

## Sermon Archive 195

Easter Day - 1 April 2018

Knox Church, Christchurch

Lessons:     Isaiah 52: 13-15, 53: 7-9  
                  John 20: 1-18  
                  Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24

Preacher:    Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



She'd been there on Friday, so she'd heard what he'd said: that the kings of the earth would shut their mouths. She heard the sermon about language failing and silence descending. Pontius Pilate told to shut his mouth. Since his words had all been about appeasing the violence, all about declaring sentences of death, just shut your mouth. Herod Antipas - revealed by his words as being shallow and superficial. If your words serve only gossip, just shut your mouth. Chief priests and scribes, whose words drip with hypocrisy, whose language reveals hearts that are false, just shut your mouth. Second criminal on the cross, using your last few words to express anger and judgment, just shut your mouth. And Peter, whose words formed a threefold "I do not know him" - O Peter, even Peter, just shut your mouth. She heard it loud and clear - the destructive power of words, the loss of heart of words, the spiralling downward into silence. Cat got your tongue? The cat got our tongue. Roll the great sullen stone over the doorway, and leave in silence.

I wonder what she did for the next few days – following Friday. Maybe some of those mechanical things that people do after a death. A little bit of housework. Put on a pot of tea. Sit in the chair, look out the window. Cry. Listen to the clock ticking. No words, just thoughts. Like the kings of the earth, the mouth is shut. (Very quiet.)

In other homes other Marys manage their silence. Some of them turn on the radio - to hear a human voice. Or turn on the TV to create an impression of conversation - dialogue - the sharing of words. Homo occupatus, masking the silence, trying to keep busy, pretending we're not alone. But following Friday, how hollow it is! These words are just a bucket of noises - because remember, words have died. The Word died, and words died with it. So a little bit of housework, a putting on of the tea. Sitting in the chair, looking out the window. Tears and silence - not a word.

Early on a Sunday morning, she gets up early - the rising time of someone who can't sleep. By herself, she goes to the grave. She has spices to deliver, last deeds to do. And she's probably going to sit there a while - as we do by our graves. What do we say? Mostly nothing at all. We just sit. It's not a pulpit. Not a soap box. Just a grave. And if you do say anything, there's no reply - because what can be said? The word is dead.

-ooOoo-

The first words she uses are words uttered in dismay. "They've taken him away and I don't know where he is!" Words are back again, but only to cry out in loss. That's what words are now to do - just voice our pain. Silence, then pain.

The first post-Friday word from **the Word** is a question: woman, why are you crying? She tells him why, and it all just pours out like spilled out ointment, a flood of words. Words for confusion. Words for pain. Words for hurt, and words for pleading. Words flow forth, and it's all a flow of garble and pain.

He stems the flow with a simple, single word. He says "Mary". The Word of God calls her name.

To speak a name. To name a person. To acknowledge identity, to dignify the other. To begin again a conversation she'd thought

forever totally broken. To speak into death from life renewed. My strength, my song, glad sounds in the tents of the righteous. "I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord." On Easter morning, new life sounds forth in song. "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever."

In the days of his healing ministry, what had **he** said? To Jairus's daughter he said "Talitha cumi - little girl rise up". To Lazarus he'd said "Lazarus, come out". Simple words. We may never know by what great word Jesus was restored. No gospel writer ever dared to hazard a guess. But when the risen one starts speaking to humanity again, it is the language of concern for human sorrow. It is a language that names a person and opens the eyes. It is the language of wanting to heal the hurt - to make strong again. It is the language of restoration, encouragement. The kings of the earth may have found their way into silence, but when God speaks again it is strength and song.

If this is God's way of speaking, if this is God's language, if God's voice comes like a song, then we need a quiet word with the kings of the earth. Ah Pontius Pilate, you representative of the powerful, the pragmatic, the indifferent to the truth! Your words are everywhere; we hear them every day. But we will sing our Easter song. We will speak not from power, but from vulnerability - uttering things that you would dare not say. Things like "I love you; are you OK?" And we will sing only what is true. God is our strength and song.

And you, Herod Antipas! You who gave your speaking to trivia and nonsense, to entertainment by the humiliation of others! Your words are everywhere - tabloid, reality TV, trash talk and rubbish. We will not speak from our worst - we will give our singing to the best. What whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is

pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, we will sing of these, for God is our strength and song.

And you, you chief priests and scribes. You who gave your words to pretending to be what you're not. You commit hypocrisy! We, though, now on an Easter morning have heard another kind of song. We will speak honestly. When we're wrong, we'll say we're wrong. Simple "yes", simple "no" - no hiding behind what appears to be said - because God is our strength and song.

And criminal on the cross. Our world is full of the speech of anger, the speech of hurt. We understand it; like all people, we too carry hurt. But ours is a song relinquishing anger. Ours is a song of reaching out. God is our strength and song.

And Peter - three fold denier. You now have a new song to sing. You friend of Jesus, you stumbler along the way of friendship - your sad way of speaking is forgiven, and you have a new song to sing.

As Mary hears God speaking again, as Jesus comes again to all his people, the mouths of God's people are given a strength and a song:

Glad sounds in the tents of the righteous. "I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord. O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever."

On Easter morning, new life sounds forth in song.