**Homily – Fr Greg Barker**

**5th Sunday of Lent**

**29 March 2020**

I am not t0o bad at the tech stuff, but truthfully I could be better, a lot better. Each time I access something computer wise I realise I must learn it first and then relearn what I need to do the next time I access it.

In the midst of the learning I’ve come to understand that part of my *‘could be better’* is I want to simply turn on what I want and have it work without having to do all the thinking, work and learning underneath.

I get frustrated when it doesn’t work how I think it should, then annoyed when I realise I’m the issue not the program or item I am trying to use simply because in my impatience or whatever you might call it I missed a dozen steps in the process.

My faith and my relationship with Christ can be like that too I realise, which is why of course I need this Lent, or desert time leading me to Easter. It makes me take the steps to learn, reflect, change and put into practice what is needed to lead me to deeper relationship with Christ. To get it to work! Maybe you’re the same?

Over the last few weeks, we have been making a journey with the Gospel of John. We often talk in terms of the Community of the disciple John or beloved disciple, that we know more personally as John. That is important for us to make note of, I think. To see and experience the personal relationship of the beloved disciple as we read the Gospel, the disciple who has that unique relationship with Jesus that we crave and who as we read is pivotal in the crucifixion event and resurrection experience; that’s where we need to be to. One of the few disciples, the only one, who doesn’t abandon Jesus at the end, very much like Jesus’ own mother and Mary of Magdala, possibly one of the women in today’s gospel.

One other thought is that the writer of John’s gospel has a particular way of writing and as you read the gospel you can see how different the events are or at least how they are recorded are to the other gospels. John leads us on a theological journey and his style invites as we go from beginning to end to a deepening in our understanding of Jesus and the Father in the world.

Do you remember those kid’s toys that were like a bouncing spring: you held one end and the other spiralled away from you? An unravelling coil: this is the image often used to describe the gospel of John, with its end very intimately based in the loving and merciful heart of Christ. It doesn’t move away as that spring does but rather more deeply to our centre that is Christ.

John makes us take all the steps to deepen our relationship with the Father. We can’t in his writing take a short cut to it.

Let’s hold that thought as we explore our reading from that Gospel today and reflect on the Gospels of the last few weeks; what might the message be for us and our relationship with Jesus and with others?

This year in our church’s Lenten liturgical cycle we have had a wonderful run of people to encounter: the woman at the well, the blind man and the blind pharisees, and now we have Mary and Martha and Jesus other close friend Lazarus. How good for us. And it starts with us encountering Jesus in the Transfiguration on the mountain with the three disciples as witnesses; even though this event comes from Matthew’s gospel. We see there and meet Elijah and Moses.

Ironic of course as we go along that those disciples were so privileged to have been part of that moment on the mountain, to glimpse the Son of God as promised and yet somehow miss the point. Interesting that those who *witness* are not the disciples but those considered least in the kingdom, those we might reflect on as sinners. Comforting that the ‘sinners’ are welcomed to the mission and that the disciples with all their experiences will continue to muck it up but not be discarded. There is a witness in that I suspect as well.

The Samaritan woman as we heard was abused and abandoned and yet many came to believe as a result of her testimony. How many husbands? But faithful to the community and as we hear in her testimony faithful to the temple. She knows where Jesus has come from and is familiar with the prophecies.

The blind man who gets to see and the Pharisees who don’t ‘see’ in stark contrast to each other and who cannot cope with this change of one man’s circumstances and his healing.

And whilst it is hard to get a handle exactly on Mary and Martha’s connection to Jesus with their brother Lazarus, we do know Mary as the woman who anoints Jesus feet and there is also the traditional thought that the first encounter is actually the woman caught in the very act of committing adultery. Martha is my favourite person, but we know her as the one makes the coffee, offers the hospitality but feels taken for granted and missing out. Way to familiar.

There are so many elements in today’s Gospel for us. I often feel that as Mary as the woman in adultery or even simply as the woman who anoints his feet, has, stepped from being helped to that lovely place of being friend, companion and missionary. Helped up! We can be reluctant sometimes to let the people we help, help us! Reluctant to allow them in. It is hard not to judge the past and to embrace the future.

How often do I struggle with that concept in my life seeing the God that is Jesus as friend, attainable, companion, intimate and close and who finds me worthy, who helps me up and who commissions me to help others up too.

When we think of our friends, our close friends, we use words don’t we such as: they love us in spite of our faults or ourselves, they rejoice our good times and share in our victories, they encourage us through our challenges and support us in our difficulties. They take no joy in our sins. I often say that our true friends don’t let us get away from them.

They want to forgive us and want to be forgiven by us. How many of us have friends we don’t see from one year to the next but when we get with them it is as though we have never been apart. Our friends can’t stop bad things happening in our lives, what they do is stand with us through those times.

You might have heard in the Gospel today that Jesus didn’t stop Lazarus’ death. We heard that he was so dead he smelt! He is not in a coma he has started to decay. It has today to be more than he simply woke up.

Mary and Martha welcomed Jesus, welcomed his support and his comfort. I hear that sigh that comes straight from Jesus’ heart.

What does that mean for our relationship with Jesus?

If we think about what we say of friend what is John sharing with us today in the events as recorded in his Gospel? I suspect that as we have encountered Mary before throughout the Gospel, she, together with Martha and Lazarus have in their discipleship have become more than just followers they have become friends. There is a confidence in the ability of Jesus to change their lives.

In listening today to the confidence of Mary and Martha in Jesus to give life back to their brother we know don’t we that in that miracle as recorded for us, that we can be confident that he will do the same for us and for those we love. And more importantly that it comes from the very sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection. What we see in the Gospel we know it in our own lives.

In exactly the way Jesus talks about calling us friends, ‘I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business’ (John 15:15), we know that what he promises will be fulfilled in us; life, eternal life. That’s really what our friend wants for us as he wanted it for Lazarus.

Today we take heart from this Gospel as we face our own moments in isolation – an enforced time in the tomb – that Jesus our friend stands right beside us in this time of trial, supporting us and encouraging us. From the ‘tomb’ he will draw us, his beloved friends!