

## Sermon Archive 548

Sunday 10 August, 2025

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Peace Sunday - again

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



### **Background:** Peter preached

Four months ago a funeral service was held at Knox Church, Ōtepoti Dunedin for the Reverend Emeritus Professor Peter Matheson. Peter had been Professor of Church History at the Theological Hall when I was an ordinand there - indeed, in the "olden days".

Peter was internationally highly regarded as an academic. He also was well known for his participation in environmental groups, and the Social Justice community. It was indeed in the social justice realm that he made his greatest impact on me. In his sermons, he could not only make enlightening connections between scripture and current events, he could also stir up the soul. I once described one of his strengths as "righteous indignation".

We're about to listen to an audio clip of a reflection he delivered as part of a Peace Sunday service in a cathedral that used to stand just down the road for us here at Knox. He'd been invited by the then Dean, John Bluck, to speak about Gideon, a prophet in Israel at a time of great hunger and suffering. As a point of context, Peter was preaching at a time when, in Aotearoa New Zealand, half the government was continuing to push on with what became known as Roger-nomic reforms, while the other half of the government was calling for a pause - time for a cup of tea. Just around the corner was the next government's Mother of All Budgets, and a climbing unemployment rate. Times were tough for some, and there was a sense of the rich getting richer, and the poor getting poorer.

We'll have the reading from Judges, then listen to the clip.

### **The First Lesson:** Judges 6: 11-21

**An Audio Clip:** The late Reverend Emeritus Professor Peter Matheson, speaks to an ecumenical congregation at Ōtautahi Christchurch Anglican Cathedral, on Peace Sunday, 1990.

*We are steadily drifting in this country into civil war: into a war of the rich against the poor, and of the strong against the weak. The values of our economics, of our*

*social policies, of our educational policies, are being determined by what in Christian terms are moral pygmies. All that is sacred in our inheritance as New Zealanders, Māori and Pakeha, is in peril - and it is time for us to wake out of our sleep.*

*Gideon was asleep, his head was down; he even had to thrash his wheat in secret, lest the forces of Median would confiscate it. So when an angel of the Lord came along like some pious friend today and said, "the Lord is with you brother", he said, "Oh yeah? In the past, maybe - when God led us out of Egypt, but no longer. In our story, Gideon decided on one last gesture. He scrapes together 20 kilo of hard won flour, and a kid goat. And he offers them to God, praying for a sign of liberation. And the Angel of the Lord reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand. And fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cake. Terrified, realising that he had seen God to face, he shrinks back - and is comforted. "Shalom Aleichem, peace be with you". On this Peace Sunday, how do we read this story of angels and volcanic fire? Of terror and liberation?*

*If, as a church, we have to deal pastorally with those who are the victims of the present economic crisis, and we have - If as a church, we have to pray for those who are the victims, and we have - if as a church we have to distribute food parcels, 20 kilo of flour, broth and meat to those in most desperate need, and we certainly must do this - - - it is also and most manifestly true that we cannot stop there. For we are entrusted as Church with the Gospel itself: that God cares and that people matter.*

*Face to face with this living God, we have to make such sacrifices as we can and care for the victims as best we can - but in faith, knowing that beneath the rock on which we are proud to stand is the volcanic fire of God's love, which rages against all injustice and which will flare out in forms we cannot yet begin to guess.*

*For we know that what the new and false and dismal prophets of monetarism preach is, in Christian terms, sheer heresy. They forget, that the world's resources are not ours to exploit, but are part of the wonder of creation, to be stewarded for all future generations. And they forget that people are not just producers and consumers, that we are not driven just by fear and greed - but that we are made in the very image of God, made to love and cherish one another, to work for the common weal.*

*And so today, on this Peace Sunday, in Word and act and symbol, we defy such heretical values as surely as Gideon was called to defy the Midianites . . . The Angel of God is in our midst, the menace of hope, the sign of liberation, the fire of God is beneath our feet. In awe and faith and love, we lift up the cross and*

*hear the gospel. Shalom Aleichem. Peace be with you. You shall not perish. Amen.*

**Short Comment:** 35 years

Since Peter spoke of the need to "wake from our sleep", thirty five years have passed. 35 years, since he called upon the Church to defy the heretical values of monetarism and greed. 35 years since his preaching made it feel like this matter was urgent.

