

Sermon for 15 May 2011 Linda Anchell  
Good Shepherd Sunday. gospel: John 10:1-10  
first communion for Beth and Sarah

The second half of John chapter 10, verse ten. ...  
"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

today we also celebrate the first communion of Beth and Sarah, as well as gathering here ourselves.

In a way I want to throw these two ideas like a pebble into a pool and watch the ripples. But I did that on Tuesday at forum on recent MS research. I put two pebbles out there and they fell like a stone into a muddy puddle! I am on new meds which help me put one foot in front of the other; I don't use the stick much any more. This medication is doing something to the neurotransmitters. But as soon as I say it is an anti depressant. I could see the boxes.

If it is an anti depressant, 'they' think depression.

There is plenty of that in MS I accept, but it is also about mobility!

It is so easy to find boxes to put ideas into. Eternal life for example meaning life after death. [*pie in the sky when you die!*] It doesn't mean that, not for John. It is a quality of life. A vitality! "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." be careful not to box it in.

It is not simply about being born; wondrous as that is... (hi to Gemma!)

But this life we have is also one in which life is a choice.

"Choose life that you and your descendants may live" it says in Deuteronomy 30:19

The wonderfully alive crimson rosella eating the almond I put out is so alive! As is the wattle bird who has returned again this autumn to sip at honeyed water in the bowl.

Susie at 8am asked me if I read Merton... well, yes I said... (sort of)... Merton speaks of the animal world as worshipping God. *We* are the animals who have a choice *not* to worship.

But we have a choice. Not just, or only, through health, good food, good exercise... we may not have that and many of us don't...

Christ was alive; so vitally alive that his life persisted *through* death into a resurrected life. This "creative word", the Logos, the Christ, who was with God at the beginning, has come to give us life.

a different, new quality of life; a life beyond death, not limited or defined by death.

now, what box that all comes in, I don't know.

I don't understand.

But I kneel at the communion rail and receive it.

I don't understand. we probably all experience it in different ways.

on the pew sheet:

Christ was the word that spake it.  
He took the bread and break it;  
And what his words did make it, that I believe and take it.

*(Reputedly spoken by Elizabeth I when questioned on her beliefs on the Eucharist in Mary's reign)*

Elizabeth had to be very careful how she framed these words.  
Her head depended on it!

I studied many years ago with Laurence and learnt a little about his Presbyterian understanding.

Communion was so special, so precious, that it was only given four times a year.

and, every communicant member had to be visited by one of the lay ministers before receiving communion. four times a year!

[and we aim for every parishioner to *be invited* to three social occasions in a year?]

and then, I heard Wayne talking to Father Michael Martin in the Queanbeyan rectory kitchen.

Wayne, an AOG (Assembly of God) pastor; Michael an Anglo Catholic priest (who was extremely ecumenical!)

Wayne was struggling to put into words the experience he had with communion and the passion of that experience.

We do these things differently, and yet, from this mass, this eucharist, this communion, we are fed and given life.

and this has been happening since the days of the first century church.

Much of our liturgy is from that time or not many centuries after. "They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship and to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42)

I once heard this advice from an elderly Irish woman. "Give children roots to grow and wings to fly."

The roots, we have here, in our liturgy and in our communion.

that life will give wings to fly.

we will grow,

we will change,

Give the wings room, but thank God that they come from deep roots!

In the gospel story; the Good Shepherd story told by Jesus, he says:  
10:9 I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.

this gate of the sheepfold, we enter and we go out. coming and going.

Icons are said to be "windows to heaven"; windows through which you can come in and go out. They allow a movement towards God and it provides strength to go out. (as does the eucharist)

Jesus is a portal through which we can come in and go out....

One of the church fathers, Irenaeus, said:

The glory of God is a person fully alive.

May we not be caught in the mud, defining our symbols too exactly, using ideas of life rather than living it!

But flying together in the freedom of Christ, having been fed at this altar, being taught by these scriptures, and by living our lives going in and out through Jesus the door...

going in and out through Christ into the abundant life he came to give.