

Sermon Archive 540

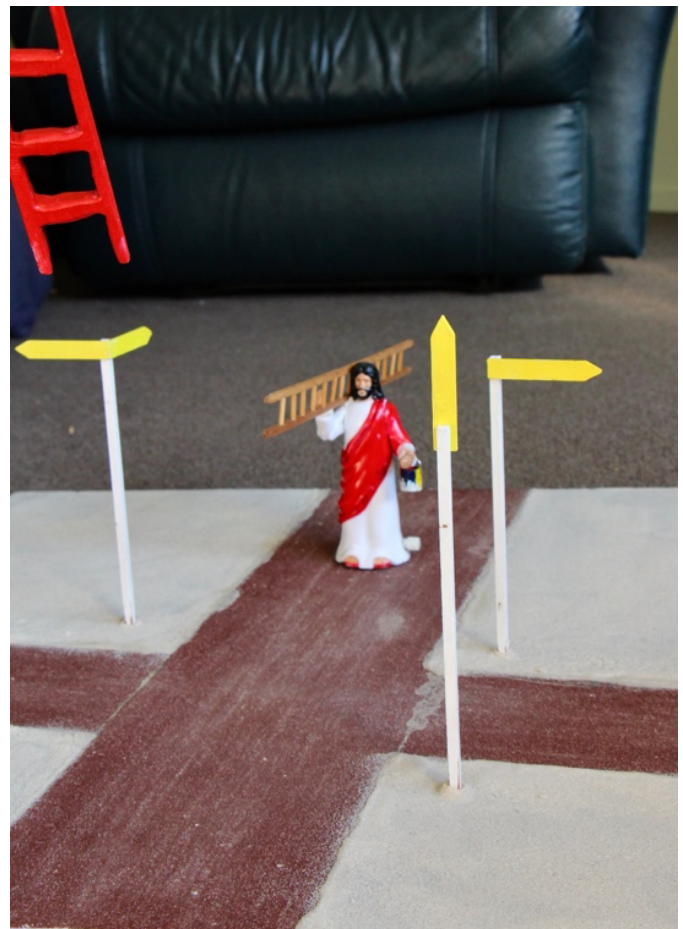
Sunday 15 June, 2025

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch
Reflections on Majendie artworks - 2
Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



Reading: John 1: 1-5, 10-14

Reflection: He arrives with pot and ladder



Look at **you!** - Jesus, coming into frame along your road. What we may not notice is that the artist made your road out of sand paper - so it's an abrasive path you take. If that's your road into the lives we lead, then it's going to remove various little bits of you as you come. Friction (in the form of Pharisees, disciples who fail to understand, Romans who want to avoid your protest, the weight of the wood along the Via Dolorosa). I hope your sandals are solid.

And for the moment, let's leave aside the cross road that you seem to approach - the decisions you'll need to make about whether to wear out your sandals to the left, or to the right, or obey that sign that directs you straight back up into the sky. Well, in Ascension faith that upward journey might yet come - but for now, with your ladder and your pot of paint, you look like you're got plenty of work to do right here.

I wonder what things in our world you plan to paint. As I wonder, two stories come forth. One is about a friend who painted my house - I mentioned this a couple of weeks ago. Paint applied to my inside walls, to make my house a loved and lifting space. As my walls changed colour by the work of Christ, it made me feel loved. Another story's about a painting on my living room wall - painted by a man called Ross. It came to me by a sad series of events in the lives of the people for whom Ross first painted the painting. They gave it to me because their marriage had broken up, and they were dividing up the house. That sadness was always there as I looked at the painting. I bumped into Ross a couple of weeks ago, and told him that his painting was now with me. He told me that he'd always loved the painting, and was pleased that it was in my home - the home of a friend. That comment kind of broke the mixed feelings I'd had. It was liked he'd added one last but important lick of paint to the work. Painted love.

Jesus, you come with your tin of paint. Are you going to find the sad faces of those who mourn, and paint a smile? That feels a bit too "Hallmark greeting card". But I can imagine you graffiti bombing their walls with "blessed are those who mourn". Are you going to paint over the hunger and injustice in Gaza and Ukraine? - so we can't see it anymore? Again, no. But I can see the tagging "blessed are the peace-makers". You put these slogans into our world - and sometimes we notice them, and sometimes that makes a difference.

As you come to me along your sandpaper road, you know what makes me nervous,? It's that you not only bring your paint can (painting the things that we can reach). You've also got a ladder - just a small one. But even small ones allow us to reach a wee bit further - to take the paint to places we'd otherwise have to leave blank.

If we climb the ladder, to paint things beyond our reach, how's that going to go? Are we **meant** to move into things beyond our reach? Peace in the world? Empathy in the heart? Food for the table? Are these meant to be within our reach? . . .

If, with all our hearts, we seek you, will we reach where we need to be? If, we knew where we might find you, would that take us to that to which we are called?

