

Sermon Archive 514

Tuesday 24 December, 2024

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Reflection for Christmas Eve

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



If I were a god, I would make for myself a beautiful heaven. There would be light there (neither dazzling nor darkness, but one equal light). There'd be music there (neither noise nor silence, but one equal music). There'd be contentment; neither fears nor hopes, but one equal possession. There'd be neither end there, nor beginning, but one equal eternity. And in that bliss, what more could I want. Where else would I need to go? I simply would rest in what is, and be at peace. - - - To provide the one equal music, I might just top one or two of the clouds with angels with harps. If I were a god, with just an angel or two, I could be quite self-contained, and all would be well.

If I were a god, though, and maybe enjoying watching the angels working with their harps, I might find myself wondering what else I might be able to make, and so enjoy. There's something captivating about seeing "what is not god" making melody. There's a kind of primitive naivety to it, and a delight for me when some of the primitiveness finds itself expressing something of myself. (How did *I* get represented in *their* music? Is that like creativity genetics?). Yes, if I were a god, I could imagine myself making more than angels - maybe finding some dirt, and picking the dirt up and forming a form and breathing breath into it, till it lives. These new creatures specifically gifted to echo my nature, to join in my creativity, to play their harps, but not with angel fingers, but fingers made of clay. Yes, if I were a god, then probably eventually I'd end up making human beings, and looking to them for my own delight.

If I were a god, who made a world, and was proud of it, or satisfied by it, or (perish the thought) maybe even loved it (how will I describe what I meant when I beheld it and said that it was very good?) - then what would that next thing felt in my heart be called? In my one equal light, my one equal music, I had no need to form a language for what my heart is

moved to say, to do. But what does One say, One do, when that thing of my pride, delight, **nay** love, "makes strange"? The apple is picked from the tree and eaten. It's not about the apple. The apple is a symptom of the "making strange".

Maybe I'd burst into the garden, with a song of shame and sorrow, that they will hear as anger. It'll be like I cursed them and drove them from the garden. (As for the serpent, upon your belly shall you go and dust shall you eat all the days of your ghastly slithering life!) So **they**, those creatures from the earth, will live forever feeling like they're far from where I am. Like their communion with me somehow is broken. They'll listen in the evenings for the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden, and instead they'll hear gun fire and noise, and maybe fantasise about that long-lost "one equal music". They will mourn a rupture in who they were created to be.

If I were a god, one of the questions I would need to answer, at least to my own satisfaction, is whether, following the rupture, I then truly could withdraw back to my heaven. Declare the experiment a failure, withdraw and leave it to its own devices. Might be a sensible option, were it not for whatever lingers following those first few new experiences of my heart. What did we say? Pride? Satisfaction? Love (perish the thought).

I found myself positioning myself on the edge of their living. I appeared now and then as fire in a bush, as cloud in the desert, as a still, small voice in a cave. I left manna on the ground for them to find and eat - like someone too shy to knock on the door with a tray. No longer in the garden, just around the garden, or above the garden, or beyond the garden, or an echo of "sometime or somewhere or somehow" in the garden. Into the ear of one of their prophets (whom I felt I could trust) I whispered the words: "how can I give you up? My heart will not allow me to do it".

If you withdraw to your heaven, and turn away your face, you might have a chance to forget, to fall out of love. But if you put yourself at a distance, from which though you still can see, love is going to abide.

And yes, if I were a god, and my love abided, but was seldom returned (unrequited, it's called; unreciprocated, it's called), maybe there's room

for anger. And you know, from my distance I saw them reckoning that, and how it would work: "I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me", they would understand me to say. Imagine hearing yourself described like that! I kept trying to remind myself that that's come not from me, but from **their** understanding of how unrequited love had worked for them. The woman scorned, the man defeated, the god rejected . . . I don't know . . .

If I were a god, I would maybe find myself working out how we could have a second "go" at being in the same garden, rather than trying to understand one another across what we called the rupture - the anger amplifying rupture. If I were to try again, maybe it would have to be in a way so that they'd know it was me. I had to figure in how their capacity to recognise me now that there was a whole "history of thought" about what my return might be like. I kind of knew that they wouldn't recognise me unless they saw the darkening of the sky, or the shaking of the mountains, or the sun and moon failing. My entrance had to be big! It had to be big if I were to play to the unexamined fear in their hearts and minds. The question was, though, since I am a god (I am who I am), will my heart let me do it?" Can I present myself that way, when in my heart I know that that is not me?

I chose another way. I came as one of them - a human person. I chose for my human person also not to bear any resemblance to anything they harboured in their fear. No war-lord. No strong arm. No resident of a palace or fortress. I would come through a baby whose parents had nowhere to stay. Through someone who told stories and talked about forgiveness. Through someone who wouldn't escape from a cross. Through someone who said both that his kingdom wasn't of this world, but who made sense of the claim that I **loved** the world.

Well, if **I** were a god, **that's** what I'd do.

So, you people of God, gathered in a church and waiting for midnight, how do we expect to see him - I mean **beyond** tonight, when once having meditated upon the birth of Jesus, we go back into the world in which we live. Out there, where do we expect to see him?

We might go looking in the corridors of power, but we won't find him there. We might go looking among the things that make us afraid, and that some of us use to control others. We won't find him there. We might go rummaging through the tool boxes of jealousy and retribution. We won't find him there.

We look at the mother's caring for her child. We look to Joseph feeling slightly sidelined, but knowing he has a holy task to do. We look to the healing of the sick, the comforting of the frightened, the opening of the prison doors. We look to a boy giving his fish to the multitude. We look to the crucified One making a breakfast of fish for those with whom he'd lived - to whom he truly had been "GOD WITH US". If I were a god . . . Sorry, I'm not a god. I'm a human being trying to work out what we mean when we observe Christmas and dare to say with all other people of Christian hope that "God is with us".

-ooOoo-

If I were a god, I would make for myself a beautiful heaven. There would be light there (neither dazzling nor darkness, but one equal light). There'd be music there . . .

But indeed, we are not gods. We are people - into whose world Jesus, the Christ, was born.

We keep a moment of quiet.

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