

## Sermon Archive 586

Sunday 17 May, 2026

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Readings: John 17: 1-11, Acts 1: 6-14

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



**KNOX CHURCH**

love faith outreach community justice

There was a time. There was a time when worship began with the calling out of the Shema (the central proclamation): "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God; the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might."

The life of the people was an affirming of God, a serving of God, a searching for God. The world belonged to God, and God was present to it, present in fire and cloud, in water flowing from the rock, in manna in the morning, in pilgrim-walking towards the milk and honey of hope. Yet it was a time also where God was not in the earthquake, not in the wind, not in the fire - more like the whisper of the still and small voice - more like people weeping by the river, unable to sing God's song. It was a challenge to perceive God - as it is a challenge to say "the world is God's", when it seems to belong to the unjust, the un-good, the un-God. Loving God with heart, soul and might involved longing for truth, for justice, for righteousness. There developed among the people a conviction that God would provide, from among them, a Saviour - one who would claim the world back for God - casting down the mighty from their seat, uplifting the humble and the meek, filling the hungry with good things, keeping the promises of old. But where would they find him? How would they recognise him? How would they keep faith to hope for him? It was a full yet hungry time when they said "Come, O come, Emmanuel, God-with-us". "Lift up thine eyes". There was a time.

-ooOoo-

There was a time. "Come and see", he'd said - so they'd gone along to see. They saw him using the lunch of a little boy to feed a multitude. They saw him healing the sick. They saw him confounding the scribes and Pharisees, silencing their hateful hypocrisy. **Some** say they saw a

spirit bird alighting on him, and saw him walking on the water. Not many believed it, though, because, you know, it's kind of unbelievable . . . Is it? I don't know. Watching him seemed to be requiring faith - a suspending of the cynicism - a conceding in faith. What **were** we seeing? What **were** we hearing - in this life that came from Nazareth? He said to his God "the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me." But part of the world never "got there". Part of the world insisted that he was a blasphemy, a child of Beelzebub, a creature of delusion.

There was a time where on his account, there was difference of opinion, or division between father and son, between mother and daughter - not peace, but a sword. Who is he? Where is our God? It was a time calling for discernment about what was being presented. "Lift up thine eyes." There was a time.

-ooOoo-

There was a time. It was a Saturday, following a Good Friday. In this time, what was to be done? Nothing really - a Sabbath-enforced nothing. Looks like he wasn't God-with-us after all - because if he **had** been, then it wouldn't have ended like this. So, if he wasn't God, who was he? A charlatan? Or something sadder than that? A good but naive man who made a mistake? Believed too hard, hoped too hard, bled too hard . . . Another cautionary tale for those believing as many as six impossible things before breakfast - **wise up world! Lift up your eyes**". There was a time.

-ooOoo-

There was a time - flowing from an empty tomb. It was a time of "what was that!" Was it life? Was it miracle? Was it . . . what was it! They recognise him - when he says their name, or breaks their bread - they know it's him. But what's with this appearing behind doors that are locked? What's with this apprehending, then vanishing? It's him, but it can't be - and how it works, we cannot say - no one dares describe the actual emptying of the tomb. Lift up thine eyes? Thou art a sea

without a shore; thy time is now and evermore. How shall we sing this majesty?

The witness is that for forty days he was present to them in risen mystery. Present, not absent - but present as mystery. Now they affirmed him as "God with us again" - but affirmed in a language of credal humility - with modesty of spirit. The Greeks understood it as a time of foolishness. Jews, as a time of stumbling understanding - stub the toe on resurrection. But for those "who are called", for the believers, it was a time of wisdom. Paul was praying for them, that the eyes of their hearts might be enlightened. Lift up those eyes! There was a time.

-ooOoo-

There was a time. Emboldened by the forty days, they're trying to see how tomorrow will look. "Lord," they say, "is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" It is the question of a community on the edge of its seat - a community of anticipation, feeling like it's almost all there. He replies that this is not the time for that question, though, to be answered. Tomorrow still is going to have to wait for tomorrow, hidden now in the hiddenness of God - whom we see but do not see. Then he is lifted up; a cloud takes him out of their sight. Gormless, staring up into the sky. This is not what we thought we meant when we said "Lift up thine eyes". Where is he? How do we find him? What are we now to do? What is this time?

Two "white-robed men" say "Men of Galilee, why are you standing there, looking up into heaven? This same Jesus will come again, in the same way as you saw him go".

If he **will**, then how should we live? If he will, then how to we keep the wick trimmed, the lamp oiled, the heart and mind in eagerness? If he **will**, what do we sing, and say, and plan, and hope? How do we give our eyes to the art of spotting "the flags of dawn appearing"? If he **will**, is there now a new way of looking through the world, seeking God on the landscape, signs of his coming again? Is this what we mean when we say "lift up thine eyes". Almost, not yet, but also already, there is this "time".

-ooOoo-

There will be a time - for the men of Galilee (and indeed, the women of Galilee also), when wind and flame will speak of the coming of the Spirit, the final piece in the work of God being in the world. It'll be a day of great understanding - when each person, in their own language, will hear of what God has done. It'll bring a new age of knowing, of believing, of being held. Just yet, though, it is **not** that time. Now it is time for returning to Jerusalem - going back into the city where there is life to get on with, plenty to do for those who have known the presence of Christ. So back they go. Luke, as he writes the story for us to read, feels that this is the time for him to write the names of the eye-lifters: *Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James - together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.*

Listing them by name - is this a time now to speak the names of those who are the new community? Of remembering, with thanks, those who have taken the journey, and are about to be made new. Is this a way of reminding us, as we look for a coming again, to love one another? "And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world; so holy Father, protect them, so that they may be one, as we are one", he says. To long for the good of those among whom we have been loved . . . is this what it means to hear "lift up thine eyes"?

There was a time. There will be a time. And now, there *is* a time - time to keep a moment of quiet.

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