

Sermon Archive 567

Sunday 11 January, 2026

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Reflections on "Gone Fishing"

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



Introduction to a Video Clip

The English comedian and writer, Bob Mortimore is 66 years old. Paul Whitehouse, actor and comedian, 67 years old, is Bob's friend of many years. Each man speaks of their friendship as something that has saved him during difficult times in life (major heart surgery, depression, setbacks, the like).

In 2018, the friends collaborated on a television series called "Gone Fishing". Fishing, it is said, is a time for not speaking - but these two older British men seem to find time while fishing to have some quite tender conversations.

I'm going to play you a seven-minute clip of Bob and Paul, then offer three short readings and reflections.

The Video Clip - *the three reflections won't make much sense unless you view the video clip. It is available online at:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSUs29MhBWo>

The edited material I played in church was from 33 seconds to 4 minutes, 33 seconds, and from 5 minutes, 21 seconds to 9 minutes, 5 seconds.

Lesson: 1 John 3: 1-2

Reflection: Parents, children and friends

Bob and Paul talk about their fathers, one of whom wasn't around for very long, and one who was. The early death of Bob's father threw Bob into growing up pretty quickly, taking on those jobs a "hero child" just feels he or she needs to do. I guess doing jobs is one way of responding to a gap you don't acknowledge but nevertheless in some way ***feel***. If

pressed to say what his a father was like, I'm guessing Bob wouldn't quite know what to say. It's the same gap that presented itself when he was working out how to be a father himself. As Bob says, "I wasn't a kid anymore; and it's sad, because I was only seven".

Paul was luckier than Bob. He got to love his father for a long time - AND had the opportunity to say goodbye to him. So his grief is different from Bob's - and as he says, it's a grief that has a golden thread running through it of gratitude, When he remembers his father, he finds himself singing "feed the birds tuppence, just tuppence".

They talk also of Bob's mother - whom we know was a solo mother probably from quite a young age. The impression is of someone who's needed to be independent, and kind of ended up instead being "isolated". Both independent and isolated involve "standing alone", but only one means "being alone". So she asks her hero child for a hug. Being the hero, he gave the hug - and wonders to this day why he wasn't able to express his love for her while he was doing it.

It causes him to ask Paul if he's ever told **him** that he loves him. "No, you don't need to; I just sense it". Then they laugh, move the conversation along.

"I love you". "You are precious to me". "You are my friend". God says it to the world in Christ. These are things perhaps that we need to learn to say.

Hymn: Loving Spirit

Lesson: Psalm 23

Reflection: Look at the light, Bob; look at that!

Bob has a few things he wants to say to Paul, so he sets up a picnic rug by the river. He lights a few sparklers next to a cake of which each man's cardiologist would disapprove. He cracks open a bottle of bubbles, and says he has one final thing to say. But Paul isn't ready to hear the one final thing. He's suddenly distracted by the beauty of it all. He suggests that the word for his distraction is "enraptured". (Is the word enraptured? Are you enraptured? Yeah I am.). He says it's about the quality of the light, the way the trout are rising, the mayflies

in the air. He wants his friend not to miss it, so says "look at the light, Bob; look at that!" The pastures are green, the waters are quiet. Maybe, though it's not just the light. Maybe it's also that his friend has given him cake and bubbles, and has set a rug out - prepared a table for him. Someone has provided a table at which he is a special guest. My head thou dost with oil anoint, and my cup overflows. "Thank you, Bob" he says - and Bob says "Thank you Paul".

To see the beauty in not just the natural world, but in the kindness of a friend, to say "thank you" and hear "thank you" said back. To have a little celebration of a rather big gift. We learn to cultivate this kind of life.

Music for Reflection

Lesson: Micah 6: 6-8

Reflection: Responding to gifts

By my count, there were at least four moments in the video where gifts were given. Gifts are not levies, or taxes, or wages or rights. They're not transactional. Gifts come from a ***different*** spirit - one that tells us that we are appreciated, valued, sometimes even loved. Maybe that's why we don't receive them casually.

The first gift is that of a compliment. Can a compliment be understood as a gift? Compliments are free! Paul says to Bob, over a beer, that Bob had had a good day in the fishing. Was he expressing some statistics about how many fish Bob caught? Was he presenting some dull and unarguable facts about fish per hour - as if fishing is about how much protein gets released from the awa? If so, Paul's words would not have caused Bob to pause, look pleased, embarrassed, without words, and be described by his friend as "going a bit coy". Why do compliments "undo" us? Is this what love does?

The second gift is the cake and bubbles. It's a gift given by someone who's had major cardiac surgery to someone who's had major cardiac surgery. They joke that once a year it's OK to eat, drink and be merry. They know how fragile life is, and the cake is almost a celebration of knowing that, and standing beside friends because of that.

The third gift is a fig tree - and the way it's presented is in keeping with the cake - something to be eaten before or after death. "After I'm gone, Paul" says Bob, "and it starts to bear fruit, you can bite into those figs, and you can think of me". Take what I give you, plant it, and keep it, nurture it, watch it produce fruit - then bite into it, in remembrance and gratitude. It's providing for this friendship to keep on sustaining us, even after the end comes. Do this in remembrance - the gift of sacrament . . .

The fourth gift is one that comes in response to that. It's a kind of "on the fly" gift, since Paul wasn't expecting gifts to be given to him. How do you respond to the unexpected presentation of "gift". You give what you have. And what Paul has are three fishing flies that he has made. They are the harvest of his slow, careful work. Bob says that he will wear Paul's flies in his hat.

Having exchanged fig trees and fishing flies, the friends rejoice that they've been given more time to live than a mayfly. They rejoice in being not bovine, but human. They gently mock the voice of the cows - as they give their voices in celebration of who we are, and how we bless one another with our gift of love.

Two older English men give thanks for their love, and we keep a moment of quiet.