

Sermon Archive 593

Sunday 5 July, 2026

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Reading: Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



I come at you violently, shouting, clenching my fists, reminding you that I have a cupboard full of bombs and rockets. I demand that you give me what I want. I tell you that if you don't give it to me, I'll take it anyway. I have a plan to execute - so just get out of my way.

-ooOoo-

I come at you without the shouting, but I think if you look at it closely, you'll see this coming still has a dark heart. As I subject you to a subtle manipulation, you are no more free as you were in the violence. "If you love me", I say, "you'll give me what I'm asking for." It's only proper and right that your will be subdued by mine - if you love me.

-ooOoo-

I come to you with a request that we might talk. How is the heart of this coming? Maybe that depends on whether I've got the conversation already mapped out in my head. I'll say this, you'll say that. I'll respond with a perfect coup d'etat, and you'll give me what I want. **OR**, am I coming with the recognition that you're free - free to respond how ever you want - and we may not end up agreeing that I should "win". Win? "Winning", of course, is something that can happen when we're having an argument. You don't really "win" a conversation, do you? So maybe, if my heart is still intent on winning, we're not really conversing.

-ooOoo-

I come to you, expressing what some call "hopes and dreams". I guess it's still about things I'm yearning for, things I'd like. But it comes with no demand. I'm just sharing my heart.

Sometimes, when someone shares their heart with you, it can be difficult - uncomfortable - because sometimes it's hard to know what to do with things

you'd rather not know. Can we "unknow" what we've heard? But **other times**, when the heart is shared, it's a beautiful and tender thing. The important thing, I suppose, is that you're not being manipulated - that you (in your response) are as free as I have been in my approaching you - there is a respecting of the other - an acknowledgement of freedom in the interaction.

-ooOoo-

Many years ago, a brilliant young minister wrote a thesis about what makes a good work of art. And one of the things he thought made an artwork good, is that it was respectful of its audience - giving the audience freedom to respond however it wished to. Good art doesn't demand a **particular** response. It doesn't shout, or threaten, or manipulate for a particular effect. If it manipulates or demands particular response, then it's propaganda, or sentimental, or ineffective tripe - it's certainly not great art. The brilliant young minister then said something like "it's like that with God. God comes in love and respect, requiring no stock response, freely allowing the people to be honest, true, free - a proper human complement to the honesty, truth and freedom that comes from heaven. In a **good** interaction, a **godly** interaction, freedom and truth and honesty are important. It's not that we expect this interaction to batter us into a form!

Jesus had been watching his generation, and noticed a few things. To what shall he compare this generation? Well . . . It's like children complaining that while they played their flutes, not everybody danced as they expected. While they wailed, not everybody mourned (as they were). There they were, telling the world what to do, then complaining about non-compliance. He describes them as unruly children. Had he detected in them an arrogance? A lack of regard for the freedom of others? An assumption that everyone ought to be the same as them - arbiters of the "one size fits all in everything"? Unruly children in the marketplace - shouting out, unhappy not to be obeyed.

He goes on to say more. He detects in them, he thinks, a lack of satisfaction - almost as if, even as they shout instructions, they still don't really know what they want. God approaches them through the austerity of John the Baptist - and they don't like the austerity. Then God approaches them through the Son of Man who eats, and drinks, and is

merry - and they don't like that either. What are they after? What do they want? It's tempting to believe that they only want to complain - which Jesus soon describes as a fairly quick road to a burdened soul.

-ooOoo-

I am at my computer, working on a sermon. I've come to a sort of natural break in its composition. I've gestured towards some different ways of working in the world, and now I've got to get on with the next section - but it's not quite coming yet. So I open up another part of the computer - at a place called Facebook. I'm there for the third time today, checking out news from friends, but also viewing short and silly videos of people complaining about Donald Trump. I don't know why I'm watching them. He's annoying, and the commentators are angry - there's nothing enjoyable about it at all. But I'm watching them again, third time today.

The phrases have developed: rage bait, hate clicking. Apparently websites that make us angry are very popular. The dog may return to its vomit - we return to our websites. The psychologists say it's because when we hate something online, we get a little hit of dopamine - which we enjoy. And there's something called "the algorithm loop". Once you engage with content of a particular kind, the algorithm learns. If you click on an annoying post, or even hover over it, social media platforms will feed you more of it, like there's an endless supply - which there probably is. We don't enjoy the material, but more and more often we find ourselves drawn to it. Children in the market place, addicted to complaining - feeding off being unhappy.

Well, in terms of the social media thing, as more and more governments around the world attend to legislation to keep children and young people safe online, it seems we're realising that constant engagement with the negative is not good for us. It leaves us with many burdens.

Enough of that. Time to go back to that part of the computer where the half-finished sermon is waiting.

-ooOoo-

In the second half of the sermon, based on the second part of the gospel reading, we find Jesus using the image of a people who are carrying something really heavy, a great weight upon the shoulders. It's like they

have become yoked animals in weary service. Maybe they've complained themselves into the situation, so are wearing yokes of self-inflicted bondage. Or maybe we blame the algorithms at work in our world - the culture of negativity stemming from the myth of our power to subdue others. Whatever; the yokes upon us have crushed freedom, crushed joy, crushed light . . .

So, he says to them: "Come to me, all you who are weary and who are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. My yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Learn from the One who is gentle and humble in heart. Learn from the One who bids us come, but does not force us. Learn from the One who shares the burden, rather than imposes it. Learn from One who can see that the world is tired, and needs a rest - rest for the soul. At worship, in prayer, in the singing of faith, the Church rests in the lightness of Christ, the lifting of burden. For the resting, I'm going to stop speaking for thirty seconds.

-ooOoo-

Now, of course, we need to return to the marketplace, with all its shouting children who don't know what they want - shouting children, some of whom have been elected to responsible office. We need to go back to the interactions that are violent, or difficult, or manipulative. We need to go back to the places where people tell us we're in conversation, when in fact we're in argument. We go back there . . .

But we go back as people who have a vision of a different way of being together - where we know what we want, because we have seen it in Jesus. We go back as people of the easy yoke, seeking to lift burdens from others. We go back, with lifted hearts and rested souls.

A moment of quiet.

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