

Sermon Archive 541

Sunday 22 June, 2025

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Reflections for Matariki

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



The First Lesson: Psalm 8

A Video Clip: Professor Brian Cox, University of Manchester
"A finite, fragile life in an infinite, eternal universe"

A Reflection: Matariki is the star of well-being
The earth is special

How special am I? At my father's funeral, I introduced myself to the people who'd come to mourn him, as the second son of the second son of the second son. In terms of mathematical sequences, I guess that's kind of special - until the first borns remind us that we're seconds in a line of seconds. My Daddy loved a first son before I came along. Indeed. Does that matter? In my father's eyes, am I special?

I talked to a lovely person recently. She said she'd always felt like her siblings were more clever, more achieving, more-to-be-proud-of than she was. There were many siblings and only one of her. My heart broke. What do you say to that sense that someone's at the bottom? Especially when she's wonderful! In her family's eyes, is she special?

My father, indeed, felt for all of his life that he was stupid - because that's what his teachers told him. Interestingly, his teachers were mainly old men who'd retired from teaching, but had been called back into service when all the younger male teachers went off to the Second World War. The old men didn't want to be back in the classroom, and when they were forced to be, they acted out their anger on my Daddy. They told him he was just as stupid as his older brother. Neither would come to anything. As an interesting side comment, I delight that my uncle, my Daddy's dead-shit brother, became a High Court Judge. It is a sin that the two boys were called stupid. Arthur and Desmond: despite their life achievements, how were they ever going to transcend feeling like they were nothing? - waiting for a star of well-being to shine upon them?

Turning from an old Irish situation, we come to the state of affairs here in Aotearoa. I can't tell you all the stories, but I can tell you that there are many of

them. In the OECD, the young men of this nation rank fifth highest in the global suicide figures. Common to the sad narrative that draws them to do what they do, is the feeling that they don't matter. Significance / insignificance. Pain, relief. Well being - are they special?

What is special? Second, second, second? What is special? First? What is special? Being cleverer than your brothers and sisters? What is special? Something that you can give to those who love you, that no one else can? What is special? . . .

Brian Cox asks what does it mean to live a finite, fragile life in an infinite, eternal universe? Like the size of the universe, with its stars above to make us small, might make us feel too small to matter!

What did he say?

Imagine that we're the only civilization currently in the Milky Way Galaxy, which is a guess, but it's a possibility. I would argue that that word "meaning", what would it mean, - whatever it is, it exists, clearly: the universe means something to us. But I would argue it's a property of the mind, human brains, complex biology. So that implies that maybe the earth is special, very special, notwithstanding its physical insignificance, because it could be the only island of meaning in a galaxy, of 400 billion suns currently.

Small in the scheme of things - but somehow, even because of how small we are, so very significant - even special?

Matariki is the star of well-being. Vast, huge, high above us - she shines and calls us to celebrate well-being.

A psalmist looks at the skies - full of stars that spoke to his cousins about what will happen to whom and when and where. But no; to the **psalmist**, the stars speak about how small we are. When I look at the stars, who am I? Small and stupid? Small and never-do-well? Small and never anything that others might miss? No! To the psalmist, the scale of these stars amaze him that, physical insignificance considered, he is something just a little less glorious than an angel.

Are we special?

Is my daddy special, and his stupid brother?

Is my friend special?

Are we?

"Special" lies somewhere in the loving discernment of God, God's high estimation of what is human - while Matariki shines her light down. The star of well-being.

Music for Reflection: Hine e Hine, by Princess te Rangi Pai (1868-1916)
Deborah Wai Kapohe and the Knox Singers

The Second Lesson: Luke 12: 16-21
This is the gospel of Christ.
PRAISE TO CHRIST, THE WORD.

The Third Lesson: Matthew 6: 28-33
This is the gospel of Christ.
PRAISE TO CHRIST, THE WORD.

A Reflection: Hiwa i te rangi: the promise of a prosperous season
Noticing God's Prosperity

Although Jesus spent a lot of time on the road, I've never seen a picture of him with a suitcase, or a bag over his shoulder. Maybe that's because of a lack of imagination on the part of the people who've painted him. Or maybe it's because he was true in his own practice to the advice he gave the seventy two, when he sent them out into the world like lambs into the realm of the wolf. No purse, no bag no sandals - travelling light. Indeed, when they put him to death, and the soldiers drew lots for his seamless tunic, that was pretty much his entire wealth disbursed.

For the rest of us, though, we acquire things, don't we? I have a house. It's appointed with objects I've been collecting from the time I left my parents' home. The small chiming clock I bought when I was eighteen. The large chiming clock I bought when I was twenty-nine. The vulgar Ansonia chiming clock I bought when I was 35. The Victorian black slate chiming clock, and the German art deco chiming wall clock I bought when I was between forty-two and forty-five. Does that sound like too many chiming clocks? It certainly makes my house a noisy place each hour. A realistic assessment of my situation would suggest that I have too many chiming clocks. But chiming clocks are wonderful things - so I ask "can you ever have too many?"

Hiwa i te rangi shines down on us at this winter time. She shines a blessing of prosperity - does "prosperity" mean many clocks?

There once was a man. He was prosperous. Well, if you're using crops and barns as the measure, he was **very** prosperous - **so** many crops he'd needed to build some extra barns.

I don't know, because I've never got there, but you hear the odd story about people who become so prosperous, that they manage to do something creative. Mark Zuckerberg got so rich that when his first child was born (a daughter), he gave away (for the fostering of her generation) 90% of his wealth. He reckoned he now had enough, and wanted to bless the babies. Bill Gates did something similar, but later in life. He set up a charitable foundation that did good things - since he reckoned he had enough to get by. Elon Musk . . . no hang on. Won't go there. But prosperous people have options to do selfless things.

The prosperous man, in our reading, gets to the point of being secure. And from his security, he decides to eat, drink, and be merry - only then to learn that you can't take it with you. The scriptures call him a fool. Are they mean to call him that? Hiwa i te rangi shines prosperity down upon us, and we wonder what prosperity is . . .

At another time, Jesus gives advice to his people - people who like us maybe have an inclination to buy many clocks (the great capitalist ambition). He suggests that we be more like flowers of the field, more like birds of the air - not worrying about building up riches - fuel for the moth and the mouse. He calls us to another kind of prosperity.

On shortened winter days, when the garden is wet, and when the curtains work hard, in colder times, when many layers of clothes are needed to keep us warm, on darker days when the kumara are resting in the winter soil, a star shines above us - she stands for prosperity.

Being with people who love us? Eating a simple meal? Saying a prayer of thanksgiving? Raking up the leaves and noticing the beautiful colours we thrown into the bin? Remembering how the rain fell on the corrugated iron roof before we had insulation? The first kiss, the latest kiss? The too many stupid bloody chiming clocks.

By the hand of God, Hiwa i te rangi is suspended above our world. She calls us, perhaps to see our true prosperity. And Jesus . . .

Well, Jesus calls us to ponder, then opens our eyes.

Manawatia a Matariki. A moment of quiet.

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