

Sermon Archive 564

Wednesday 24 December, 2025

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Reflections for Christmas Eve

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



Reflection: A Special Moment

I know it must have been a special moment, because I have a very strong memory of you telling me your name, and fumbling about with your phone, so we could swap facebook I.Ds. I remember not being sure - which you might interpret as lack of interest. But I gave you my details - and the fact that I have perfect picture of the moment says something the opposite of lack of interest - doesn't it?

The romantic poet within me wants to say that I've loved you since that day, but I'm not sure I believe in love at first sight. I think I believe more in the gift of time which grows things deeply rather than quickly - the slow reveal of layers of heart. So though I choose not to say that I loved you from that day, I do say that I have loved you for a long time - as the flower opened.

In the early days, you were a voice that sounded in the cool of the evening in the Garden. The voice of creative wisdom that made the days, and gave us food, and was OK with the nakedness. In later days, you were fire in the bush, and commandment in the stone. Then you were the pillar of fire and cloud (leading on, ever on), the invisible hand that scattered manna on the ground in the morning. Praying "give us this day our daily bread" we met you in the answering of prayer. We loved you more deeply again when you sang us your songs: the Lord's my shepherd, O God you have searched me and known me, when I see the stars, what are people that you love them. They were songs of the heart, and they called us closer. Day to week, and week to month, and month to years - the slow growing in time of the love that wasn't at first sight - but mellowing, mysterious, the deepening of the wine. I have loved you for a long time.

The "love at first sight" people - they **try** to get the point. But before long they tire of waiting for me. "When on earth", they ask, "will you just get on with it?" - like it's all so simple. They seem not to have noticed the complications. Complications? It seems obvious to me that love between a creature and a

Creator is not that simple. A deep love, yes. But also a space between us that aches. While you are immortal, I am mortal. While you are all knowing, I guess more than I know. While you are found in every place, I'm hardly present in any place (my thoughts are prayers that run and scatter like naughty children). And you know, there's the fairly basic complication that while I love you solely, your love is for the world - and for "the world", I often read "not solely for me". You do not belong to me. Indeed, I have loved you for a very long time. I would have it no other way. But . . . I suffer this sense of distance, this quality of "the arms not reaching far enough", this sharing of life that hasn't yet found its way - like it's kind of stuck in that stretch between the heavens (where you are) and here (where I am).

I wait for you to love me more closely - more immediately, more "flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone". And because I love you, I hope that you will find a way.

O Lord, that you would tear open the heavens and come down! [Isaiah 64:1] As a deer longs for flowing streams, O God, so my soul longs for you. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. [Psalm 42: 1-2a] The voice of my beloved! Look, he there he stands behind the wall, looking through the lattice. When shall I come and behold the face of God? [Song of Songs 2: 8-9].

Our love is. becoming very old, O God, and I hope that you will find a way . . .

Hymn: Love came down at Christmas

Reflection: A Litany of Shared Experience

The romantic poet who wanted to say "I have loved you from that day" comes back. She presents a scene. Yes, in reality it was probably set in a cave, but we cut her some poetic licence, since she's a poet - and a romantic. So she sets her scene in a stable. It's night time, but things are kind of bright because of this huge big star in the sky - not to mention the way that human beings set lights in the darkness - light a candle, set a fire, keep the night at bay. There are cows, maybe sheep. There's a man and a woman, and a new born child. He's just arrived, the new born child. If you believe the angel-song, the child is that longed-for completing of the slow-growing love - the bridging of that thing we couldn't quite articulate. Here in this stable is the inkling that flesh of flesh, that bone of bone has come - and that even we who cannot grasp love at the old first sight grasp

this: that distant heaven now is present on earth - eternal life finds room in human life. "I have loved you for a long time", we say. And you say "me too". And we touch, and it is made complete.

- I was born of a woman; so were you - of physical existence, a shared experience
- I was told bedtime stories and learned to dream; so were you - of imagination, a shared experience
- I was hungry and thirsty; so were you - of need, shared experience
- I learned to carry disappointment; so did you - of the carrying of burdens, a shared experience
- I learned to put my disappointments down; so did you - of recovery, a shared experience
- I sang like my heart was full; so did you - of joy, a shared experience
- I did a brave thing, so did you - of courage, a shared experience
- I did a beautiful thing; so did you - of kindness, a shared experience
- I said a prayer of deep, deep longing; so did you - a shared experience of hope
- I will die; and so did you - of living with endings on the horizon, a shared experience
- You will rise - will I? In love and assurance, you promise me one more shared experience - a making alive again of the love that has grown.

I have loved you for a long time, now. And you will love me longer.

Hymn: Infant Holy

Reflection: ~~A million religions~~

From the same stable as comes "love at first sight" comes the equally pithy but not necessarily true expression "opposites attract".

The tall man and the tiny woman. The chatty wife and retiring husband. The great grandfather who says "Emily, make sure you vote correctly"; and the great grandmother who smiles to herself in "a very knowing way", then says "yes, Bertie" - and votes as she will. Opposites attract - indeed, sometimes they do. But that's a bit different from the matter of shared experience. We can be quite different, or much the same - but the thing that deepens what we have across difference or similarity is the sharing of our experience. It's our doing it together. It's our common memory. It's

our knowing that someone else was there, and we weren't doing a private viewing. It wasn't "you - and - me". It was "us".

There are a million religions, O God. I wonder whether when you see them, you see part of yourself within them. And yes, maybe seeking some respect in that "seeing" is what will move us all together into a greater peace for the world. But tonight, what makes this religion, to me, become a "faith", is that this is a religion where we affirm a shared experience. You are not foreign to me, to my world. You are not removed from where I am, and how I am, and who I am. You are not "perfect in theory but beyond my touch" - for you have joined me in flesh. What did I ask for? Flesh of my flesh. Bone of my bone. Someone who's sacrificed separateness for a "being with", for an "entering of shared experience".

Pithy is the expression "opposites attract". Pithy is the expression "love at first sight". But our religion blossoms into something new because within it we say "I have loved you for a long time. You have loved me for a long time. And now in the fulness of time, as stars draw to their position above stables, and as the romantic poets put their quills to hymns of "Infant lowly", you have found that way we sought - the way of bringing divine love to the point of human meaning, by entering yourself into human meaning. Our lives touch in this moment of birth. The life that follows? A new possibility for love?

-ooOoo-

How do we end? Well, the world believes in love at first sight. Some of us believe that too. The world believes in opposites attracting. Some of us believe that as well. But there is also a love that has existed forever, and that, fed by God, now has found its way to becoming real.

O Lord, tear open the heavens and come down. Seek out the souls who have loved you for such a long time, and whom you have loved for all eternity. This night, be God with us, and fill our love.

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