Sermon Archive 609

Sunday 1 November, 2026
Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch
Reflections for All Saints Day
Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack

KNOX CHURCH
love faith outreach community justice

Introduction: The script was all sorted

I have the funeral script all sorted. I am pleased with it. Then someone shares a story with me - about the saint who has died. It's a great story, so I chop out a less great story and print Version Two - Version One going into the bin. With plans to go home via the supermarket to buy ingredients for dinner tonight, I take a piece of paper out of the bin to write a shopping list on - no need to waste the redundant paper!

And so I find myself at the self service check-out at the Papanui Pak n Save. I put my shopping list (with God words on it) onto the surface by the scanner. Since this is one of the rare times when I'm buying a bottle of wine, the young man supervising the check-outs (on minimum wage) has to come over to tell the machine that the customer appears to be over 18. A couple of moments later he has to come back, since the machine has gone into a "please place the item in the bagging area" loop - the small red chili being too light for the scales to detect it. It seems that he is an observant young man, since on his second passing of my shopping list, he asks me if I'm going to preach a sermon. I tell him no, but that I'm taking a funeral. He looks sad, and wishes me well.

He had seen the God words, and recognised them as God words. He knows what a sermon is - and that sermons are things that are preached. He's got the vocab. It seems that he is a God-person. The God people ***are*** out there . . . but they don't wear labels. You could walk past them many times and not notice the beguiled heart and mind all caught up in the mysteries of God.

I hope that the young man's church is helping him to flourish - since church should create flourishing, and the one whose funeral I was preparing always helped people to flourish. As someone recognises my language,

as he reacts to my mourning, I feel part of a big, invisible unity - a great cloud of witnesses. Where does a cloud begin and end? Are clouds not, indeed by nature, indistinct? I feel that I have met someone in the cloud.

Lesson: Acts 16: 6-10

Reflection: A vision of need

Paul, the apostle, has been burdened with a desire to speak about Jesus, and how God now has been revealed in a more wonderful way through Christ's life, death and resurrection. This speaking about Jesus has gone really well for Paul in some places, and not so well in others - but he keeps faith with the plan to travel here, there and everywhere, with his freeing, completing good news for all. The trouble at this point is that everywhere he plans to go seems to be becoming impossible. He tried to visit Asia, but the door was shut. He wanted to visit Bithynia, but it was like God was not allowing it. Nothing's opening up. So they kind of pull the great gospel bus to the side of the road at Troas. Have you ever felt like your options have closed, your journey has stalled? All the will in the world to do something joyful and good! - but the world is saying "no".

Some years ago, I worked out that I was in the wrong place. I'd successfully prevailed against a re-structuring programme at my work place, ending up winning appointment to a job I didn't really want. The job I didn't want had few KPIs that interested me, and my creative self was dying inside. One seemingly open exit door (an alternative job), upon which I hung my hope, then closed. We can't go to Asia; the way to Bithynia is shut. In frustration, I cried in public. The public told me to go home and pull myself together.

A conversation began with a parish five hours up the road. As the conversation began, my mind (of the beguiled heart and mind we do not always see, though we are in the cloud) kept visiting the scripture about Paul and his vision of the man from Macedonia. With ***his*** options radically reduced, but his sense of being called to do something for God, Paul moves into a mode of entertaining visions. What are visions? Well, who's to know really, other than that one came to Paul during the night. One imagines that people would have told him it was just a dream. Most of us dream every night, and you don't want to be planning your life around dreams (or do you?)

Within his dream (sorry, ***vision***), Paul encounters the man from Macedonia, who says nothing more than "please visit us, and help us". The word Paul uses to describe the mood of the man is "pleading" - so there's an intensity to it. Not "come on over, if you like", but "please come; help is ***required***". That's what's going on in the vision (sorry, ***dream***) of Paul. Is it vision or dream? Paul calls it a vision.

Not Paul, but ***Matthew***, finds news of this vision or dream taking position in his mind (beguiled by the gospel of Jesus). What's the status of this taking position. It's not a dream, because he's awake. He doesn't want to call it a vision, because it's a replay of something belonging to Paul. Maybe it's a connection, or an imagination, or a mysterious prompting of thought and faith heritage connection.

In his response to the pleading man from Macedonia, Paul turns away from the closed doors, and organises a boat trip. He sails for Macedonia in case there is a need there that God wants him to attend to.

In ***my*** response, I fly to Ōtautahi to see if there is a need that needs attending to. On reflection, I see that while Ōtautahi may have had a need, so did I. I desperately needed something of value to do. Who are the people of Christchurch? What do they need? I had no more idea than Paul had about the people and needs of Macedonia. But saints are hidden everywhere - even in the Pak n Save check-outs. They don't wear labels, and you can't see into the hearts and minds of those around us. We live within the invisible cloud - so maybe we need to be open to vision and sailing. Paul sails to Macedonia - to see what will happen next. Deeper into the cloud he goes.

Lesson: Hebrews 12: 1-2

Reflection: Resting in the possibilities

The son takes off from Ōtautahi for Tāmaki Makaurau, to see his mother, who indeed has loved and nurtured him now for 63 years. Some would suggest that to love and nurture such a son would indicate qualification for sainthood. I'm not so sure about that - which kind of proves the point that it ***is***! (loving the ungrateful is quite a Godly, therefore saintly pass time!) As the plane takes off, it moves into the cloud. There's that period between being able to see the ground (so to have some bearings) and

coming out into the sun (so seeing some brightness). Within the cloud, there's a kind of no-man's land of indistinctness - where ***is*** the heart of the man at the check-out? So an on-going matter of discernment for the church has been "who are the saints?" Despite the Catholic part of the Church rigorously assessing candidates, and declaring some people official institutional saints (yes or not under clear criteria), who really are they?

I'm wondering, today, whether there mightn't be an insight from Paul's vision. Perhaps a saint could be thought of as someone who has heard the plea "come and help us", and who then "goes and helps". Maybe it's closer than we generally have thought to "love your neighbour". Love God, by loving your neighbour . . .

We live in a world of frustrated plans, and sliding doors - and awareness that every day decisions might take us here or there. We live also in a world where we know that the people around us - and even distant from us - need assistance (in all sorts of ways). We live in a world where some passing thoughts about helping (or connecting) return to us for further consideration (is it a vision, or just a dream).

Maybe the saints are those who rest a while with these possibilities for life, and ponder where the will of God might touch who we are, what we might do, and who we might be enabled to be - to give God's help . . .

-ooOoo-

I had my funeral script all sorted. I was pleased with it. Then someone shared a story with me - about the saint who'd died. The young man at the check-out, the apostle faced with many closed doors, the minister ministering and being ministered to, the great cloud within which we live. Do we hear the call to help one another? Could our understanding of sainthood fit somewhere in there?

On All Saints Sunday, we seek to follow God, and we keep a moment of quiet.