

Sermon Archive 583

Sunday 26 April, 2026

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Reading: Acts 2: 42-47

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



Yum. This is good. I've not made it before; it's a new recipe. Well, it's new to me. It's old to Mary Berry, who's included it in her book of old favourites released to celebrate her 90th birthday. It's a slow cooked beef cheek, served with creamy mashed potato and steamed broccolini. The meat is really tender - falling apart at the prodding of the fork. The celery, curry, cream and horseradish sauce is perfect. Mid-Autumn comfort food? Certainly warming - wonderful. I have a glad heart.

I did not buy the recipe book. It was a gift from a friend as a thank you gift at the end of the week she spent at my house. I wasn't expecting a gift - didn't feel that thanks were required - since the holiday at my place was a joy for me already. I was grateful already for the time we'd spent together. We'd come up with the holiday idea when we realised that good friends hadn't actually seen each other face to face for ten years - and ten years is too long for proper friends. So, as I eat the beef cheek, I do so with appreciation for a long friendship reignited, celebrated. Friendship attached - the heart is glad.

One day I'll make this dish again, and share it with other friends. It's actually quite well suited for a dinner party - the slow cooking thing means that I can do all the prep well before the guests arrive - just take it out of the oven when everyone's ready to eat. That way, when everyone's chatting, drinking, I'm not stuck in the kitchen - can enjoy the company, clink the glass, be part of the fun. The heart is glad.

My mother tells me that she greatly misses my late father, that she'd love to speak with him again. They were married for 63 years, and he died six years ago now. She confesses, though, that she quite enjoys not having to cook on nights when she doesn't feel like cooking. If she fancies a boiled egg, she boils an egg. Simplicity and freedom. It makes me think of all those years that she cooked not just for Dad, but for all of us, and of how many of those years came and went without any of us saying "thank you". There was a little magnet on the fridge, or tile on the wall (can't remember) that said "superior

foods and beverages served in this kitchen with love. Love was the special and secret ingredient. Even if it's just a boiled egg, love is attached, and the heart is glad.

One of the marks of the early Christian community was breaking the bread at home, sharing the food, and eating with glad and generous hearts. In the presence of the Bread Breaker, regular, basic things like eating become expressions of gratitude for what God has done. "For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful" we pray. He is risen; the heart is glad.

-ooOoo-

Before the recipe book was given, as I said, there was the week spent together at my place. Four people in a house that usually (not always, but usually) has one person. Critical to happiness was the quick establishment of protocols around the bathroom. Use the bathroom when you need to, shut the door as a sign that it's engaged; open the door when you're finished, so others know it's available. We sorted that out in ten seconds, and we lived happily all week without bathroom stress. There was enough bathroom to go around.

Also important was the allocation of bedrooms. The married couple took the guest bedroom. That was obvious and simple. A minor problem to be transcended was where the third guest should go - given that although the main bedroom (*my* bedroom) has a comfy Queen sized bed (what size exactly is a comfy Queen?), I didn't think that my guest should have to sleep with me. I vacated my room, and took a tiny camp mattress on the floor of the study. Getting up from the floor each morning, I rejoiced that I was only 62 years old and could still manage to get up off the floor. Interestingly, being on the floor was, in a way, a comfort, since inexplicably, the night before the guests arrived, I fell out of bed, hit my head on the bedside table, and bled all over the carpet. It was hard to read the expression of the third guest when I said to him "here's your room; don't mind the blood stains".

Also important was the kitchen. I had invited ideas about what I should cook, since on holiday you want to eat things that you like. I got a little bit of guidance. One night the couple took us out to the Gatherings Restaurant in Papanui Road. It was good. One night, I was given the night off while one of the couple made us a lovely pasta. Libations for the week came in the form of a large bottle of gin and several bottles of wine - all provided by the guests. We shared the table, the bathroom, the time, the friendship.

"All who believed", we read, "were together and had all things in common. They would sell their possessions and goods, and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need". We understand that a mark of early Christian community was sharing life and wealth for the common good.

Welcome to my house. My bathroom is your bathroom; my bed, your bed; my table, your table; my time, your time. It's as if it's happening in celebration of the Christ who shared his life with others, and gave no thought to grasping himself to himself. "Let's do this together" he says, and opens wide his arms. He is risen - no wonder the heart is glad.

-ooOoo-

As I said, before the recipe book was the holiday. And before the holiday, there was that previous life in Sydney. I went to Sydney because the Spirit of God convinced a community there that I should be invited to become part of its life. It might be said that I ended up there because Jesus Christ is risen, and is forming that rock upon which he promised to build his church.

About a year after I arrived, the much loved Director of Music there escaped to an Anglican Theological College, and needed replacing. We replaced him with Peter. Peter came to Sydney, as I went to Sydney, because the Spirit of God moved a congregation to invite him. I don't know whether Peter had always imagined that he'd end up in Sydney or not. I guess that's where a lot of the work is. Peter was the first one to tell me that you should never say "Alleluia" during Lent. (He couldn't tell me why.). Week by week, we worked together closely on the services of worship. We pondered the mood and purpose of each part of the liturgy. We took care of the pastoral needs of the small but loving choir. We became dear friends. We would not have met, had we not each, in our own place and way discerned the call of God on our lives. He is risen, and a community comes together. The heart *is* glad.

Either just before or soon after Peter arrived, Bronwyn also arrived. Christian faith had been part of her life for a long time already - she'd been educated in a Catholic school. She ended up doing a lot of inter-faith functions for us at church. She sang God's songs. She spent a while as the secretary of the conflict-torn church council. Because it was conflict-torn, we developed something like that of which old soldiers speak - solidarity formed in the trenches. We helped each other along the steeper parts of the road. She is a good friend, and the giver of recipe books. I

would never have met her, had Christian faith not put her on a journey. He is risen; a community forms of those who otherwise would not have met. And the heart is glad.

We read of the early Christian community, that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the saying of the prayers. Christian learning, theology, the practice of praying creates something that is full of signs and wonders - maybe the greatest sign and wonder is love and the sharing of life. Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi. How we pray shapes what we believe, and what we believe shapes how we live. Faith leads to a particular form of life - a **shared** life. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. As you sit in church, who are these people sitting around you? Would you have met them, would you be thanking God for them, were he not risen and calling the people together? He **is** risen; and the heart is glad.

-ooOoo-

A short prayer, to close.

Thank you God for recipe books,
for food on the table,
and wine in the glass.
The heart is glad.

Thank you for the teaching of the apostles,
wonderful insights,
community that otherwise would never have happened.
The heart is glad.

Thank you for the secret ingredient of love,
bringing light to life
and gratitude to simple moments.
The heart is glad.

The heart is glad, the heart is glad;
he is risen - the heart is glad.

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