

“The Revealing” a sermon based on Isaiah 64:1-9, 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 and Mark 13:24-37 preached at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand by Kerry Enright on 29 November 2020.

The church has strange practices. For example, our calendar is peculiar. The church’s new year begins today, four Sundays before Christmas, not on the first of January. And we begin the year with a set of readings that are not about the birth of Jesus, which is where you might think the story would begin, but about the fulfilment of the life of Jesus. In other words, we begin at the end. And in so doing, as we move towards celebrating the birth of Jesus, we are invited to expand our horizons, to extend Christ’s inhabitation of time, to see his life as it is stretched into the future, to the goal of it all, which is where we are taken today.

What difference does that make? We were driving north to Whakatane in the north island. We had passed Taupo and I said to the family – “We’re going to take the short-cut I have heard about through the Kaingaroa Forest.” So when we were near Reporoa, we turned right and headed onto the forest roads. We turned here and there and after a while one of the children said – Dad, you know those hills that were on the left when we started. Well, they seem now to be on the right. Are we still heading north? At which point another car appeared, the first for a long time. We waved them down. Can you tell us the way to Whakatane from here, and they pointed back in the direction from which we had come. We repented. We turned around. Without Whakatane, we would still be driving the gravel roads of the Kaingaroa Forest.

The destination makes all the difference to what we do now and it enables us to sense the times we need to turn around. The destination is the judgement, the criteria of the worth of what we do. The church begins the new year focused on the destination.

And what is it? Paul writes of it. The church in Corinth was a church divided with competing leaders and conflicting understandings. The divisions were deep but it was also a church with many gifts. The people had become consumed by the variety of their short visions and had taken their eyes off the uniting goal of it all. Paul begins his letter by affirming their gifts and especially the giver of those gifts, captured in the word

“grace”. Grace is God’s overflowing love, God’s irrepressible generosity, God’s eternal blessing of creation. Paul gives thanks for that grace because by it the Corinthians have been enriched in Christ in speech and knowledge of every kind so that they were not lacking in any spiritual gift. What a remarkable thing to say of a church with deep divisions – they were not lacking in any spiritual gift.

But what are those gifts for? “As you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ ...” The purpose of these gifts, the purpose of their life together, is the revealing of the Lord Jesus Christ. What does that mean? For followers of Jesus, the revealing of Christ, is the revealing of human being as it is meant to be. Christ is the human in the fullest and richest and most life-giving way. Human identity, human being, human purpose is revealed in the revealing of Christ. And not just personally, because in the coming of the Holy Spirit, Christ became community, a body in the fullest sense of that word. So the revealing of Christ, involves the revealing of a living, breathing, active body of Christ, the revealing of a community that embodies how Christ relates with creation, including humankind. And more than that, the revealing of the fullness of God among us.

The end of the story is the revealing of Jesus Christ, the revealing of full humanity, the revealing of life-giving community, the revealing of the One who is with all. A purpose with the broadest of horizons. This is important when we come to ordain new elders. The Book of Order refers to church councils and ministers guiding and governing the congregation. The destination of their guiding and governing is the revealing of Jesus Christ, in the world and for the sake of the world. So when we come to set goals or make a decision or take a step as a congregation, the question for the church council and for every part of the congregation, is it taking us towards the full revelation of Jesus Christ?

It is a vision meant for the world. It is not a revealing for the church but for and in the world. As our lives develop a pattern, as our cities and towns and communities develop a pattern, as creation develops a pattern, where do we see emerging the pattern of Jesus Christ, the image of Jesus Christ, the revealing of Jesus Christ? It is that for which we look.

In the meantime we wait in anticipation, with a thirst, a longing, a passion, a persistent crying ...

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down so that the mountains would quake at your presence ...

O that you would make your name known to your adversaries ...

O that you would greet those who joyfully do what is right

O that you would reshape us as a potter shapes the clay.

O that you would send out your angels and gather your people

O that you would come in evening or at midnight or at cockcrow or at dawn

We long for that revealing as a lover longs for their beloved.

We long for that revealing as you take hold of our hearts and spirits and bodies.

For your revealing O Christ, the one who is most fully human, the one who is community at its most loving, the one who is life-giving spirit flowing through all.

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made known in Jesus, given in grace***



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