Last week, Jesus looked at the task of tending to the harassed and helpless people, and called the situation daunting. The need for justice and peace for the people was huge, but the workforce was small. "Pray for God to make more workers", he said. This week, we are astounded (but probably ought **not** to be astounded) that 35 years seems not enough time for progress to be made. A question arises: how do Peace-Sunday people persist in times when although the vision might be clear, the progress is under-whelming? How does the spirit not wither?

Some music for reflection, a scripture reading, and then we listen for the Word of God.

**Music for Reflection**

**The Second Lesson:** Romans 5: 1-5

**Sermon:** Creative impatience?

Paul is keen to describe Christians as people of hope. He boasts in his hope. Boasting . . . not hiding or apologizing, but standing tall. Yes, we have hope. After 35 years? Does not hope become a little harder to hold? That's the question raised when affliction also is part of the picture. But no, Paul refuses to stop boasting in his hope. Indeed, he boasts also in his affliction. Not **of** his affliction, but **in** his affliction. Perhaps this may be because of how he uses the affliction creatively . . . ?

Paul insists that affliction produces endurance. Last month, Emile Donovan on Te Reo Irirangi o Aotearoa, Radio New Zealand, interviewed ex-Member of Parliament, Peter Dunne. Peter had written an opinion piece following the resignation of New Zealand First MP, Tanya Unkovich, half way through her first term. Tanya's parting comment was that she thought she could serve humanity better in the private sector than in public service. **Peter's** view was that that showed a lack of commitment. If you ask the electorate to put you into parliament, and the electorate does so, then you need to take that seriously. And if you find the experience of being in parliament was different from what you expected, then you should quit at the next election - once you've completed your

term. You don't just give up - you apply a little endurance. Affliction, of course, **can** destroy a person in parliament; one thinks of Kiritapu Allan, and Golriz Ghahraman, both of whom experienced terrible, hateful misogyny and death threats as they did their parliamentary work - until they couldn't anymore. I'm sure that Peter wouldn't criticise **them** for lack of endurance. He **does** criticise Tanya. Paul encourages us to think about the possibility of affliction producing endurance - an endurance (perhaps necessarily a shared endurance in which we face the affliction not alone, but together - both Kiri and Golriz fell over after the dissolution of their primary relationships). If we are standing together in our affliction, is that something of which we may boast? Maybe there is a creative possibility there, for those who are afflicted . . .

Not sure, perhaps, that he's boasted enough yet, Paul goes on to say that while affliction produces endurance, endurance produces character - personal substance, moral standing. As we heard last week in Obama's conversation - "no, we say no to the money, and yes to the principle of doing the right thing." CHARACTER! "No, we say no to doing things only when they are easy or trendy, and yes to doing good things when they are hard". CHARACTER! It's impressive, isn't it! You could almost feel proud! Forged in affliction, tempered by endurance, the person of character is someone of whom to boast.

Not enough boasting? Affliction produces endurance, endurance produces character, character produces hope - which we feared may have been dying in a lack of progress. Affliction, in Paul's eyes, does not necessarily kill hope - not if the community of faith handles it creatively.

And so to the 35 years! Peter Matheson has returned to the elements from which he came; we heard his words just now. He said:

*And so today, on this Peace Sunday, in Word and act and symbol, we defy such heretical values as surely as Gideon was called to defy the Midianites . . . The Angel of God is in our midst, the menace of hope, the sign of liberation; the fire of God is beneath our feet. In awe and faith and love, we lift up the cross and hear the gospel. Shalom Aleichem. Peace be with you. You shall not perish. Amen.*

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