

Sermon 3 April 2016 'Speak Out'
John 20:19-31 Acts 5:27-32

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord.

It's *almost a joke* between the Sunday Bible readers and me *about which* scripture to read 1st each Sunday. The prescribed way is to read the Gospel last, but sometimes it fits better to have it read first! So today as you have already worked out, today is a little different because I have asked Loas to read after I start the 'sermon' and we have another little change in things – all because our title today is 'Speak Out'.

So Loas – would you read our Gospel for us – and remember this is John's story of when the disciples first discovered that God said 'No' to permanent separation by death from his beloved children, His Son Jesus and 'us'. When the disciples discovered that **yes the women were right** the tomb was empty – and somehow, in *some* way Jesus was really present with them – and yet not....

Loas: John 20:19-31

John ends this passage with a return ^{*1} to his central focus, perhaps to Christian gospel as a whole: **life!** For John it is 'Life' which defines the agenda of the mission of the church and its context. For John the **celebration of life** is what "Easter" is about: life before 'Easter' **and** life after 'Easter'. The change – The change of Easter *for John* is that now – post Easter, there are new **bearers** of that life **and** the Spirit *given without measure* to Jesus (3:34) now operates without measure among the disciples and it is this **Spirit** that makes Jesus' presence real to them (14:22-26). Cv

In *about* 50 days we will have Pentecost Sunday. A special Sunday celebration where we have a traditional focus on the giving of the Holy Spirit **to** all people – **for** all people. The Bible readings on that Sunday **always** include Acts 2. This is "Pentecost" – **The Pentecost** that most of us think about / know. It's a very dramatic version and we all have to wait a few more weeks to hear it again! Cv

Today we actually have John's version of the giving of the Holy Spirit to the disciples – for all people. John's Pentecost story, which is a much quieter, softer 'arriving' of the Holy Spirit, but actually just as powerful in its execution, in its expectation, **when Jesus**, the Risen Lord arrives. And this is *a John special* which most translations blur the edge of – but John has a theme in his gospel that is 'his'. **He** wants us to see that **in Jesus**, God was re-newing creation. Re-doing creation – or in Jesus, God was bringing **new-life** (hear the 'life' theme again?) So John's Jesus gives 7 signs – which echo the seven days of Chapter 1's Creation story.

So we are to understand that it wasn't *any day* what Jesus first appeared- it was the 8th day – the NEW day – the new beginning – and so on this **first day of the new beginning** – **the first gift is peace**. Peace as only God can give. Peace to a frightened – terrified- exhausted tiny group of friends and family of Jesus, huddling together behind locked doors – **peace**. cV

In true Jesus style – the comfort, reassurance, deep breaths of 'peace' – are almost immediately shattered by the challenge: 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' ... Did anyone *else* hear Jesus '**I am**'? God's name to Moses? 'I am' – is sending the disciples, **just as Jesus** had been sent. Cv

The new life of John's *post-Easter* people starts with peace – followed immediately with mission; with the context of mission; to go on with what Jesus was doing; to do what Jesus was doing; to say and live like Jesus – because that is the way to life, the way **of** life, trusting Jesus is the only way to live^{*1} and this trusting Jesus is the link to the ultimate source of all life. cV

*1 W Loader *2Barbara Brown-Taylor in Home by Another Way – 'Believing the Word'.

So to the *probably* terrified, *possibly* guilt wracked disciples, Jesus appeared, gave peace and life's mission **and then** Jesus 'breathed' the Holy Spirit on them. If any of you have had a quick dip into the first two chapters of Genesis, you will know that God 'made' humanity/ the 'form' and **then** God 'breathed' life into them. **Jesus 'breathes'** the Holy Spirit' into the disciples: *the new start*, the new **life** is completely echoing the original gift of life according to John! The Holy Spirit is as much a part of us as breathing; as *naturally* a part of us as our breath and as vital, important, essential to our life as our breath!

*Peace, sending, breathing spirit, **and then a specific task, a*** specific mission, to **go** into the world and teach forgiveness where ever they could. Forgiveness – in the church's language is the start of 'new'. Turning life – returning life to the source of all life and starting again – that's what Easter means in John's good news account of Jesus – the risen Lord's first visit. **"Life"** Cv

And **Thomas**, the disciple who missed out on that first visit of Jesus, had to learn that **for himself**; had to hear it; see it; experience it for himself **and accept** the life and way of it's giving; **accept** Jesus offer – **or** miss out – forever.

How **blessed** are we because of Thomas? **Very!** It is because of Thomas and his need to experience the risen Lord before he would trust the witness of his friends, **because of Thomas** we are included into the discipleship family, as ^{*2}Jesus speaking over Thomas's shoulder says to the rest of us: 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.' (20:29)

We belong even though we have never seen Jesus hands or side or feet – and we, who have to rely on the stories of those first witnesses; on other people begging us to trust their stories because **they knew** what they saw, they knew it was special, an extra-ordinary 'happening' in their life-time. They knew it was up to them to keep it alive – **to share** it – **to speak** of it so their children and children's children would know of the wondrous gift given – **life in Jesus!** That's where the given bible text from Acts for this Sunday ends – '...We are witnesses of these things' CV

The other reading for today is from Luke's writing of the Acts of the Apostles – and just wait until you hear the **result of Jesus visits** to the disciples huddling in fear and guilt and terror and... And Loas will read the given passage – and I hope you hear in this passage why our title is given to us to day – **'Speak Out'**. But – but the full impact of the change in the disciples is better is we have more than just Loas's few verses: So I am going to 'book-end' Loas's reading:

Lorraine Acts 5:12-26

Loas Acts 5:27-32

Lorraine Acts 5:5:33-42

Something happened to those disciples; something in the 'peace / sending / breathing / forgiving = life in Jesus happened to those disciples! From the *huddles* in a darkened, quietened room – **to speaking out** in the – THE most public place; healing people – lots of people; – escaping from prison (somehow??) – challenging the Sanhedrin – their religious authorities – speaking out Jesus story – and declaring they were speaking God's truth – and all this please remember despite our history of subverting this passage. They were speaking out completely within the Jewish family – not guilt / blaming Judaism – just those present, speaking out, calling for their brothers and sisters in faith and blood to return to God's way (Jesus), and seek forgiveness as **the path to life**. cV

Something happened to Jesus disciples that is way beyond regular expectations – that they would be of one mind; that they would accept a flogging – happily and return to doing exactly what earned them the flogging in the first place! That they accepted being witnesses might earn them death in the 'now'. **Something happened** – **was it trust?** They trusted their own experience of the risen Lord and accepted the gift of life – the good news of life in Jesus name that sent them out? And so they did speak out, giving witness to what they knew as good news – Life in Jesus, now and forever more. Amen

*1 W Loader *2Barbara Brown-Taylor in Home by Another Way – 'Believing the Word'.