

## ACT FIVE SCENE ONE

Acts 4. 32-37; Psalm 133; 1John 1.1-2.2; John 20. 19-31;

EASTER 2B, 2024

### INTRODUCTION

Dead is dead.

“...Jesus came and stood among them...”

He is supposed to be dead. And now, here he is. Clearly the old story, that ended in a cross, is being rewritten, like a new act written for an old play that seemed like it may have run out of steam.

Here now, from the dead; now we have no choice but to pay attention.

### NEW ACT, AN OLD STORY: GOD RENEWING CREATION

“When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week...”

Writers like John are drenched in the story of creation. The first day of the week brings the story of the great “week” of creation straight to the forefront of the mind. But this is the 8<sup>th</sup> day, the first day of the week, a new week, and the bulb lights up; a whole new creation is beginning.

And it begins with this group of cowering disciples fearful of what’s outside the door. It’s a realistic fear, because outside the door are people who managed to orchestrate the crucifixion their rabbi, Jesus.

John starts his gospel with ‘In the beginning was the Word...he was in the beginning with God.’

Now that creative Word stands among them at this new beginning. This is the crucified Word who created life. Now, life from the dead. The power of death broken. No need to be afraid. Death is the tyrants' weapon to terrorise, entrap and enslave. Resurrection robs death of its finality and power to separate and destroy.

## NEW ACT, OLD STORY: A NEW COMMISSION

“Peace be with you”

Jesus says this three times. When the creator Word, this crucified, risen Jesus speaks, we need to pay attention.

There are ironies here. The violent, coercive power of Rome, had put Jesus to death. That was for one purpose alone. To keep and propagate the peace of the empire. As one contemporary recipient of Roman peace described it “They plunder, they murder, they rape, all in the name of their so-called empire. And where they have left desolation, they call it ‘peace’”. So empires continue until today.

Jesus gives his fearful church the commission of peace of the new creation. This peace flows from forgiveness grounded in the cross of the crucified Word. He has put to death the power of terror that lies hidden in all empires and all misbegotten human power.

That is the new commission: Peace to the whole creation flowing from the cross in the reconciliation of forgiveness.

These timid figures struggling with their fear, their guilt for their behaviour are told to bring peace of reconciliation with

God and the creation and the social order to the whole of creation.

On whose authority?

NEW ACT, OLD STORY: A NEW AUTHORITY

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

To do as Jesus did, speak the word of life clearly to all and sundry and invite them to engage with this Living Word to know the Father. Reconciliation with the Father is the key to everything. Forgiveness transforms everything, now we can see the creation through the eyes of the Father and the Word who love it with a passion and, who in the power of the Spirit, will restore it to its glory.

We have the commission and authority from the crucified and risen Word, Jesus, to apply the reconciliation of forgiveness to the whole of life in the whole of creation. We are curators of the whole of creation for its consummation in peace. It is staggering.

This authority to proclaim and incarnate the peace of the risen Messiah for the whole of the created order defines our mission. We are not purveyors of private religious or spiritual confectionary.

We find ourselves in the public realm whether we like it or not. In that public space we offer the possibility of forgiveness and renewal, the whole peace on offer that the Word longs for human beings: humans renewed, creation restored, governance that heals.

Paul once cried out, “Who is sufficient for these things?”  
Good point.

## NEW ACT, OLD STORY; A RENEWED PEOPLE

“... (H)e breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”

The breath or wind that created the world (Gen.1) creates a new people. The authority given us now has the power of the Spirit of love and new creation to carry out our vocation in the world God loves. To do that we will have to pay immediate attention to some elements of our life as the people of the Risen One.

First, we will have to recognise that we are in the end stages of the great dechurching that has taken place in western societies since mid-last century. Our first task will be to get a handle on that.

Second, we will have to pay attention to the things that worry people about us. Science, miracle, history, hypocrisy, overreaching desire to dictate to others what their life should look like.

Third, we need to put our wares in the market place. Thomas is a good example.

Thomas wants proof. God in the crucified and risen Christ offers him that. Not a blind faith against all the evidence; not the weaponised rebuke of a wrathful deity: Simply love that knows no bounds.

We often wield our intellectual wares as weapons for power’s sake and self-justification.

Our authority and commission is to burnish them with the love of a crucified God longing for fellowship, restoration and reconciliation.

Fourth, most importantly, we will need to pay attention to our life together.

Let's begin with the real estate sale in Acts. This should entrance us. What did Barnabas get? What capital gains did he make?

What an alternative perspectives Luke has. These people are filled with the Holy Spirit, the new creation. And the church is in the public arena boldly testifying to the resurrection.

The wonder-working power of the Spirit enables Barnabas to sell his field and give the proceeds to the distribution to the poor. Notice there is a distribution to the poor.

The Spirit has released the tight rope of private property and released Barnabas to show true generosity and bold living; to let go the security blanket.

The most eloquent testimony to the reality of the resurrection is not only an empty tomb.

It is a living group of people whose life together is so radically different, so completely changed from the way the world builds community

The only explanation than that something decisive has happened in their history to bring change.

The quality of the church's life together is evidence for the truthfulness of the resurrection.

That quality is what John calls in his tract (1John) the joy of fellowship in the Father and Jesus and each other. This is a community of forgiveness because we know forgiveness through Jesus' death.

It is a community of truthfulness because we know our own brokenness and we welcome other broken human beings. Arrogance and deceit about our brokenness makes us liars who cannot welcome the broken.

In the end we are not peddlers or side show alley shysters offering people new or comforting spiritual experiences. We are ambassadors of a crucified king in waiting. We order our lives according to his story and his praxis, and our minds according to his truth.

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