT.

The prayers conclude with the usual communion segue . . .

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