

Sermon Archive 337

Friday 2 April, 2021

Knox Church, Otautahi, Christchurch

Lessons: Isaiah 53: 1-5, 8
John 18 & 19

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



A plant, a carpenter, a Christ. Something is wrong.

-ooOoo-

The plant. I began as a tender young thing - a soft freshly greened living thing coming up out of the ground. Would I be wheat? Would I be grass? Would I be a magnificent kauri, or some massive totara, at whose felling the people of the land would say karakia, give thanks to the forest, and ask for forgiveness for felling me?

I don't know. At that point I'm just living and breathing, not knowing what I'd turn into.

Rain falls, sun shines. Growth happens. (The Christians later will sing "We plough the fields, and scatter the good seed on the land, but it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand". That's what they'll sing.)

So it was that I grew in God's garden, surrounded by the song of the people of God, and that I brought my own beauty to all around me. Was I spectacularly beautiful? No. But I had the integrity of who I was - my place within the variety of the garden - my own reflection of the goodness of creation.

As I grew beyond the soft, green shoot of myself, into something larger, it seemed I had substance and height. I had a kind of strength and firmness. After some years of blowing in the wind, bending with the breeze, you could have knocked me over with a feather (only figuratively - literally day by day it was further and further from possibility) - that I would be wood, rather than garnishing!

There we are.

Because of my strength, I was harvested - taken from the earth in which I'd grown, sawn into bits.

Would I form the lintel to a door, in a house - a lintel beneath which people would

pass on their way to a "welcome home", a kiss at the door, the washing of the feet, the extending of hospitality. Or maybe a dining table - something around which they'd gather for food and conversation and being with one another.

Or would I be turned into a yoke, to tie a team of oxen into a force to plough, to haul, to gather in the crops for the feeding of the people? Planted by people in hope, grown by grace from God in sun and rain, harvested for good. "My yoke is easy and my burden's light" - if just you listen to what I'm saying about the love and favour of the One who does the growing!

A cross . . . I have been sawn into pieces. I have been nailed together - forced into some geometry never natural to a tree - a hideous design to maximize pain and humiliation.

What kind of force moved me from being natural and beautiful, to something so unnatural and ugly?

I could have sheltered animals. I could have been carved into sculpture. I could have lived for years and years and years and scattered seeds until we became a forest!

Now I'm cruciform, with eerie wet sensations West, East and South - with this hideous weight. What was done to me? I used to be something beautiful.

Something has gone wrong. Lord, have mercy.

-ooOoo-

A person - not a tree, *I* was good with my hands - and I had a good eye as well. You know how the sculptors, the marble workers from out there West from here, talk about seeing the form in the stone that just needs letting out. They don't impose their will on the marble - they let trapped and inner and deeply-ingrained out! There's an intuition, a sensitivity, a servanthood to what's already there and looking to be beautiful. And I've got to tell you it's all there with **wood**. I see this wood, with its grain, its colour, its shape, and even after it's dead, its movement. If it's to remain beautiful, I need to treat it with respect.

I told my son about this. He was a good boy - also with an eye for the inner beauty that needed "outing". He had such a talent for it. But I also kind of knew that he'd never stay in the workshop with wood. He was interested in another material altogether. Maybe that's another story. Back to my workshop!

I had lots of jobs that people paid me to do. Family tables. Lintels above the front door - under which there'd be kisses and welcomes. Wheel barrows (with

wonky wheels) to bring home the crops for cooking and eating. My work, my craft is all about life and love and cycles of these green things that grow out of the earth.

Then one day, probably not to me, but can you imagine the irony if it were to me - it *wasn't* to me - an order comes in for a cross. Please use your skills, your love for the medium, and your respect for living things now processed, to fashion a cross. Eerie wet sensations to the West, East and South - a hideous weight.

My God, what have I been called into? These skills of mine, this desire of mine to reveal the beautiful, required to make a cross?

Something has gone wrong. Christ, have mercy.

-ooOoo-

And for me, another person? My ancestors spoke of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil - so there was a warning there. People who follow me will speak of the tree of life. My father (well, that's what I call him) speaks of the kingdom of God as a tree under which all the creatures of earth find shelter and food. Others will talk of me as the vine of which they are branches - organic, growing, wonderful, full of life.

But for now I have this weight on my shoulders, and I'm being forced to walk. It's just so heavy . . .

And I know soon into what purpose this great beam, ripped from a tree, will be forced. Some living thing will be made a killing thing - for me. Some carpenter, who sees life and loveliness, will have produced an instrument of torture. Something here has gone very, very wrong. This is a *perversion* of what ought to be . . .

Garnish and garden, boughs and garlands! A carpenter in his shop, revealing the good and the lovely. A child of God flourishing as the people are blessed and kept.

Nah. This is a hideous use of a dead piece of wood. **Something has gone wrong. Lord have mercy.**

-ooOoo-

So it is:

Lord have mercy,

Christ have mercy,

Lord have mercy.

Gathered around the cross, we acknowledge that something, seriously, has gone wrong.

Epilogue: Bloody cross

Bloody cross,

what are you doing there?

You should be growing in a forest,

giving shelter to birds

and forest litter to the ground in which other things find root and grow.

If human beings get involved,

you should be in a magnificent long case clock,

ticking over time,

or in a dining room table on which people put their food and wine.

A living thing,

a recently harvested living thing,

you should be giving yourself to life.

But here you are - an instrument of death,

wet bits to West and East and South.

What happened to you?

What happened to the creative hands that fashioned you?

What happened to the One killed upon you?

Something went wrong here - seriously wrong, most desperately wrong.

It's wrong, just wrong. It's wrong! . . .

When beauty and life is called into ugliness and death - something's wrong.

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