

Sermon Archive 559

Sunday 16 November, 2025

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch
Reflections in Trans Awareness Week
Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



Deuteronomy 34: 1-8

The historians tell us that the people of Israel suffered a time of slavery in Egypt. They tell us also that a time came when the Israelites exited Egypt, moving North towards the region that would become their home. That's what the historians say.

Alongside what the historians say, the Israelites wrote their own stories - reflecting on what they were fleeing, what they were seeking, Whom they followed, and who they were enabled to become along the way. It was a story of leaving bondage, finding a home, becoming whole.

Since the tradition talks about the journey taking forty years, let's crawl into the mind of some hypothetical traveller born during the journey.

-ooOoo-

Kia ora, my friend. I was born into a journey. My old people remembered the place from which we'd come. They spoke of the past, as the old ones do, but it never meant too much to me. I mean, I listened politely, because you do, don't you? But what I heard were black and white flickerings. To their credit, they tended not to generate nostalgia - keeping generally their hand to the plough, their eyes on the prize - the place to which they were marching.

For **my** part, the past wasn't anything at all. And actually, nor was the present. The present was just something I was passing through. Some of it was beautiful in its own way, yeah! I saw the lines

between hills and skies in various places. I saw oases in the desert (trees, the miracle of water, animals coming to the pools). And yes, we met people as we travelled - whose smiles, and conversations, and questions, and welcomes all made the place more real. It was a real journey, made more real by all the real, and feel, you-and-me dealing.

But I knew that this was not my place. I belonged to another life - just down the road. One day, around the corner, I would put my head down on some pillow, and wake the next day at home. Today I am who I am (slightly displaced), but soon I will be who I was created to be - someone at home. It is my dream to "arrive"!

For our journey, I acknowledge Moses. It's probably true that he was hot-headed, but I prefer to use the word "brave". When others were treating us like slaves, insisting that freedom was something not for us, **his** was the heart into which God's indignation flowed. "No", he cried. "Let these people go". Later, the observant will note that every liberation movement needs its difficult and determined ones to kick things off. Diplomacy comes later, but determination is for now! Moses was our determined one. Without him, probably we'd not have made our move towards home.

Kia ora, my friend. You know that Moses didn't make it home. Still full of vigour, still loved by his people, though still waiting actually for history to put its "right side" stamp on his remarkable contribution, he ran out of whatever it takes to drive the journey. We buried him with love.

Others didn't make it either. Many of my own, the people in whose eyes shone the vision of "being really at home, in the home we were born to find" died along the way. Some in automobile accidents. Some of cancer. Some of too much drink. Some, by their own hands because this is not my home, and I can't bloody do this anymore . . .

What **can** we do as we journey towards this place, this being-at-home we seek? The story tells us that we can listen for God. We

can love our neighbour. We can extend whanaungatanga even to the alien (what's an "alien", what a horrible word to use). We can acknowledge that we're all people on a journey - looking to become those whom God wants us to be. Not the displaced. Not the entrapped - but people at peace.

Kia ora, my friend. An important part of our tradition's faith story is a people on a journey. Within the love of God, that is who we are. We're all on our way to a truer, more peaceful home. Let this truth speak to you. Whether it speaks such that you will feel more at home, or whether it speaks such that you will open your heart to those whose journey is more complicated than yours is, let us listen for the Word of God.

Knox Singers: Anthem

Lesson: Galatians 6: 12-18

Paul is writing into a strange kind of dynamic - a cross-cultural collision of deep-seated taboos, ignorance and fears. A Greek community is dealing with the importation of a Hebrew-associated faith that comes with cultural practices attached. How shall we chart the landscape?

The gospel has arrived in Galatia through people who, culturally, are Hebrew. And for Hebrew people, for about two thousand years, the way you showed your belonging in God's family was to circumcise your sons. God might have commanded Abraham to mark his children as "distinctive" in any manner of way. The Hindus have the bindi, the dot of red on the forehead. The Sikhs have the turban. None quite so enfleshed as the Jewish circumcision. But there it is.

Into this non-circumcising community in Galatia, comes a gospel of salvation, newness and hope - a beautiful thing of heart and mind and liberty. In the odd spirit of the time, though, somehow it

all descends into a debate about whether people need to be circumcised.

In light of this descent, the first thing Paul does is to note that those who are pushing the circumcision agenda are doing so only to gain power. They become more powerful as others conform to their vision of how the body must be. "All they want", he says, "is to brag about having you conform." Let's have no regard about the soul. Let's have no second thought about how anyone is sitting within the body - and what they might need. Let's just insist that every body conform to the cultural norm. Paul is proud of his Jewish roots, his people's culture - to his proud announcement in his letter to the Philippians that he was circumcised on the eighth day. But here, to the Galatians, he says "it doesn't matter if you are circumcised or not. All that matters is that you are a new person."

Let the cultures argue about body conformity! The community of faith asks "are you becoming a new person".

In the first part of this sermon, we entertained the idea of someone born into a journey - from "no longer", through the "not yet", into a state of being at home. We acknowledged that we're all on a journey - and that for some, the journey is more complex. We thought about people like Moses, who brought everything he-had-and-was to facilitate the journey. Now we find Paul, specifically focussed on matters of how the body speaks of who we are, saying that the only thing that matters, is that you are becoming a new person.

I think that's enough for today. We keep a moment of quiet.