

Sermon Archive 573

Sunday 22 February, 2026

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Reflections for Lent 1

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



Lesson: Psalm 40: 1-5

A Reflection on Mud

Abandoned in a ditch, trapped in gluggy mud that wouldn't release me, I waited . . . and waited . . . and waited for God - who at last looked, who finally listened. I was lifted up, found my feet placed firmly upon a rock - so high that I could see clearly, and sing a new song - a song of praise to the One who lifted me up, gave me somewhere to stand.

The mud doesn't sting. It doesn't hurt. But it disables. It glugs in around the body, finding a closeness that you can't escape - from which you can't find liberty. Mud clings - and in the clinging, constrains our otherwise power to move and step free. We're stuck.

2008 or thereabouts, he begins to realise that he's trapped in a lie - and one that will suffocate him. He needs to get out. But does God have a high rock onto which he might climb? - where his feet might find some firm standing - above loss of job, and the anxiety of his parents, and moving into a minority? - where all that is proud? Or **does** God hate him? - as some people say. Will God consider that transition too glugged in mud, or something that will be given a new song? Identity - he waited patiently for God . . .

2013, or thereabouts, he finds himself on duty at a university college. It proves to be his professional responsibility this night to scrape vomit out of a sink in a kitchenette in the North Attacks. The vomit was left there by Jay, an old boy of Kings College Auckland - who had paid good money to be vomiting there. Scraping, gagging, he wonders about this job that he has. While noting in his mind that he has a PhD in Philosophy, such still is the mud, that he accepts that vomit scraping is his task. Is he to have patience? Vocation - how we spend or waste our lives - he waited patiently for God . . .

First world problems, those! How about being brown skinned in Minneapolis? How beautiful, lovely, dignified is your skin! But how much a target does it make you when the authorities are looking for people to deport? Can you step away from your skin? Can you be who you're not? Why should you need to be? Yet, into the

ditch you're thrown. And despite the protests of many concerned citizens, maybe eventually it becomes the soul waiting patiently for God - I waited . . . and waited . . . and waited for God - who at last looked, who finally listened. God found a high and solid rock upon which we were moved to stand.

I'm told there's some other mud in . . . Hornby? A couple are working long hours at work, but still can't feed their children. They've looked for solutions - but then the power bill came in, she got sick, he got made redundant. They're trying to escape, but it's mud in a ditch.

On a Sunday morning we hear a psalm - "God raised me from the mud - gave me a high and stable rock on which to stand". From God's goodness, I know I will have a new song to sing!

Three Litanies of Celebration and a Meditation on the Big Concrete Jesus

Celebrate: One who honours our patience

I don't know, O God, that you did very well when creating us, with imbuing us with the gift of patience. We're inclined to think that the passing of years helps us build our patience. The impatient impatience of our earlier selves makes us think so. I can't wait until Monday! Several Monday's passed have been instructive. Yet in the psalm, the instructed poet still cries "how long?" There's this tireless yearning for good things to come. We learn patience reluctantly - and maybe you live with us within the reluctance - longing for your nurturing to nudge us along. "Come on, humanity, come on" you say. The psalmist says we wait and wait and wait - and then you come. We celebrate the One who enters our patience, and takes us to stand upon the rock.

Celebrate: One who opens up our view

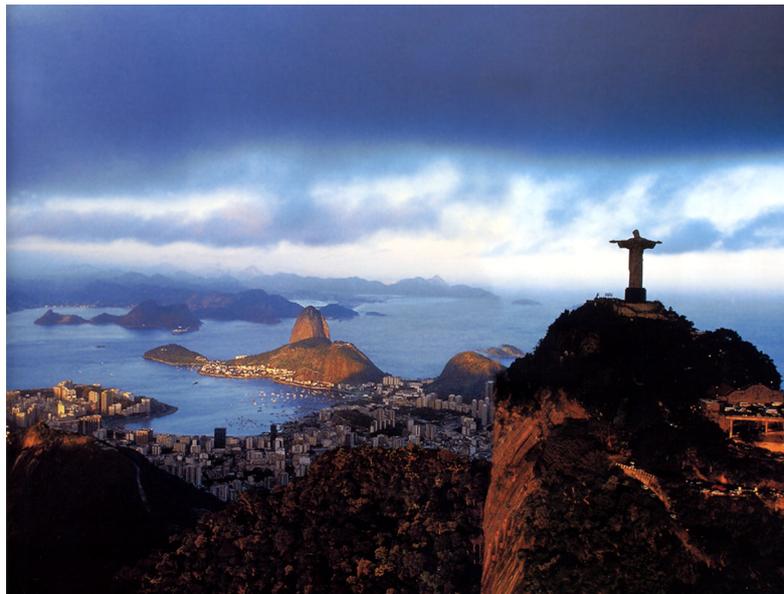
I don't know, O God, about view. When news reel upon news reel falls into my view, and Trump is mad, and people are cruel, and greed is high, and honour is rare, we form a kind of view - in the mud. It's not a good one, and within it, the spirit . . . well, sometimes it fails. It's easy to fail when the mud is in your eyes. But **you**, you lift us to another view - where we can see further, and better, and brighter, and more through the eyes of Christ. Is death the only end? Is mud the only view? No, we are taken to a higher place where can see the world, and life and death, and death and life differently. We celebrate the One who takes us to the solid rock, from which our view is new. We stand upon the rock.

