



Breaking Open the Word

Easter 3B

14th April, 2024
St Peters by the Lake, Paynesville

The Rev'd Dennis Webster
Rector

Acts 3.12–19

Psalm 4

1 John 3.1–7

Luke 24.36b–48

Broiled Talipia, a common musht found in the Sea of Galilee. The Gospel of Luke does not share with us whether Jesus' fish was broiled with Parmesan cheese!

The sermon "Repenting of Sin: A Call to Transformation" emphasises understanding church jargon and the importance of repentance and baptismal renewal. The story of Thomas affirming Jesus as Lord and God to the significance of baptism as a public declaration of faith. Most Christian denominations are encouraged to prioritise following Christ over specific traditions. Repentance is highlighted as a transforming act aligning believers with God's grace and love, urging everyone to respond to the call to turn away from sin and be bold witnesses of Christ.

Repenting of Sin: A Call to Transformation

During the week, at our Tuesday Eucharist and study, we informally grappled with the language we speak and the jargon we encounter in Church.

Jargon is not just limited to the Church. An example can be found when everyday words are used to describe different things. With apologies to Mr Fordham, the word "cabinet" was raised. Is it a place to conceal things from plain view, where people meet to consider important matters, or maybe both? Jargon depends on the context and audience to which a word may be found to have meaning.

If I mention needles to the sewing group, that context could well be along the lines of the Sound of Music song, "Sew, a needle pulling thread", in the context of the Parish of Richmond, a syringe or sharp found around the Church grounds, or, when it comes to Victoria's other religion, what we do to members of opposing clubs. Again, it is the context that defines the jargon.

In Church, we also find jargon. And like all other groups, there is an assumption, rightly or wrongly, that we all know what we mean when we say something. Through the Easter period, I am following up on the renewal of our baptismal covenant (a lovely piece of jargon if I say so myself!) and the promises we make in Church before God.

Some eyes may glaze over, but please consider to what extent you, I or the unchurched would understand our words.

Last week, I addressed the first question in light of the story of Thomas asking to see Jesus' scars and wounds. He affirms that Jesus is both Lord and God. Jesus promises that the essence of God, or blessing, will be upon those who come to believe even though they were not privy to the privilege of standing before the risen Jesus. In baptism, a ritual of symbolically washing or sprinkling water, we are asked to acknowledge Jesus as our Lord and God, setting us on the path of being part of the larger group of Christians.

We may choose to follow various paths and journeys along the way, be it as Anglican, Catholic, Pentecostal or Uniting Church, to name a few. We may attend worship more like a concert or, in a way, full of ritual and mystery. The important thing is that we make that decision. And so we gather in the good ship, Anglican. Anglican, deriving from the United Church of England and Ireland, supervised initially by the Diocese of Calcutta, India, arrived on the first fleet.

By the time of the first Catholic service in 1793, held in the Port of Cygnet in Tasmania, there had been in the Church of England 226 baptisms, 220 marriages, and 854 burials in Sydney since 1788. For each of those baptisms, the people being baptised or their godparents would have answered these two questions: Do you turn to Christ? Do you repent of your sins?

Repent is jargon. Sin is jargon. I assume, incorrectly, that you know what those terms mean. To repent means to "turn your back" or "face away". If you turn to Christ, you put your back or gaze on our Lord and God, and you turn your back on what distracts, tempts and separates us from the countenance (an old word meaning "face") from our loving God.

Repentance is a profound move. It is a divine call to turn away from sin and embrace the transformational power of God's grace. In Acts 3:19, we are urged to "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."

In all of the scriptures we heard today, sin and repentance underpin the mission of what we are all called to embrace as witnesses to the love of God. The scriptures from Acts 3:19, 1 John 3:1-7, and Luke 24:36b-48 call on us to understand the essence of

repentance and its significance in our lives.

Firstly, let us clarify what sin and repentance mean. 1 John 3:4 defines sin as the transgression of God's law. Any action, thought, or attitude that separates us from God and God's perfect will for our lives is a sin. Sin tarnishes our souls, disrupts our relationship with God, and hinders our spiritual growth.

Repentance, on the other hand, is not merely feeling sorry for our wrongdoings but a sincere and genuine turning away from sin towards God. It involves a change of heart, mind, and behaviour—a conscious decision to align our lives with God's righteousness.

In Luke 24:36b–48, we witness the resurrected Christ appearing before The disciples, offering them peace and commissioning them to witness His life, death, and resurrection. This divine encounter underscores the importance of repentance in the life of a believer. Just as the disciples were called to bear witness to the transformational power of Christ, we, too, are called to repentance and obedience.

The passage in 1 John 3:1-7 reaffirms this call to repentance and highlights the profound love of God bestowed upon us as God's children. It emphasises that those born of God do not continue to live in sin, for God's love and grace have transformed them. As recipients of God's love, we are called to live righteous lives, imitating Christ in all we do.

Now, let us address the baptismal requirement mentioned in Acts 3:19. Baptism symbolises our spiritual rebirth and commitment to follow Christ. Through baptism, we publicly declare our repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour. As baptised believers, we are called to witness all Christ has done for us—Jesus' death, resurrection, and the promise of eternal life.

Therefore, heed the call to repentance, turning away from sin and embracing the transformational power of God's love and grace. Let us be bold witnesses of the gospel, shining the light of Christ in a world engulfed by darkness. May our lives reflect the beauty of repentance—a life surrendered to God's will and guided by The Holy Spirit.

As we depart from this place today, I know you are a witness to all these things. Let us carry with us a renewed commitment to repentance and a sincere desire to be witnesses of all that Christ has done for us. May God's love and grace empower us to live lives that glorify In the holy name. Amen.

Discussion Starter

What's the funniest misinterpretation or misunderstanding of a church jargon or term you've ever heard?

Group Discussion

What is the connection between Jesus' interaction with Thomas and the concept of baptism?

Context: The sermon explored the story of Thomas, who asked to see Jesus' scars and wounds. Jesus promised blessings for those who believe in Him, even if they did not witness His resurrection first-hand.

Application Question: How can this passage inspire us to have faith in Jesus without having seen His resurrection like Thomas?

How does repentance play a vital role in our spiritual growth and relationship with God?

Context: Repentance involves turning away from distractions, temptations, and actions that separate us from God's loving presence. The sermon explains that repentance is a profound and transformational act that aligns us with God's grace.

Application Question: What are some areas in your life that you need to repent of in order to grow closer to God?

How does Acts 3:19 encourage us to turn to God and what are the consequences of doing so?

Context: Acts 3:19 urges us to turn to God and have our sins wiped out, leading to spiritual refreshment.

Application Question: What are some ways we can experience spiritual refreshment when we turn to God in repentance?

In the context of 1 John 3:1-7, what does it mean to be born of God and how does it affect our actions?

Context: 1 John 3:1-7 describes the profound love of God bestowed upon His children. It states that those born of God do not continue to live in sin but are transformed by God's love and grace.

Application Question: How can we demonstrate our transformation as children of God in our daily lives?

What does it mean to be a bold witness of the gospel, and how can we apply this to our lives?

Context: The congregation is encouraged to be bold witnesses of the gospel, shining the light of Christ in a world filled with darkness.

Application Question: Share some specific examples of how you can be a bold witness of the gospel in your own life?