

Talk 14 May 2023

John 14:15-21.

Spirit of Truth; Mind the Gap.

Jane Ward-Hall

What a lovely service it was last Sunday! Coronation weekend! It was very special for me to see Terry's hard work acknowledged and I'm very grateful for that. David Brown preached and reminded us that although we were celebrating King Charles commitment to our nation and Terry's service to our church we are all called to a royal priesthood, to live in service to each other to further the kingdom of God here on earth. I wonder how that sat with you? What a challenge? How often do we feel up to the task?

David Brown used the phrase Mind the Gap. If you were travelling on the underground in London last weekend you might have heard this: King Charles himself saying "Remember, please mind the gap!". I think the gap David Brown spoke of is a time gap - we are in between Easter and Pentecost. I would like us to think about "the gap" in quite a different way. The gap within ourselves.

Our reading from John is part of what we know as "The Last Supper Discourse". Jesus giving His disciples as much information as He could before the shocking events of Good Friday. I imagine the disciples, in those early days after the Resurrection, trying to remember as much as they could of what Jesus had told them. Even though they couldn't take it in at the time, Jesus repeatedly told them that he wouldn't be with them for much longer. But they were not to fear because He wouldn't leave them helpless. He would send the Holy Spirit, as Eugene Petersen says, to be their Friend, to comfort, support and advise. This Spirit would be the Spirit of Truth. This is where I'd like us to focus today. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth.

What is truth? It is a question pondered on down the ages. Pilate even asks it of Jesus when he is questioning Him on the morning of Good Friday.

Sadly, in everyday parlance "truth" has become a rather vague term to mean whatever anyone wants it to mean.

In biblical terms as we heard last Sunday, Jesus said "I am the way, the truth and the life"(John14:6). Jesus is the truth and He is also the way to the truth. Earlier in John's gospel Jesus says "and the truth will set you free"(John8:32).

So back to "Mind the Gap". I've been thinking about this. Here I'm attempting to simplify something that is very complex. So what's this gap within ourselves? I'm suggesting it's the gap between the person I want to be, how I want others to see me and the real me, the innermost me, the person God knows and created me to be.

We are created by Love for love. We thrive on love. We need it so much, that it's natural for us to try to gain love in false ways. From earliest childhood when we realise a behaviour or characteristic is not approved of, we suppress it and eventually it becomes part of our unconscious self.

I think it goes right back to Genesis Chapter 3 where Adam and Eve hide themselves in the garden and cover their nakedness with fig leaves. I need to emphasise that for us this is not necessarily about sin, although it can be. The gap between our developed persona, as many writers call it, our false self and our true self, the self God knows, is about fearing we won't be loved. The fear can be so strong it can lead us down wrong paths. So do we hide, cover ourselves with fig leaves? It's as if we wrap bandages around ourselves because we are scared to be really seen. We can think the bandages will heal us, keep our wounds clean, as they might if we had grazed our knee. But that's not true. Keeping ourselves covered, with a persona we think others will like, blocks us from God's presence.

Let me give you a personal example of how these behavioural patterns that go back to childhood and can have consequences in adult life. They can stop us being authentically ourselves, the true self God created us to be.

My parents, were lovely people who only wanted the best for me, but they would be very strict on any behaviour that they deemed as “showing off”. Boasting was not allowed. It was the era when children should be seen and not heard. Consequently I was a very shy girl and the fact that I was so tall gave me yet another thing to feel awkward about. Even as an adult I found it difficult to share things about my life, even happy news, for fear that it might be seen as “showing off”. The fact that I can stand before you now and feel I have something to say that others might find useful demonstrates the grace of God I have been blessed with, at least in this area of my life!

This is where the Spirit of Truth comes in. Its the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth who can bridge this gap for us. It’s the Holy Spirit who enables us to know we are accepted by God just as we are. Gradually we can let the bandages loosen and the gap is lessened. If this isn’t a step too far, we could make a link with the resurrection life of Jesus, the grave clothes, the bandages, were left behind in the tomb.

So when we feel so far from being part of this royal priesthood, that David Brown spoke of, please don’t despair. Just look at the example of the disciples. They spent 3 years with Jesus, listening to Him, watching Him, seeing the miracles yet they still hid in fear after the crucifixion. Jesus, after His resurrection, (John 20:22) needed to remind them that they had received the promise He made in John 14: 20. “On that day you will realise that I am in the Father, and you are in me and I am in you”. Jesus is now in them, by His spirit, the Spirit of Truth. This same promise is available to us. Jesus is resurrection life, right now. Our scarred wounded saviour is alive and available to us. Are we willing to receive the Spirit of Truth, the resurrection life of Jesus and allow it to flow through us, as the gap within us is reduced? This is the way to be part of the Royal Priesthood. The way to change the world.