

Sermon Archive 495

Sunday 28 July, 2024

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Reading: John 6: 1-15

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



Matthew Jack is writing this sermon on a Wednesday afternoon - which is well within the time frame I set for myself when I came to Knox. "Public worship is important to us", the Church Council had said when I arrived, so I determined to work from home on Thursdays - with the phone turned off and no one banging on the door of the study. Sermon writing on **Wednesday afternoon**, then, is a whole day ahead, according to the official schedule. The trouble is that for the last few months, I've actually found myself having sermon ideas on a Tuesday, so have just got on and written it on a Tuesday. This regular premature production of sermons has given me cause now to feel, as I write this sermon on a Wednesday, that I'm running out of time. I feel nervous about not having enough time, even though, actually, I'm a day early and have more time, probably, than I need.

Funny thing, isn't he, this nervous human being? He feels like there isn't enough.

-ooOoo-

Matthew Jack is at a meeting of the Finance Committee of Iona Church, Blockhouse Bay - a suburb in the mid-West of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. The meeting is in the Ansell Room, a small, uninsulated not-quite "lean to" added onto the side of the Keith Hay hall that housed the congregation. The parish treasurer is Ian Hay, a really good human being who carries no extra weight, but who's up for heart surgery. The jury is out on whether being treasurer has been a factor in his needing surgery. At the meeting in the Ansell Room, it is acknowledged that there's not enough money. It's not a notifiable crisis. The parish isn't about to collapse. (This pleases Matthew Jack, since the parish pays him.) It's just that there's no sense of security. If anything major goes wrong that requires a whole lot of money to be thrown at it, we'd be in trouble. As it happened, nothing major went wrong. I am happy to report that twenty eight years later, Iona Church, Blockhouse Bay is still a living, breathing, viable outfit. We just felt like we didn't have enough.

-ooOoo-

Matthew Jack is at a meeting of the Property and Finance Committee of St George's Church, Takapuna, Tāmaki Makaurau - a gracious and leafy suburb on the North Shore. The reputation of Takapuna is that it's the home to the North Shore's old money. Max Robinson is the treasurer. Like Ian Hay, Max Robinson is a really lovely man - I think in his late sixties. He plays golf. Although he's in his sixties, when he sits in a chair, he folds his legs up like a teenager. He never panics. I really like Max. Eventually he dies, I think (by memory) of cancer. At the Finance Committee meeting, in the Peter Beere Lounge (a comfortable space that wasn't just tacked onto the side of a hall, but was architect designed), we note that there isn't enough money. Again, it's not an emergency, but we do need to maintain the Pat Hanly stained glass window, and then do some maintenance on something or other - can't remember what it was, but it was perceived as important at the time. Well, I'm pleased to announce that St George's still exists. Takapuna still is leafy. We feared that we didn't have enough.

-ooOoo-

Matthew Jack is wishing that he wasn't at a meeting of the Finance Committee of St Stephen's Uniting Church in Sydney. He's wishing that he wasn't there, because there's a lot of hatred and conflict in the room - but that was just the default position of meetings at St Stephen's. Yeah, yeah, some big blocks of stone had fallen from the building's facade onto the footpath on Macquarie Street, almost killing innocent members of the public. Major problem - we didn't have the money to deal with it. Scaffolding to keep the public safe cost huge amounts each week to rent. This was to be the end of the church. Judith said it was the fault of Susan. Susan said it was the fault of Ross. Ross didn't say anything because we'd not let him onto the committee. I am not pleased to announce, but announce anyway, that St Stephen's Uniting Church is still a financially viable business entity. We feared that we didn't have enough.

-ooOoo-

Some churches **do however** run out of money. Some have to move from full-time ministry to part-time ministry. Some have to amalgamate with richer neighbours. Some just close. My experience, formed from a culture outside of terminal finance though, is that even financially secure Christian communities tend to feel that we don't have enough.

Meanwhile, outside of the church, I need to say that I am well aware that some people now are stealing from supermarkets, because they can't afford to buy. I am well aware that foodbanks around the country are struggling to keep up with demand. I am well aware that defaulting on mortgages is ballooning. I

am well aware that more people than ever before are not going to see the doctor, because they don't have enough money. So there's no desire on my part to say that there's always enough. I know that sometimes there isn't enough. I'm not an idiot.

But . . . today I am called to respond to a strange story about a Saviour who feeds five thousand people with a few loaves of bread - as if there is more than we need.

Listen for the Word of God.

Lesson: John 6: 1-15

Any competent analysis of the situation will reveal that there isn't enough food for the people who have showed up. The resources are meagre - some little kid happens to have arrived with five loaves of bread and two fish. The people to be fed, believe it or not, number five thousand. It's not going to work. As said before, we fear that there isn't enough. Buttressed by the obvious, chronicled anxiety says "credo - there is not enough".

I want to look briefly (like I'm running out of time - there isn't enough time) at five wee details hiding within this story.

One: as the hungry people arrive, the Passover is near. Echoing in the background of this story is the remembrance of the day on which a special meal was inaugurated. Passover wasn't so much about the food, as much as it was about the people being freed from slavery. Passover isn't about food, so much as it is about hunger for freedom - a deeper hunger. Passover - death, crying, running, grasping, fleeing, flying, believing. The meal on the eve of our becoming a people of freedom. That sits in the background. As the hungry people present themselves to Jesus, the story remembers a deeper need for the people.

Two: Jesus asks the question "where are we going to find the food", but already knows the answer. This feeding of the people is deliberately designed as a teaching moment. Don't just feed your face - THINK about who is feeding you, and how. Much like we are doing right now - thinking about who is feeding us now, and how.

Three: the one who is called to begin the feeding of the people is a wee boy. He is not the Saviour of the World. He is not the Wisdom of God. He's just a little kid with something in his lunch box. I like to wonder how he turned out to begin the process of the miracle. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, is said to

have noticed that he has a little food. I wonder if Andrew applied some pressure - give us your food, you little tyke. Or whether there was a degree of innocence (people are hungry and I've got food). Maybe that doesn't matter - or maybe (if we're looking to repeat it) it **does**. Maybe, if a culture of fear that there is not enough needs breaking by the Lord of loaves and fish, and innocence is a key to the breaking, then the part played by the boy is critical . . . Not sure.

Four: taking the loaves and fish given by the boy, before he distributes them, Jesus gives thanks. Again, maybe this is a harkening back to the rituals of the Passover meal - in which the giving of thanks is featured. OR, is there something simple about giving thanks for what we already have that unlocks the capacity in a community to produce more? Good God, you people of St George's - you have a Pat Hanly stained glass window - give thanks! Good God, you people of Knox - you have love among you. Give thanks and see what now might come.

Five: mysteriously, the meagre act of giving on the part of the boy feeds everyone who is present. Might this be because his giving unlocks the giving of others. We move from a culture of fear about not having enough, to living like we have plenty. Under the instruction of Jesus (who already has given much, and soon will give more), people are freed to join in with what the boy has started - or Jesus has started (who started it?) By the end, baskets of food more than was needed exist.

Those were the five details.

Perhaps now we just need to let this vision of "grace being enough" permeate our life. Is there enough? Yes, there is enough - of what is important.

And what is important? I leave that for you . . .

Whatever it is that drives our sense of anxiety in the world, behold the Christ who uses next to nothing to feed a multitude.

-ooOoo-

4:57pm, Wednesday 24 July. Let the record show that even though he thought he didn't have enough time to write a sermon, one still was delivered. And the people keep a moment of quiet.

The Knox Church website is at: <http://www.knoxchurch.co.nz.html> . Sermons are to be found under News / Sermons.