

Sermon Archive 537

Sunday 25 May, 2025

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch
Heading Home?

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



Lesson: Acts 16: 9-15

Reflection: An Open Door

Four years ago the week after next, on 3 June, I moved into my home in Papanui. When I say 3 June, that was the first day of the move. When you're doing the move yourself to save as much money as you can on expensive removalists, it's not something you do on one day. The process was slowed somewhat also by the presence in the house of a group of people with paint brushes and rollers - holy rollers? These inconveniently present people had decided at the house blessing a year earlier that my new house was lovely but needed a good lick of paint. So they bought a paint of my choosing from a shop, and gave their hands and hearts to making my house as fresh as possible. I bought them pizza for dinner - it seemed the least I could do to say "thank you". When the painting was all done a few days later, and the furniture was roughly in its right position, two of the painters presented me with a blessing written by the late Irish contemplative and poet, John O'Donohue. It went like this:

May this house shelter your life. When you come home here, may all the weight of the world Fall from your shoulders.

May your heart be tranquil here, blessed by peace the world cannot give.

May this home be a lucky place, where the graces your life desires always find the pathway to your door.

May nothing destructive ever cross your threshold.

May this be a safe place, full of understanding and acceptance, where you can be as you are, without the need of any mask of pretence or image.

May this home be a place of discovery, where the possibilities that sleep in the clay of your soul can emerge to deepen and refine your vision for all that is yet to come to birth.

May it be a house of courage, where healing and growth are loved, where dignity and forgiveness prevail; a home where patience of spirit is prized, and the sight of the destination is never lost, though the journey be difficult and slow . . .

May you have the eyes to see that no visitor arrives without a gift, and no guest leaves without a blessing.

The blessing felt congruent with the kindness of those who had gathered to paint my house. So I turned it into a fridge magnet and put it on the door of my fridge.

-ooOoo-

Seeking their never-lost destination (have they seen it, do they know it?), Paul and his friends went on a journey. It took them about as far as you could go on land, to the point where you either turn back towards where you've come from, or push on out across the sea. To go home? Or to press on? In the night, a conviction forms in the clay of Paul's soul, that somewhere out there, beyond what he knows, there is a need to be met, a form of help to be given. So the boat takes him onward, across the sea, to a land where the locals speak another language. There are Romans there, purple cloth and sights and sounds of a completely different world. The wee boat-load had been away from home before, but never anywhere as far as this. Because Paul's so famous to us, we imagine him taking this cross-cultural thing all in his stride - but I can imagine some of his companions seeing it all through widened eyes. How's this going to work? Where are we going to stay? What will we eat - never quite as far as "what will we wear", since the Master had told them in the olden days not to worry about such things. But when you're away from home, you're definitely in the realm of "how **will** this work?"

Down by a river, just outside the gate to the city, they find not the "Man from Macedonia" who appeared in Paul's nighttime vision, but a group of women - one of whom is called Lydia. It's a Greek name, of course - kind of makes sense given where they are! This woman of a foreign name, speaking in a foreign tongue, living in a world little like that of these travelling Jews from the East, says to them "if you've judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home".

How is this going to work? It's going to work as God opens the heart of a woman who then opens her home. They're a long way from their home - dependent upon the openness of others. And Lydia is prompted to open her door.

May this house shelter your life. When you come home here, may all the weight of the world fall from your shoulders. May your heart be tranquil here, blessed by peace the world cannot give. May you have the eyes to see that no visitor arrives without a gift, and no guest leaves without a blessing.

Music for Reflection

Lesson: John 14: 22-29

Reflection: May you be at home

The passage from John comes from a series of reflections said to have been delivered by Jesus to his disciples on the night before he died. They're gathered around a table, in an upper room that **someone** has provided for them. They've shared a meal together. Jesus has washed their feet - an act of quite some intimacy. This isn't a public gathering - it's a gathering of those who are close. It's a being at home, as it were (even though it's no more their physical home than Lydia's house is to Paul and his friends much later). Home is something more than legal ownership, or squatting rights - isn't it? (Have the disciples begun to work out that home is about belonging, and that belonging comes from company? What company have they found in Jesus? Jesus says that he and his "Father" have come to make a home by being among those who love them.)

Yet this feeling of intimacy that speaks to them about being sheltered (may this house shelter your life), is unsettled by a sense that it might soon be ending. Maybe there's something destructive assembling at the threshold - may it never find its way in. Jesus is discerning among his people the seeds of anxiety - Judas (not Iscariot) asks an **anxious** question, and Jesus begins his ministering answer. The beginning of the answer is to affirm what they have sensed about this gathering being a place of special presence - a home. "Those who love me will keep my word", he says, "and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. So yes, you are right - this **is** your home - this event. It is indeed a hired hall, but there is something in the love, in the demonstration of

faithfulness, in the "listening" that goes on in this place, that gives it divine presence, and makes it a "home", rather than just a house. If you, he says to his disciples, are sensing that you belong here, then maybe that's more than understanding merely in flesh and blood.

But what of your fear? - this sense you have, because you're mortal, that all things come an end? This sense you have, because you know about loss, that everything's kind of fragile? What will happen, you wonder, if your Christ is snatched away, and the house of cards . . . not a home, but a house of cards.

When he speaks of the Advocate who will come, he's picking away at the notion that his presence among them is one of those precious but passing things. There is something abiding, there is something risen, about what they have received here. Don't let your hearts be frightened. Don't be afraid. You will find the power to remember what I have said to you, what I've done among you, who I've enabled you to be not just to me, but to one another. You **have** heard me say "I am going away", and I am (as you have known me) - but this isn't the ending. Because of love that remembers, because of the holding close of peace, because of "the clay of the soul" practising the art of "awaiting the Spirit" - (expectancy, hope, faith) - God will continue to be at home among you. If you love me, in this you'll rejoice.

-ooOoo-

That's pretty much all for now. Tomorrow these same disciples will be scattered as Jesus is taken away - scattered sheep without a shepherd. Tomorrow they won't know where to go - exiles in the world once more.

But later, they'll hear his voice again. Later, they'll remember he said "I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe". And later again, there will be the realising that the Spirit has come, so God again deeply is present.

May this shelter your life. When you come to this, may all the weight of the world fall from your shoulders. May your heart be tranquil in this, blessed by the peace that the world cannot give. May the possibilities that sleep in the clay of your soul emerge here. Indeed, in the presence of God, may you be at home.

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