For his dystopian novel *1984* George Orwell invented the word doublethink as a subset of the language of the novel which was known as newspeak. Briefly stated doublethink is the ability to believe that two mutually contradictory facts are true. There are a series of famous quotes from the book which illustrate this concept like “war is peace” and ‘freedom is slavery.” They are ridiculous sounding because of their extreme nature but I would argue that we are used to such things in everyday life, although maybe not quite so brazenly. We have all heard politicians assure us that whatever power grab they are contemplating is “essential for democracy” or that lavishing their constituents with gifts is “essential for the children.” All sides of the political aisle are guilty of this so don’t think I am singling out anyone. And I think the reason why we do this or are blind to it is because we have something in our lives that we esteem more than truth and this thing is usually our own wants or desires. We want what we want and don’t care what has to be bulldozed to get it. In my experience, toddlers and certain celebrities are the only people honest enough to admit that their desires are selfish and need to provide no further justification. But for the rest of us, we realize that we have to dress up our selfish ambition in more acceptable language. So, we won’t say that we want the last brownie we say that we realize that the other person is on a diet so we are helping them by removing a temptation. When we want what we want truth is often the first casualty.

In the passage we have from The Acts of the Apostles today we are met with a fairly familiar scene in the early church. The disciples are in trouble. They have been imprisoned by the rulers, elders and scribes and are being questioned. The only reason we are told for their arrest is that they were “annoying” those in power. But in this moment of questioning Peter being full of the Holy Spirit points out the doublethink going on in the minds of those who are questioning him saying, “Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead.” Peter is pointing out that by having had the disciples arrested the rulers are pronouncing that they have done something wrong, but Peter explains that the “wrong” thing that they have done is that they have healed someone who was sick. Put in newspeak “healing is bad, sickness is good.” And as with many things in the Bible, this story has relevance beyond being an accounting of historical events, for it presents two issues for us to examine. And these two issues pertain to our own propensity to slip into newspeak when we find an impediment to something that we want.

The first issue is, in many ways, a mental one and has to do with us being honest with ourselves about reality and about our own motivations. Truth may make us free but it might not always make us comfortable. And to avoid discomfort we often tell ourselves untruths to keep the world as we want it to be. We like to believe good things about stuff we like and bad things about stuff we don’t. If you don’t believe me, ask yourself why there are newspapers and television channels dedicated to just one side of the political aisle. Our news today is much like the old British Empire which boasted that it was an empire on which the sun never set. Meaning that you could travel the world without ever visiting anything that was not British. Similarly, we can navigate life in such a way where everything we hear will assure us that we have been right all along. I could do some two-cent psycho analysis and try to explain why this is but I don’t know if the reason is terribly important. The important thing to know is that it is a real temptation. We are very self-justifying creatures and so doublespeak is a problem because as any good conspiracist knows, when reality does not fit your preconceived notions, the answer is to change reality. That is what the temple leaders did this morning by seeking to punish the disciples for doing good things. I am sure if you were to ask them why they were doing it, they would have produced a whole litany of good sounding reasons – they were protecting the children or honoring God or some such thing. They would never come out and say the disciples get on our nerves because they were threatening to overturn the power structure in which they were so comfortable.

But there is a second part of the challenge that this story presents and it is a challenge that may be even more difficult than recognizing the truth and that has to do with actually acting on the truth. For it is one thing to know the truth. It is quite another to make a stand for it. If you remember back a few weeks ago to Good Friday, Pontius Pilate insisted that Jesus had done nothing wrong and that the temple leaders where only wanting him crucified out of jealously. Which is all well and good, and true for that matter, but then he did nothing to stop the actual crucifixion. In fact, he is the one who made it possible. It takes a tremendous amount of courage to swim against the tide, to tell others things that they might not want to hear.

On September 5, 1925 a U.S. Army Colonel made a public statement regarding the crash of three navy seaplanes and a Navy airship saying, “These incidents are the direct result of the incompetency, criminal negligence and almost treasonable administration of the national defense by the Navy and War Departments.” He further criticized the War Department’s refusal to embrace the future by investing in aircraft carriers instead of battleships. Within days, the War Department charged him with violating the Ninety-sixth Article of War, which covered “all conduct of a nature to bring discredit upon the military service.” At his court-martial the prosecutor asked, “Is this man a Moses, fitted to lead the people out of a wilderness?... Is he not rather the all too familiar charlatan and demagogue type.” He was found guilty and sentenced to a suspension from rank, command, and duty, with forfeiture of all pay for five years. Rather than accept the verdict he resigned from the Army on February 1, 1926. This man was of course Wisconsin native Billy Mitchell who we now call the father of the U.S. Air Force. If you ever fly out of Milwaukee’s airport you might also notice that it is named after him. History has vindicated his honesty and his willingness to buck conventional wisdom, but at the time he paid a very heavy price. He would not live to see the restoration of his name and his posthumous promotion to Major General. That can be the nature of knowing and acting on the truth. It might not win you many friends in the time in which you speak it.

Today the disciples were arrested for doing actions that should have been celebrated. And like Mitchell history would later vindicate them but it was probably not a lot of fun at the time. In John’s Gospel he says, “the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light.” Being the light in a world that loves darkness takes courage. It takes courage to see the world as it is and it takes courage to tell these things to a world that may prefer to live in the dark. But that is the call on our lives so that we may live in God’s truth this day and forevermore.