

Sermon Archive 460

Sunday 19 November, 2023

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Readings: Psalm 123

1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



On my last day, most probably I'll spend a bit of time looking out the window. Depending on the window, I might see a number of different things. If it's the bedroom window, I'll have a nice view of my private garden, with the plants doing well (in the main) and the grass growing at a Springtime rate - except for that fading patch in the middle - the grass grub is back - how many times do I need to poison those grass eaters. Another window at home will give me a view across the road, where I'll see Alison walking the dog and pulling along her wee shopping basket on wheels - I might have one of those one day. Or I might see the mysterious visitor who comes and goes from the double-storeyed place (rushing in and ambling out). If the window is from my study upstairs in the Knox Centre, then I'll see the traffic (including the lights and sirens traffic), the big trees that have leaves in the summer and bare branches in the winter (and keep Lacey sweeping the autumn colours from our front door in the Autumn). I'll see the comings and goings from the Southern Comfort Motel - the guests scrambling out by 10:00am and the laundry bins on wheels that ferry sheets and pillows in and out of the "next guest" readiness.

It's really easy to stare out the window, and watch the world. Minutes, then tens of minutes, can pass when you're staring out the window. Watching the world, rather than being a player in it. Seeing it, rather than moving it - but also feeling like it's good to watch it, because then you're noticing it, understanding it, maybe in a funny way exposing it and making it accountable. I don't know. Would it be a waste if I gave too much of my last day to staring out the window?

-ooOoo-

On my last day, most probably if I come and go from my house, I'll turn the burglar alarm on (then hopefully off again when I get home - to save my neighbours from the loud wailing sounds I make when I forget that I have an alarm. I only got the old system working again after the car got stolen for the first time. There was something about the experience of having real live car criminals right at the end of the driveway that made me think about my house being vulnerable. So there's no point in having half a burglar alarm, much of it not working. So I spent lots of money to get it working - to keep at bay the "thief in the night". The car got stolen in the night. Ironically the alarm is mainly about protecting the house during the day - because I'm out during the day. I'm home at night, ready for the thief in the night. On my last day, also, of course, I'll spend money on insurance, to protect my things from the thief in the night. That bloody thief in the night won't have a chance on my last day, because I'll give enough of my last day to deal with the thief in the night. Staring out the window is going to take some time, but I've got to find time (enough time) to provide around the thief in the night.

-ooOoo-

On my last day, I said I'd spend some of it being home at night. Some of the night I'll give to the sleep of the just - you know that blessed restorative slumber when the mind, the body (the soul?) can take a breath, then sigh (as if in relief). No bad conscience. No important task failed in the doing. No regret to process. Glory to thee, my God, this night, for all the blessings of the light; keep, O keep me King of kings, beneath thine own almighty wings. Yes, I'll give part of my night, to the sleep of the just.

-ooOoo-

I may also give part of my night to getting drunk. Sitting in my chair and having several glasses far too many. Why do we do it? Is there something to be forgotten, some pain to dull, some funny little chemical switch of need? The slipping away, the fading, the avoiding, the blotting out, the nothing else to do the absence to be felt, the "what the hell, why not?" Those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night - what is it about the night?

Some people work at night. They clean at night the empty corridors that are too busy to clean during the day. They make the bread for tomorrow's morning. They monitor the heart monitors for those who

must be watched. They have their most creative thoughts. There's nothing wrong with the night - except that it's dark, and from the olden days the poets and thinkers called it "the night" in some kind of spooky voice - like it stands for that within us that is bad. There is light, BUT THERE IS DARK, and the dark is darkest dark - people of the dark.

Well, part of my last day **will** be lived in the dark, because that's the deal really. Part of our life is destined to be lived in the dark. The preacher will say to us "you are children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of the darkness.

Probably part of my last day will be dark.

-ooOoo-

On my last day, I may give some time to finding for myself something to hope for, some kind of statement about what I'd found ultimately valuable, ultimately good or decent or holy or deep. Who was my god - in Tillich's "God is the object of my ultimate concern" sense - you know what I'd sought, what was the pearl of great price I'd sold all else to possess - whose name was written on how I set my eyes. "As the eyes of servants look the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to . . . To whom do we look? Maybe part of my last day would be the pinning of my colours to a mast that flew them high and proud. And not just faith, maybe also my last day could go for love. You know, looking for some high expression of whatever love is within me. How to tell those I love that I love them - so that they will know, and won't forget. Faith, hope and love abide and have a greatness - would **this** be a worthy filling of the last day? Put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation . . . I don't want to spend my last day weighing myself down with armour (as if it's all just a big nasty fight) - but if I could dress myself in faith and love for the encouragement and building up of one another - "brothers and sisters", says the preacher, would that be a good last day?

-ooOoo-

What else for my last day, I wonder. How about I spend much of it wondering whether this is, in fact, my last day. Because, you know, it hasn't been so far. Each day has come with another day to follow it, with other opportunities to sleep and wake, be sober or drunk, be

loving or fearful, faithful or sad. And there's something about the accumulated regularity of one day following another, that makes all this stuff about last days seem a bit silly. And as the preacher said, concerning the times and season, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. Nothing written will be of benefit. It'll come like that thief in the night, and you're bound not to know.

The question becomes, rather, if you believe in the coming of the new creation, if you hear somewhere in the promise of faith a voice saying "behold, I make all things new", then what will you do with this day? Not with some fictional day that you can never point to and say "there it is, that's it". But this very real day that you have been given to live - now.

If you believe that God is calling the world into fullness and forgiveness, then what of today? God has destined us not for wrath - for the anger and judgment and hating. God has destined us for the obtaining of Christ making things right - in old fashioned words "destined for salvation".

If that is right, then how do we give ourselves to living **this** day. Not **that** day, not lying in wait for the thief - but encouraging one another as we live towards all that which we have said of our God. You, yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. But today (today) I call you to life.

-ooOoo-

On my last day, most probably I'll spend a bit of time looking out the window. That's what I do with part of most of my days. Watching, not driving. I may do some drinking, some sleeping, some thinking about the light and darkness, and whose I am. I may go looking in the cupboard for a helmet or breastplate. If that last day were this day . . .

We keep a moment of quiet.

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