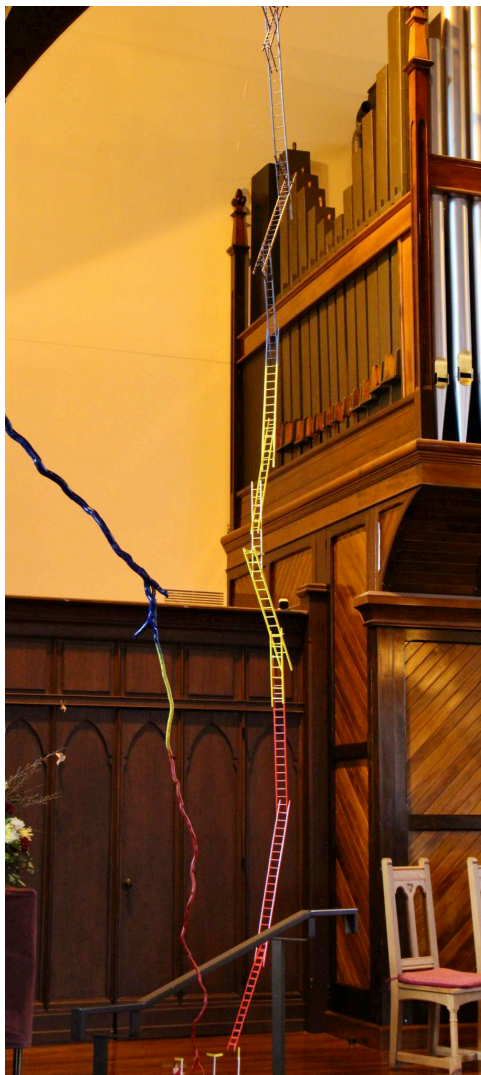
A pot in his hand to paint the world.
A ladder on his shoulder, to climb the heights.
If, with all our hearts we seek him . . .

Music for Reflection:

"If with all your hearts",
from Elijah, Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847).

Reading: Matthew 14: 22-32

Reflection: Frightened of falling



Please look at the extraordinarily long ladder hanging in our sanctuary. Notice the various points along it, where it changes colour, but also direction. Think about how the change in direction might pose a challenge to anyone who might climb it. Think about how the changes of direction become increasingly more dangerous - or should we say "exhilarating" - the higher up we go. Some of us

see danger - others see excitement. Depending on what we see in this ladder, we climb up, or clamber down. I think, in the face of various challenges, I've done both. Anyway, here's the reflection.

The Lord of the ladder has walked into our life. Above him stretches out this most remarkable ladder. It stretches even higher than where the lightning begins.

I look at the first part that I must climb. It's long, with just one small bend in it. But then it reaches a point where another ladder takes over. And I'm thinking which side of the first ladder do I need to be on, in order best to transition to climbing the next part - so I'm not hanging upside down. And how solid is the connection between them anyway? If I push it with my weight, will the parts detach? And if they do, will the top part fall down? Or will the bottom part fall off? I suppose it depends on whether it's anchored at the bottom or at the top . . . Do I know the answer to that? I should have inspected the bottom before I started climbing. Whether it's anchored at the bottom or top - my main fear, quite simply, is that I'll fall. And the higher I get, the further I'll fall.

To believe that there was a community of faith - maybe to fall from that wouldn't hurt all that much. To believe that within that community of faith, someone arose called Jesus. Yes, that's a bit further up the ladder - but easy enough to access. To believe that he healed someone - that's a bit of a climb. That he is the Messiah? That he died on the third day rose again? . . . How high! Imagine the fall!

Having followed Jesus for a while, Peter has found his horizons interfered with. A little worm is eating away at his sense of what's possible. People born blind are seeing. Hungry crowds are being fed. Grizzled grudges are falling into love. Hell! In the storm of the moment, why shouldn't he be able to walk on water?! Onto that ladder he climbs.

But, no Lord Jesus; now I'm frightened. I hold out my hand - - - and you take it. You say to me "'You of little faith, why did you doubt?" I aspired, perhaps too much, and you rescued me from sinking.

The little ladder on his shoulder becomes this huge long stretch for us into what is high and scary. Whether we stay here, painting a few things, or step onto what is daunting, may depend on whether we entertain the idea of a Christ who reaches our outstretched hand.

Peter, do not fear. Should you fall, you will be met by Christ.

Hymn: Immortal love, forever full

Reading: Luke 10: 1-12

Reflection: The Gate

We have before us a gate. I don't know - when does wrought iron become gothic? Not gothic as in "gothic architecture - kind of pointy", but gothic as in "gothic scary", "gothic horror"? Is it because it's made of metal? Or because I know it comes from a church yard where rumour has it Tautahi (after whom we have Ōtautahi) was buried - but the body seems not to be there, and no one knows where or why? The gate has a spooky edge . . .



The thing about a gate is that it can be opened, and it can be closed. If you wanted people locked out at all times, you'd have a fence. If you wanted people to come and go unimpeded, you'd have a path. Gates are about the regulation of access. Gates give power to those who operate them - the gate-keepers.

The gate keepers of Jesus' time annoyed him. He was of the view that they spent too much time closing the way. There was a generally closed attitude to foreigners. But also gates were closed to those people of Israel who were disabled, or ill, or unclean, or menstruating. A million purity laws caused the keepers to close the gate. (Are there echoes here of trapping the Spirit in a cage?)

One day, he called his people together, put them into pairs, gave them a few instructions on travelling light - and sent them out into the world. Out they went to visit wherever would receive them. Out they went to share good news, to heal what presented, to bless the generous spirit, to not dwell on rejection - all with the sign above their gate "Christ is painting your world, calling you to climb" "the kingdom of God has come close to you".

He sent them out in pairs before him;
HE WILL DO THIS AGAIN AND AGAIN.

As we lift the latch, creak open the gate, light may indeed shine forth.

Music for Reflection:

"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun",
from Elijah, Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847).

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