

Sermon Archive 340

Sunday 18 April, 2021

Knox Church, Ōtautahi, Christchurch

Lessons: Psalm 4

1 Peter 5: 6-11

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



A little text by John Wilbye (1574-1638). It seems he's not sleeping.

*Draw on, Sweet Night, friend unto those cares
That do arise from painful melancholy.
My life so ill through want of comfort fares,
That unto thee I consecrate it wholly.
Sweet Night, draw on!
My griefs when they be told to shades
And darkness find some ease from paining,
And while thou all in silence dost enfold,
I then shall have best time for my complaining.*

A roaring lion is raging through my sleep. But . . . "I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety." [Psalm 4:8]

-ooOoo-

She's almost used to the space in the bed next to her. Since his work dried up here a while back, he's been having to work from the branch up in Auckland. It's been a while now. It was a sensible decision - to follow the money. It's meant that she's had to move her work around a bit, to be around for the children when they get home from school. Less money in **her** pocket, but it's kept money going into **his** - and they share their pockets. That gap in the bed where normally he is - tonight, while she's not been sleeping she might have talked to him about the house situation. The house is going off the rental market. Not so much because the landlord's lost the "tax deductibility of mortgage interest expenses" thing - as much as it's just time to get out of land-lording. Where are they going to go? The rental market, some raging, racing, roaring lion's been devouring the possibilities. They could always pull up pegs and go North to where he's working - but the rental situation's worse up there - the money won't stretch. Both working, rentals

disappearing, kids have friends at local schools, the house is good enough. Swirling nighttime thoughts! She'd love to have him there, for pillow talking. In the wee small hours of early morning, she's lying down, but there is no sleep.

The gentle green digits from the old-fashioned alarm clock across the darkened bedroom tell him that it's 3;15am. This early morning began as the usual vision broke his sleep - one most wretched vision. It's not really fair. At work he passes papers across his desk - well requisitions and release forms in and out of his in and out boxes. It's superbly public service. Fifth floor office; views across the narrow Wellington Street towards another office building. Morning tea in his own mug - "world's best dad" and stains that need some baking soda - talk about what we did in the weekend; more intranet emails going "bing". He's admin, so doesn't know what it's like to thrill people at parties with work stories. Other people further up the chain make the policy; they decide on the names he puts into the order form release fields. Someone else, in some warehouse somewhere (some government warehouse), moves the actual product. Someone else again has developed the product - some clever scientific type in a lab or something. A cog in the machine, he's just pushing the paper.

The vision who's taken to disturbing his sleep is a child. It's on the lap and in the arms of a woman, while a medical person comes in from the front. Some aid is being provided, but by a Western stranger in a uniform. And the clinging child, seeing the well-meaning stranger, half smiles (and in the smile looks like any child we might know - favourite baby photos), but then loses the smile - it's gone, replaced by something more frightened, and the clinging to its mother. It's a five second sequence; played over and over again of a smile rising and dying, a child clinging, a toddler amid the rubble. It was on the TV One news some time ago, and it's not going away. The news reader said it was from Yemen - one of the countries onto which bombs were dropped - aided by software and hardware released from government warehouses run by the New Zealand government. Did I say that it's superbly "New Zealand public service". Fifth floor office; views across the narrow Wellington Street towards another office building. Morning tea in his own mug - "world's best dad". The roaring, racing lion is raging, and bombs are falling on children. Talk about what we did in the weekend? "I didn't sleep" he says. He's lying down; but there is no sleep.

Another bedtime scene. She was born in such a year as she maybe remembers the deadly shake of her city. Or maybe she doesn't remember it. Sometimes memories are "half and half" things. She doesn't know, but maybe part of her does. Is that part deliberately forgetting? No one knows. She certainly remembers the subsequent shakes - God knows, they were a common part of her

world as up she grew. Those a little younger than her, who maybe can be more sure they don't remember, still have drunk mother's milk from anxious women - absorbing from the remembering ones all we need to feel sleepless.

One Friday afternoon she'd found herself hiding under a classroom table, told to keep away from the windows. In that classroom she learned the lesson of how to urinate in a bucket, because there was no safe way through to the toilets. She'd been asked not to use the phone, since being quiet was important. Important in a time when the raging, roaring lion was racing about her city with a gun - a garden city, for goodness sake! Not a wildlife park - or a circus where the animals are institutionalized into dysfunctional destructive behaviour.

She emerged from under her classroom table to take her place in a world of facemasks and QR codes, where keeping distance was required and making of definite plans for next week, next month, next year, was impossible. Another roaring lion. They say of her generation that it hasn't really had "normal". Can they remember the deadly shake? Who knows! But they can't remember the normal. So she lies down in her bed. Most probably, she doesn't sleep.

He lies down at the same time each night, because the lights are turned out at the same time each night. The locked door also reduces his options a bit. He can't go for a walk or make a cup of tea. He has no mug with "world's best dad" written on it.

His bed is metal, and his bedding is regulation. Probably there's a toilet in the corner of the room. **He** doesn't need to urinate in a plastic bucket. I don't know what's going on in his head - how could I? But they tell me that it's full of thoughts about forming the perfect argument. Some argument that the judge will be moved by - a plan to change some of the conditions under which he's been held. Not the judgment; not the sentence; just the day to day implications. Maybe less time alone. Maybe extra provisions. Maybe a bit of lion food - so he can roar and rage a bit. I don't know what he wants because for the moment the judge is keeping all that under wraps. Some say he's forfeited the right to sleep. Some say he's killed the sleep of others, so deserves no sleep of his own.

He is among the many, who for various reasons (good or bad, wrong or right, absolutely rational or totally accidental) aren't sleeping tonight. **All** the brothers and sisters, says scripture, are undergoing the same kind of sleepless thing. The lion without, the lion within. The lion temporarily satisfied, the lion still hungry. The lion in my biting. The lion in my being bitten. "Ponder it on your bed, and be silent", says the psalm. "Humble yourselves" says Peter, "under the mighty

hand of God . . . cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you".

Humbling the self, resisting the lion, casting anxiety on the One who cares . . . *I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety.*

There we are.

-ooOoo-

When next I find myself lying awake in my bed, may I know that I am not alone in this "not sleeping". May I know that all the brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kind of thing. May the sense of loneliness that comes with sleeplessness find the peace of God. I am not alone.

And . . . When next I find myself lying awake in my bed, and the problem is that my conscience is rightly troubling me (**rightly**), may I find the wherewithal to offer right sacrifices, to not sin, to attend to the lion which I embody and equip. May I ponder it on my bed, until I know what, within the love and challenge of Christ, I now need to do.

And . . . When next I find myself lying awake in my bed, and it's because, quite innocently in this respect, simply I live in a world fashioned for my anxiety - and when counting sheep isn't working, may I find peace through knowing the One who cares. "Cast all your anxiety on God, for God cares for you. Not peace as the world gives, but peace we can't yet quite understand."

Maybe this last bit, about casting anxiety on the God who gives peace in sleep, seems pie in the sky to you. Maybe it seems impractical, and my mentioning it makes you angry - (not so angry, I hope, that it'll be added to the list of things keeping you awake tonight). Rather than be angry tonight, may you offer a right sacrifice. May you find the light of the shining face; and may you sleep well in the care of your God.

I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O God, make me lie down in safety.

Amen.

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