

## Sermon Archive 479

Friday 29 March, 2024

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Reading: Psalm 22: 1-11

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



### **Reflection:** A penny for your thoughts

Penny for your thoughts, young man. You're normally so animated, smiling, engaging. Every time I've seen you, you've been attending to your things with something that always looked like happiness - like you enjoyed being with people - warmth, light in the eyes.

Today you're just standing there, as people go by. No reaching out, no speaking - kind of staring into the middle distance place where people don't reach. You look kind of sad, so penny for your thoughts.

Do I look sad? Sadness isn't worth a penny - not a half penny. Keep on walking, you! No penny passing from hand to hand today (reminds me of thirty pieces of silver maybe). So I keep on walking.

-ooOoo-

"Penny for your thoughts, young man" says God. God has no penny actually. And God doesn't need to ask the young man his thoughts. God knows. God knows, God knows!

But because it's God who's asking, not some silent passer-by, the young man replies "why have you forsaken me?"

"I'll be your God, and you can be my person" you said. And "yeah, that's be good" I'd said. Could be fun . . . lovely even. I didn't expect that thing about having descendants as many as the stars literally. I didn't think my home would drip with milk and honey. But you know, I thought it would be good. I don't know *why* I'm doing that middle distance staring - we don't deploy it deliberately - like any

kind of calculation. Experts will say it's because I can't be engaging - not feeling OK for talking to the world. Not sure even about talking to you.

Maybe I'm talking to you because I've got no one else to talk to. And I know no one's going to be able to tell me what's gone wrong. Did I do something wrong? O, probably - we get it wrong all the time, but some of the time the people we hurt manage to cope with that - not leave us lonely. And **you're** meant to be able to cope with it - "abounding in steadfast love" they say, longing to cast our sins as far as West is from East, even to the far side of the sea. "If I take the wings of the morning and settle on the far side of the sea, even there . . . even there your right hand would find me, and keep me fast" - they say. Maybe that's right, and would be true for me if only the people you're calling to embody it for me were listening, had lifted the sails of their souls to catch the wind you send to blow them along. Maybe I've done something wrong, and they're doing something wrong. Staring into middle distance as people go by; why have you forsaken me?

-ooOoo-

"Penny for your thoughts young man" says God. God knows how he is, and asks maybe to bring him out of his middle distance armour. No, today is not a good day for God to tempt people out of their armour. Today is a day with too much stabbing and sharpness to the soul to abandon the armour. Maybe not speaking is an armour of sorts . . . "Penny for your thoughts, young man".

The young man asks "why have you forsaken me?" Maybe actually it's nothing to do with me, or what I've done (thought, word and deed, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa). Maybe you became bored with me, and found somebody else. It could be that I'm boring - you know, it's quite an ordinary life, especially when you've been part of it for a while. Should I have learned to dance, maybe, or sing, or ride a unicycle or win a race. Maybe I should have told

more jokes, and been more witty. Or split the atom or cured the cancer . . . rather than gone to the supermarket and paid my taxes and fallen asleep before the party ended. Maybe it's not what I've **done**, but what I've failed to be. Being someone better or more interesting, or exciting - whatever it is that a covenant person needs to be to keep the interest of heaven coming down.

Or maybe it's **you**, that you just don't care, or keep your promise. O yes, there's been a lot of talk about covenant - your solemn word to me that I'm your chosen. New every morning are the mercies - they never come to an end. Every time you see a rainbow, be assured that my love never fails. I am the faithful One, you said. But maybe that's a load of shit. Maybe your eye shifts. Maybe your hand wanders. Maybe you're no different from anyone else in the world who uses solid language while your heart flaps about in the wind. I know you've found someone else. I do not feel loved. I do not feel chosen. I feel forsaken. Why have you forsaken me?

-ooOoo-

God waits a while, before saying again "Penny for your thoughts, young man".

Dear God. I was angry. We say hurt things when in pain. I'm sorry. Perhaps you **do** still love me. Perhaps you **haven't** found someone else. Maybe it's just that you're not in charge, that you can't help me. Can you stop other people from spitting? Can you stop other people from bearing the false witness that hurts me? Can you stop them from picking up the hammer and nails? Can you stop a crowd from jeering once it's found its voice? I don't know. It would be good if you could, and then your covenant person would be safe. But maybe you can't . . . Maybe your nature (the divine nature) is best expressed through the image of someone who's crucified - just another victim of what goes wrong (why didn't he come down from the cross - maybe he can't). You know, I'd rather see you hanging rainbows in the sky the way no

person can hang rainbows. I'd rather see you as someone who casts stars across the sky as none of us can decorate the heavens. I'd rather see you as someone so full of such powerful love that you can write your name on the interior of our hearts. But maybe you're just like a man on a cross - did you see that coming?

My God, my God - if there are things that you do not control, and if what you do not control kills the one you love - your covenant person - then maybe we should weep for you. Come into my middle distance, O God, reveal yourself as a God of grief, and I will cry for **you**. Immortal, invisible, God only wise - show yourself as crying for me, and I will weep for you.

May I have my penny now?

**Epilogue:** . . . in sorrow and horror as the covenant breaks

I see the young man. Normally so animated, smiling, engaging, attending to his things with something that looks like happiness - like he enjoys being with people - warmth, light in the eyes. Today he just stands there, as people go by. No reaching out, no speaking - staring into the middle distance where people don't reach. For himself, but maybe also for everyone else, inwardly he says "My God, why have you forsaken us?"

And the world wonders. Have we done something wrong? Have we failed to be the covenant people? Or is God a capricious leech who loses interest? Is heaven's word, like cheap trinket words, worth nothing? Or is God watching and weeping, with us, in sorrow and horror as the covenant breaks?

Thoughts may not be worth a penny today. But maybe on the third day, there will be something new to say.

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