

Our Lay-Reader Susan Cresswell's Homily for May 10th

Acts 10: vv22 – 31, John 14: 15 – 21

When I'm thinking about a talk, I like to find a word that seems important in the readings. Then find a hook to hang that thought on. Today the word is *Word*.... Trouble is, especially the written word tends to limit thought about it.

For example – *tree* – we all know what that is. But then there are so many. Mthr Victoria went down to Cardiff especially to see her favourite Foxglove tree in flower. Other words are a lot more difficult to understand, and should have a lot of thought about them. Here I have four cards, you will soon see what the letters say..

W (on the back is written *Will of God, prevail*)

O (on the back is written *Over all the earth*)

R (on the back is written *for he Reigns supreme*)

D (on the back is written *he will Deliver us*)

Now what words could we use to describe all this mystery?

The apostles, disciples, Paul and the early followers had to struggle with the oral stories of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. They had to make sure things were recorded properly, and made sense of in a way people could understand. That is why they say repeatedly – look at the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, there lies the Spirit of Truth. Even so, we are left with words we struggle with that appear in today's readings.

Love, Father, Friend, Spirit of Truth, Worship, God, Lord...

Yes, we know these words, but we could have a whole Bible study on each one.

The writer of the gospel and Paul were trying to throw light on the meanings for those early Christians. Paul was speaking to the Greeks, and they were great thinkers and discussers. He linked into their thinking when he saw the altar to the unknown god. It wasn't that the Greeks were hedging their bets by building such an altar. It was part of their spirituality that in all their deities they were seeking to get in touch with the unknowable. In touch with something beyond their present understanding. The ultimate reality which defies human knowing.

That hit a chord with Paul, because he could see how Jesus was fulfilling not only the Judaic Law, but also all other genuine human attempts to grasp the mysteries of God's truth. Lucky for us, he was prepared to talk to everybody. All those words we looked at, Jesus fulfils in his life, death and resurrection. Paul saw God drew close to his loved people through Jesus. We are told Jesus was in the image of his Father God. In such human terms it is difficult, but we can make a start at relating to God. That relating showed us what *love* means even in the face of a degrading death. It had to show that the power of creative life is even stronger than death. The Cross is the sign of Love.

It's no wonder Paul said, *Give up your idols and gods in favour of the "Living and true God."* He was brought up a good Jew and knew his scriptures inside out.

Psalm 31: 6-8, "You hate those who pay regard to worthless idols, but I trust in the Lord. I will exult and rejoice in your steadfast love, because you have seen my affliction; you have taken heed of my adversities, and have not delivered me into the hand of my enemy; you have set my feet in a broad place." Paul is saying Christ is the fulfilment of all this. He will come again, and everybody has to repent and get ready. He was speaking to a thinking people. Many of the Greek philosophers had come to the idea of a "one" God universe, this is why Judaism attracted many of them.

The Gospel reading goes further and deeper and encourages us to think, "What do people look like who are living Christ's Risen life?" How would we know if we saw one? Jesus answers with straightforward bluntness that does not let us hide behind high sounding words and ideals. It is the way we live, following the commands of love, that sets us apart and shows we are followers. Sadly, sometimes the way we are led to go may chafe and send us out of our comfort zone. Such living, we are told, will take us in ever closer relationship to our Father God.

Jesus promises the Holy Spirit, the Risen Christ and the Father will be with the disciples. So surely will they be with us. They and we will not be alone. Augustine said, "Now we love when we are believing in what we shall see, but then we shall love when we see what we have believed in".

At the end of every time of worship, we are blessed and sent out into the world. We have shared the Eucharist and been fed. We have been strengthened by the Word. Then off we go to keep his commandments and share in his love. We may struggle with difficult words, but out in the world our faith is thoroughly mixed up in our lives if we live by Jesus' commandments. We are part of God's vision and mission all our lives every bit as much as the apostles. Hour by hour, and task by task. Showing love through each thing we do.

Amen