



# ***THE NEW SHOFAR***

**It is not easy being a disciple of Christ**

**We are called to be co-creators with God**

**Ordinary Sunday 21**

## ***Two “doors” – one to life and the other to death***

Today’s Gospel is one of those incredibly challenging readings. What Jesus offers is clear: there is only one way to rejoice in life here on earth and forever in life beyond the grave.

That single *way* to life is the “door” that is Jesus the Christ. There is no way to a full and genuine life apart from Jesus. When Jesus speaks of “life” what does he mean? There are probably millions of humans around the world – perhaps even among our own family members and friends – who seem to be fulfilled and happy and yet do not accept Christ as Lord and Saviour. How does that work out? It means believers have an advantage in being fully human, an advantage called Jesus Christ.

## ***Biblical life – being as God in the world***

When God created He placed the man and the woman into the Garden and commanded them to *rule over all things in my name*. This is where God sets down the purpose of having humans in the creation. They are to be in the world as God is in the world, to live and act in collaboration with the ongoing creative presence of the Almighty in all things. This is the way we are *in the image and likeness of God*. We are co-creators working alongside of God in our world. Jesus helps us in that life.

This is the “why” of our existence and it is a great and wonderful affirmation of what it means to be fully human and fully alive. The closer we are to living and acting as God acts, the more fully human we become. This means we set aside our own self-interests and live to serve God as we were created and called to serve. That means we focus on making the world a “better” place...and Jesus helps.

## ***What are the characteristics of God we need to bring into the world?***

Here is the question: *what does it mean for us to be like God – as God is in the world?* We can glean the key moral characteristics of God from the experience people have had in their own interactions with the Almighty. These are not theoretical but based on living experiences. Remember too, these are not passive descriptors. They are actions. They are all verbs in the sense that God (and so us) takes the initiative in *reaching out* and *doing* these things.

**Goodness:** All that God is and does is worthy of approval, and he is the final standard of goodness (**Luke 18:19**). Goodness is not an abstract quality. It is the active pursuit of right, a preference for right over wrong, righteousness over evil – whatever the cost.

**Love:** God is freely and eternally giving of himself for the good of others (**1 John 4:8**). Here the verbal character is of most importance. God is love only in the sense that love is like a constantly flowing waterfall pouring out of the divine heart into human living. Imagine what this world

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would be like today if this was the primary focus of all men and women. It is a characteristic of our lives that is easy to examine and evaluate but an area of life in which we can so easily fool ourselves into believing we are loving people or faith communities defined by love. We are not loving simply because we believe we are loving. We may be loving only when others see us as being a source of love in the wider world, out beyond ourselves and our close circle of friends.

***Mercy:*** God's kindness toward those in misery and distress (**2 Samuel 24:14**). This is another of those qualities that can only be understood as a stepping out into the lives of others with a loving and compassionate heart. It has to be something in which we take the initiative, engaging with those who are without voice, who are victims of their own sinfulness and the selfishness of the world in which we live. To fail in doing mercy, to walk past or perpetuate injustice is sin.

***Grace:*** God's kindness toward those who deserve only punishment (**Romans 9:15**). Here is another really tough challenge for disciples. Grace is a divine gift enabling us to move beyond our perceptions of the worth or worthlessness of others. It stops us in our tracks so that we confront our selfishness, our self-centeredness and put aside our prejudices and engage with sinners, especially those we believe are persecuting us or "hating" us in some way.

***Patience:*** God's kindness in withholding punishment of those who sin over a period of time (**Exodus 34:6**). Here is one of the really tough demands. God is ever so patient with us, looking beyond our moments of sin and rejection and walking alongside of us to bring us home to himself. We want God to help us and we want it yesterday. When it comes to others, we want and even demand a transformation now. God, however, is amazingly patient with us.

***Holiness:*** God is separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own sovereignty (**Isaiah 6:3**). God alone is holy and God alone is good. It is something for which we strive, a quality of life we can only achieve in part when we walk with the help of God. It is tough to avoid sinful choices, almost impossible to take up every call to love and forgive. But that is what is demanded of us.

***Peace:*** In God's being and actions He is separate from all confusion and disorder, yet he is continually active in innumerable well-ordered, fully controlled, simultaneous actions (**1 Corinthians 14:33**). Biblical peace is not an absence of conflict, persecution and disruption to life. Shalom (peace) in the Bible is something that happens when God is alive within the words and deeds of men and women of faith. The more we reveal and respond to the divine presence in all things in our lives, the more it will be God who creates a genuine *shalom* even in the very midst of suffering and death. Finding God in others is the very beginning of peace in the world.

***Righteousness*** (justice): God always acts in accordance with what is right and is himself the final standard of what is right (**Deuteronomy 32:4**). Here is a further enormous challenge for believers. To pause, pray and then to act in the light of what is good and proper, what builds up and does not tear down, that heals rather than wounds is always difficult unless we live under divine grace.

### ***What makes us fully human is living in Christ***

What Luke's Jesus is teaching here is the *Way* we need to choose, in grace, the kind of life we strive to be living in this world. We are to be "as God" (in God's image and likeness) in creation, being to our environment and to others as God is. Nothing else has a chance of returning this world to the Eden kind of life Adam and Eve experienced at the time of creation. As Paul says, living in the Spirit means we sow *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness* in the world and in others. That is, we travel the narrow road, whatever the cost.

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