

## Sermon Archive 477

Sunday 24 March, 2024

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Readings: Mark 11: 1-11

Isaiah 50: 4-9a

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



When I was in discussions with St Stephen's Uniting Church in Sydney, about whether I might be a good minister for them, the sexuality question came up. Deep and frightened parts of me scurried away, not in elevated panic, but maybe in "suppression thinking", taking refuge in the part of me that professed just not to having met the right woman yet. Denial's a complicated thing, the dissecting of which is beyond the remit of this sermon.

The really difficult thing about scurrying away from what you suspect is true, is that the truth comes out to you eventually anyway, and as day by day of life passes you by, robbing you of any sense of being rightly placed in who you are and how your life could be, truth doesn't go away. The coming of truth is *inevitable*.

Part of the problem with pushing away the inevitable is what you do in the meantime. In the case of *my* "meantime", I developed a life where my being straight was required for the salary to keep on coming, for the accommodation to remain available, for my purpose within my immediate community to retain its coherence. In *that* constructed life, if the truth had come, it would have made me unemployed and homeless. That must have been a subconscious factor (then over time not so subconscious) in my decision to keep the *inevitable* at bay.

**"Inevitable"** - that which cannot be avoided; that which cannot be prevented; that which is sure to happen. **Inevitable**.

For multiple smaller reasons, all of which contributed to a big reason of deep unhappiness, I resigned from St Stephen's. I articulated some of the smaller reasons when I announced my intention to go. Some short time after I made the announcement, but early in the time during which I was required to "work out my notice", I came across a silly object for sale in some shop somewhere - I can't remember where. What would you call it? Is it a flag? Or a banner? At its top, it's got a kind of jester like quality - with a wee bauble on it. It's

boldly rainbow - the kind of thing that only a "close associate" of Dorothy would own. I bought it.

Having bought it, I found it a bit too big to stick in my bag or hide up my shirt. How would I get it home without people seeing it? For the first time ever (even though probably no one noticed or cared), *I* didn't care! I emerged from the Bondi Junction train station with my big gay flag, and I carried it boldly, held up high, all the way from the train station to the home from which I was about to be ejected. The sun shone. The day was warm. I was a one person Pride Parade, and I just didn't care. The time had come. Was it inevitable? It was certainly liberating.

A couple of Palms Sundays ago, we acknowledged that it's easy to feel silly when walking down Bealey Ave, singing and waving palm branches in the air. Normally we move through our public spaces in lower-profile ways. Generally, we choose invisibility; "shhh" we say . Unless, that is, we have come to a special time, to a time when the inevitable is setting us free.

-ooOoo-

The Christian tradition has often used the figure of the Suffering Servant, from Isaiah's writings, to cast light on what made Jesus tick. Jesus was not Isaiah's suffering servant, but the Suffering Servant may have captured his imagination centuries later. We don't know. But of the Suffering Servant, here are three reflections and a Palm Sunday epilogue.

-ooOoo-

Number 1. Not everybody notices those who live around them. No, I don't mean we think the world's empty of others, that we're the only ones living in it. At an obvious level we all acknowledge the base existence of others. But when I say "notice" those who live around us, I mean "notice how they are". Reading the lines on their faces, fathoming the look in their eyes. Is that the posture of someone doing well, or the slouch of someone whose steps are heavy? Where have they been - to a funeral? Where are they going - to a party? And if to a party do they have a nice gift to give, or the embarrassment of a really cheap bottle of wine - as much as they can afford just now. At some point, I began to notice people - and to notice when the word that fits is "weary" - I notice the weary people.

At the same time, I found myself thinking "you know, I reckon you've got the tongue of a teacher". You've got things to say, ideas to share, things to teach - for the sake of the weary. What are the things to say? What are the things to teach? And are you going to teach the weary, or teach those who might be contributing to the weariness? I don't know - but this noticing of

the weary and this growing sense of having ideas that might somehow help is rising. Is it **inevitable** that this rising is going to move me to speak? "Inevitable" is a strong thing to say (cannot be avoided, cannot be prevented, sure to happen). If I do speak, maybe it'll get me noticed. Maybe it'll make me poor and homeless - just like some of the weary. Many people choose not to speak, it's true. But if God is here and truth is coming, then for me, the Suffering Servant, is speaking inevitable?

-ooOoo-

Number 2. Morning by morning, God wakens my ear. The recycling truck emptying my neighbours yellow bin full of empty wine bottles (not my yellow bin, you understand) can waken my ear. As can the alarm, announcing the indecently early start of struggling out of bed. As can the cat saying "I think you've forgotten to fill the biscuit bowl, would you mind attending to that?" (A most articulate cat of impeccable manners!) But what of God wakening my ear? Each day I rise as a listening person. I'm going to listen to my world - not just hear it. Am I going also to listen to what I hear for the voices of the prophets and the writers of the psalms within it? Am I going to listen for possibilities, for the million little invitations to risk for the chance of faith, to loosen the grip on what I might discover had indeed become stagnant, to peep inside the tomb and see that it's empty! When my morning ear hears not the truck, but whatever it is that God is saying - then maybe this will be a day of "being taught". Some people, of course, will choose not to hear that kind of thing. It's easier **not** to start the day with being open to the wild and wonderful creativity of the Spirit blowing through the paddocks. Regularity and status quo can be comfortable. Raising the flag less so and not caring about what others think, a little less so.

I, however, was not rebellious to the God who begins each day. I did not turn backward. And for me, was that **inevitable**? Once I heard God in the morning, could I have done anything other than say "yes"? "Inevitable" is a strong word. But for the Suffering Servant, maybe it's a word that fits.

-ooOoo-

Number 3. As a fresh faced tween, did the Suffering Servant ever look in the bathroom mirror, willing those inert follicles to push out some hair? If you clench your teeth, or crunch your diaphragm might something pop out? Of course it won't. "You just have to be patient, son" his father says. As sure as hormones and growth spurts, the beard will come. You might want to say it's "just this side" of "inevitable"! Is it inevitable also, though, that when the beard eventually grows on his chin and cheeks that others will pull it out just to cause him pain?

You wouldn't want to think so, would you? But maybe you begin to suspect it might be as your words of love, and deeds of mercy begin to elicit angry responses. He heals the blind person and the community sets up a roar. He helps the non-verbal man to speak, and the establishment calls him Beelzebub. "Why, what has my Lord done? What makes this rage and spite? He made the lame to run, he gave the blind their sight. Sweet injuries! Yet they at these themselves displease, and 'gainst him rise."

We would characterize the violent response to the Suffering Servant as perverse. We would pray it wouldn't happen. But when the Servant sees the weary and speaks for them, when the Servant begins each day open to the call of God, when the Servant is growing up, is the pulling out of the beard inevitable? Maybe not, but now we find the Servant saying "who are my adversaries? Let them confront me! It is the Lord who helps me; who will declare me guilty?" And by the time you get to that kind of boldness, perhaps certain tragedies **are** inevitable . . .

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A Palm Sunday epilogue. Why did Jesus go to the trouble of entering the city of Jerusalem in such a noisy, festive way? Why finally was he willing to take on the profile of a Messiah? Why, after all that time, was he willing to hear them sing "blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Given who he was, and how the covenant had nurtured him, was it inevitable?

Certainly, in the fullness of time, the time appeared to have come. Outed as the New Covenant - living, breathing, moving, blessing the world! Inevitable in the purposes of God, on Palm Sunday the time had come.

We keep a moment of quiet.

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