

Sermon Archive 339

Sunday 11 April, 2021

Knox Church, Ōtautahi, Christchurch

Lesson: Acts 4: 32-35

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



It's got really good bones, this boat. I *can't* tell you it's had one old lady sailor who's done hardly any kilometers. No, this has been one hard-working vessel; you can see it in the dents and dings. It's done its fair share of storms - in fact if you like ghost stories, you may have heard of that ship in a storm where the crew saw a figure on the water, and the skipper got out and tried to walk on the sea. I kid you not - that was *this* boat. So it comes with mystique - at no extra cost to you, my friend. A free ghost story with every solid bone.

Like I said, it was a fishing boat - in one family for a while - brought in a whole lot of nets of fish. And you could use it for that too - start up a wee business. Or you could just use it as a run-about hobby thing - bobbing on the lake. I'm not sure you could use it for tourist trips - you'd need to look into passenger licences, compliance and all that - and really it's a bit rustic to peddle as a leisure craft.

"Why's it for sale?" you ask. Good question! The previous owner had some kind of mid-life crisis - went off on a spiritual quest to find himself. Followed some guru guy who'd blown in from the North. Why do we do it, we men and our mid-life crises? I don't know - we just do. So the boat has just sat here a couple of years, drying out by the lake. Not needed by an owner who's not fishing anymore. Why didn't he sell it ages ago? I don't know. Maybe he'd just forgotten about it - been too distracted by his signs and wonders! Or maybe, you never know - maybe he'd hung onto it just in case he'd need it again. You know - a safety net if following the guru didn't work. ("Yes, Lord, I'll follow you to the ends of the earth - but I'll hang onto what I might need in case one day it's Plan B". Don't burn the bridge; don't sell the boat.)

But yes, yes siree; I now am selling you this boat. I have instructions that the Plan B insurance policy is no longer needed. Very recently, some time since Easter, the owner has let it go - and interestingly enough, is now trying to free up some money for a new venture. Good luck to him - and a good, cheap boat for you. It's working well for all concerned, my friend. So what do you say? Time to buy a boat?

-ooOoo-

We're told that the members of the wee Christian community had reached a point of selling what they had. Property was being divested, disposed of. It was being turned into cash which was being shared among them all - according to the need that was identified.

I guess the fledgling Christian community had always needed to find money. Not even people of faith can live on thin air, so from the time they all left their jobs to follow Jesus, they'd have had to have provided for food and incidentals - just enough food and incidentals to keep the experiment ticking along. I call it an "experiment", because in the earliest days, I don't suppose any of them quite knew what it was, and how long it would last. I guess most of their early revenue had come from the pockets of sympathizers they met along the way. Well sympathizers and maybe some who found it entertaining and were willing to toss a few coins to continue something that amused them. Who knows how long it'll last!. Maybe it'll last until the money runs out. No one quite knows at the very start. Jesus might be a passing fad.

Indeed, a passing fad is what Holy Week claims - the world's attempt to bring the experiment to a close. Time, ladies and gentlemen! With the death of the founder, it's time to draw a line, declare it "interesting but ended". Time to go back to normal life, to pick up those abandoned jobs, to relaunch those insurance policy fishing boats, to forgive yourself for being so "Utopia silly".

But then, hard on the heels of Holy Week comes Easter ("ours the cross, the grave, the skies"). When will the presence of Jesus among the people end? Easter says "never - it never ends". As the resurrection is celebrated among them, the people of this community are realizing that Jesus is a persistent presence among them. He's not a morning mist. He's not going away. For their identity, for their day to day being, he's become something of a foundation.

So, while they continue to pray, as he taught them to pray, for their daily bread, and while daily existence continues to require daily faith, now they know that there's a new responsibility to make this sustainable. They can't go on relying on people around the peripheries to throw coins at them. They have to step up and provide for this future they once weren't at all sure would ever exist. Now they know it **will** exist, **does** exist, they need to bring their "grown up" commitment to sustain and support it.

What does the grown up, post-Easter commitment look like - for them?

Well, for them, there are four things.

The first is to affirm that there *is* a future. It's to let that strange news of empty tombs, and missing bodies, and mystical interactions in the garden and the upper room bleed through into a new conviction that HE is present. That indeed, henceforth, every time two or three gather in the risen name, he's with them. It's to fly in the face of the nihilists - those who say "eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die" - the "God is dead-ers" who say "it's sound and fury, signifying nothing". For the first post-Easter community, the commitment is to confess "there is a future for us, and we are determined to grow into it, to grow towards it, to let it come forth in our life in the shape of things like energy and hope, and peace - and maybe even sustainable faith and living.

The second thing, for this first generation of "hoppers" is to dispose of the old security. Yes, you might have that old boat, waiting at home in case everything comes to nothing. But at this point of the community's development, now's the time to let the boat go. Let it slide off back into the water in the service of some other fisher-person. It's an old insurance policy that needs converting into something allowing for life today. "As many as owned lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed" - so we read. Over the centuries, they'll be called communists, and they'll be besmirched by the conduct of "apostles" who steal from the people in the name of Jesus. But here, at this key time of the growing up through the first generation of faith, the community creates a sustainable life by pooling its resources.

The third thing. The community is only able to do this, to manage its resources in a sustainable way, because it discerns need in the community. "It was distributed", we read "to each as any had need". The sustainable community, the community which is responsible in the face of the Christ and his gift of a future, is the community which has time to discern human need.

The fourth thing. This discernment of need is no interesting survey, for the sake of the sociologists' reports. We see that the widows fall into the lower quartile. Behold, the cervical cancer rates are highest among Maori women. Let's draw a graph! No; this discernment of need serves "doing something about it". The Christians discern the need, and then they send their money there (I guess also

with their love and action). The discernment of need is followed, is fuelled, is made effective through a willingness then to share what is needed. "No one claimed private ownership of any possessions", we read, "but everything they owned was held in common." There is no point in discerning need, if there is no heart to open up the hands, to share what is **ours** - not **mine**, but **ours**. As resurrection is shared with **them**, so they share life with **others**.

-ooOoo-

Affirming the gift of a future - a Christ who is not going away. Disposing of the old securities for a flourishing of life and engagement today. Discerning need among the great sea of others. Then, sharing what we have. **This** is how this new community celebrates the resurrection that has happened among them.

Good for them. What's it to us? As inheritors of resurrection, as this generation's Easter people, what's it to us?

Well . . . , dare we live in the world as if the world is no longer an experiment, but as if it genuinely has a future - toward which we're called to live sustainably? Dare we let go of the old securities - the old ways by which we lived our careful and fearful lives towards the grave? Dare we notice the need right within our community? Dare we share what we have? As an echo of the generosity of the God who shares life with an Easter people, dare we share the life we have?

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The boat for sale! Recently, the owner has let it go - and interestingly enough, is now trying to free up some money for a new venture (a new venture). Good luck to him! And a good, cheap boat for you. It's working well my friend - maybe for everyone. So what do you say? Is it time to buy a boat?

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