

Sermon Archive 595

Sunday 19 July, 2026

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Reading: Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-52

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



He had such a poetic, creative soul. There was a kind of light in the way he saw the world. He had an eye for the Spirit in things. Others might have seen mundane actions (the planting of a seed, the finding of a trinket, the casting of a net) - but he saw a holy moment - something "full of God".

The people who went before him had been willing to accept that God was in the world - kind of - like on high mountain tops, or like smoke in the sky, or maybe in the earthquake - maybe **not** in the earthquake. But no one had quite found God in a woman making bread, or someone catching a fish - these "down at home", domestic things - like God was in the kitchen, or out there working in the field, or in a bird perched in a tree. God in the normal, ordinary things. Nazareth - ha! Can anything good come out of Nazareth - the ordinary? The poetic, creative soul says "yes; good **can** come from the ordinary - maybe that's part of the point of incarnation. So, off run the theologians to write down a doctrine of Word made flesh - while the creative soul writes another parable. Did I tell you the one about . . .

I love following the story-teller. I love his fun, his calling on my imagination - the way he tells me things without **telling** me. He makes me feel like I can tilt my head a little, and maybe catch a glimpse of the God he follows - I see God! Do you? Let me tell you a story - see that woman making a loaf of bread!

Thank you, God, for sending me that poetic, creative soul. I will follow him, listen for his lovely stories, and (in heart and mind) be his friend.

Hymn: O Jesus, I have promised

The tree with birds in it.

Friday 3 July, 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Seeking some guidance from the poetic, creative soul, the sermon writer takes his chair from the patio, puts it under the old flowering cherry tree in the garden. It's 10 degrees Celsius. The grass is damp underfoot, but the sky is clear and blue. I'm looking up through the tangle of branches, the crazy criss-cross of the patterns they form - and noticing already the little buds that'll become blossom normally in early October. I've watched this tree for five years now, each Spring wondering if there are as many buds as the year before. I wonder whether it's steady as she goes, or whether there might be a tailing off. I guess trees have their seasons, and also their lives. I hope it's not nearing the end of its life - but I have no idea how old the tree might be. Unlike that maple by the fence - I planted you! I picked you up from the Big Little Tree Company shortly after I moved here. I put you in the boot of the old Corolla (with rainbow hub caps) and brought you home. No way you'd fit in a boot now - it's like you're almost touching the sky. Amazing growth. I just put you in the ground, and now look at you! How did you do that? The miracle of growth - from little things, big things grow - sometimes. A bit like the little question posed by the teenager to the Presbyterian minister in Howick. "What is God?" he'd asked. The answer was offered in an unremarkable way - but something started growing - Who knows how, but it did! Now I feel like it's become a shelter, something touching the sky. "The kingdom's like that". Thank you, you poetic, creative soul.

The mysterious yeast effect

Saturday 4 July, late morning. Seeking some guidance from the poetic, creative soul, the sermon writer puts the ingredients out on the kitchen bench. I've not made this recipe for a while now. I think originally it came from Amanda, who lives in the States. Good friend; I smile when I think of her. It's a garlicky focaccia bread, topped with rosemary, grapes, brie and rock salt. The exciting moment of the process is when you've added the yeast, done the kneading, hidden it in the bowl under the damp tea towel - remove the tea towel and seen this most remarkably enlarged piece of dough. It's like magic - a tiny bit of yeast having such a big, obvious effect. Lifting, filling, expanding . . . turning damp and flat into risen and nourishing. **And** when it comes

out of the oven, the smell fills the house - the smell of fresh bread is good for the soul. So, let's break bread together, sing songs together, praise God together. A simple act of putting bread on the table. Plain domestic act? Or something like the kingdom . . . Thank you, you poetic, creative soul.

The hidden treasure

Any day, any year, any time, any temperature - inside, outside, doesn't matter. The pilgrim's on her progress. She may or may not be aware of St Augustine who said to his God "God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they find their rest in you" - but through her landscape she goes, past the shouting cryers and advertisers, the snake oil sellers and the pamphleteers. Seek this, they say, seek that. Whisky will make you popular, and shoes will make you happy. She wants to be happy - indeed, many do. But what will do it? She searches every inch of that across which she travels. And one day, digging around some random field (is any field random in God's world?) she uncovers treasure. As soon as she finds it, she **knows** that this is what she wants, what she needs. There is a deep recognition that this is it. So she scuttles back home ("we knew she'd be back" the cynics say. But she's only back to sell everything she has, to buy that field and its hidden treasure. It's madness to the cynics - because they don't see the treasure. To them it's just the random field. A bit like to others, it was just the guy from Nazareth - rather than the poetic, creative soul of God. Is it a silly land purchase that makes no sense? Or God in a moment, a holy recognition, a revelation of where the heart must be - the kingdom! Thank you, you poetic, creative soul.

The net

Down by the lake, any day, any time - who can tell when the fish are likely to be biting - not that nets require fish to bite, you know . . . I guess the art is reading the conditions, knowing the lake, getting a feel for the moon and the sun, and times and tides - though tides not so much in a lake. Maybe it's all just luck of the draw - some fishing trips are successful, some not. **This** net is absurdly full. It has fish of every

kind. The rainbow ones, the flat ones - did you know that flounder begins life like any other fish (taller than wide), then go through some remarkable transformation where they become sideways creatures - with one of their eyes moving to the other side of their head. And the ones with long noses, and ones with teeth, and ones with lights and ones with stings, and ones that flap and ones that glide. They're **all** there - in this ridiculously pregnant net. Onto the shore it's dragged - where the fishers start the sorting of the good from the bad - one imagines they have the eye to spot the difference. Hey, maybe we could take the focaccia bread and two of the fish, and maybe feed a multitude! How about that! Not so much a fishing trip, as much as a showing forth of the kingdom. The hungry fed, the humble lifted high! Thank you, you poetic, creative soul. I'm going to follow you, listen for your stories, and search the world for your kingdom.

-ooOoo-

His question to us is "Have you understood all this?" Had he only asked "have you understood this", rather than "**all** this", I'd have wanted to say "yes". But I know there'll be things that I've missed - treasures so deeply hidden in the field that I haven't found them yet. But, as I've said, I delight in these stories, these images, and I rise to the challenge of searching my world (my real, ordinary, domestic world) with faith and imagination that come from God. How's that for a "partial yes". Actually, maybe, life is about continuing to wonder. Are there yet? Hmmm - we are journeying with the story-teller, and probably that's a calling for life.

Having asked us the question "have you understood", he assures us that we are like masters of a household, bringing out of our treasure things new and things old. It **is** treasure. So for our continuing journey, we say "thank you, you poetic and creative soul".

And keep a moment of quiet.