Celebrate: One who gives a new song

The people sing, O God, don't they sing! Carrying heavy stones, they sang. Taken away from home, they sang. Laying the body in the tomb, they sang. They have been singing for a long time - they always sang.

Lifted high upon a rock, from where they could see forever, a **new** song was given - a song of praise to God who lifts up the mud-stuck soul. I will sing a new song - and all the people will hear, and fear, and put their trust in God.

To a world that still lies in the ditch, that still knows the suffocation of the mud, announced is the God of the rock - a high rock up to which are lifted those who were lost. We celebrate the One who takes us to the solid rock, from which our song is new. We stand upon the rock.



Reflection: The Big Concrete Jesus

Since the sun is going down now, it's time for me to say goodnight, Rio. Don't worry, though. Even though I'm saying goodnight, I'm going to carry on standing on this rock, looking out on you and raising my arms in that blessing that goes "on and on". The psalmist waits and waits. And I - I bless, and bless.

Through the night, maybe some more ships will come into the harbour, finding shelter in the bay. Maybe the night clubs will heave and pump, people laughing, falling over, or saying things that later they'll regret. Maybe the doctors in the hospitals will do their best, but not quite save the day. Maybe the children will sleep and the parents will rest. Yes, "maybe" to all these things. And I'll just stand here on the rock above it all, and keep my arms opened wide - that's what I'll do . . .

Why did you build me here? I know the details - the date, the name of the artist. I know the dimensions and the materials. I know even the maintenance schedule that keeps me safe - so no fragments from my beard or robe fall onto the heads of those who stare up from right below my pedestal. But why did you think that your city needed a big Redeemer - to loom above the place where you

live? Is it something that gives you hope . . . security . . . a sense of place within the grace? "There is a Redeemer" . . .

-ooOoo-

He lifted me high upon a rock - rescued - new view - new song - new life. Above where we live, there is a view from the high rock - and a Redeemer.

Hymn:

The Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 1: 20-25

Reflection: Stones and Stumbling Blocks

Jesus came from Nazareth. Those who met him, and came to love him, say that in him we found the embodiment, the making real of the Psalmist's claim that God met our patience, lifted us up from the mire, and gave us a new song to sing. Jesus' life was the perfect new song. Sing of God with us. Sing of peace on earth. Sing of forgiveness. Sing of knowing and being known. His life was the perfect high rock view - see the world through the eyes of God - see pattern, rather than random. See meaning, rather than confusion. See neighbour, rather than competitor. Take us, O God of Psalms and Saviours, to a high place where we can see all that . . .

While it is true that many sang and saw - others didn't. He became for them a stumbling block - someone over which to trip, to curse, to pick up and throw away - the sound of breaking glass. They determined to resist him, to place in his way various stones of their own. Stones stone people to death. Millstones drag people to the bottom of the sea. Stones are white-washed, but full of death. Why these stones are thrown at the Christ, who knows? "Men made strange", the poet wrote . . .

For our journey through the Season of Lent we will hear stories of Jesus and the stones - the way they blocked him, the ways he found of getting around them - and the determined love that drove him. Maybe finally we'll hear of a great stone being removed from the door of his tomb - opening the new and living way.

May God bless us as we begin the journey. May the day come when we will be able to say with him that we have been lifted up, saved from the mire, placed high upon that rock from which we truly can see - and sing.

A moment of quiet.

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