

## Home Service for May 7, 2023

### Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

*Christ, the living stone and corner stone of our faith, is building us into spiritual houses and a holy priesthood. Let us open ourselves to the master builder.*

### Call to Worship:

Come now and see for yourselves. God is alive in our midst and begins life anew even among us. You will see the very nature of God in those gathered around you. Get ready to stand firm, to stand on the Rock that is Jesus Christ. From there we will feel the confidence of those who follow the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Welcome.

### Opening Prayer:

O God of all creation, become for us once again the solid foundation upon which we build our daily lives. We gather before you, this first day of the week, to align our lives to the strong teaching and life of Jesus Christ, our Cornerstone. Receive our praise and thanksgiving as expressions of faith and love. We come to you, O Lord, as people who desire to learn and serve like Christ. We are ready to receive your blessing and direction today. Amen.

### Prayer of Confession:

Living God, in times of spiritual homelessness, we long to hear Jesus' assurance that he has prepared a place for us; we yearn to be formed by the Master Builder into spiritual houses, like living stones. Grant us the courage of Stephen and the confidence of Peter, as we strive to be a holy priesthood, In your blessed name, we pray. Amen.

### Words of Assurance

*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God and place your faith in Christ. Make your petitions known and the one who is faithful will answer.*

Read Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

In you, LORD, I have taken refuge;  
let me never be put to shame;  
deliver me in your righteousness.

<sup>2</sup> Turn your ear to me,  
come quickly to my rescue;  
be my rock of refuge,  
a strong fortress to save me.

<sup>3</sup> Since you are my rock and my fortress,  
for the sake of your name lead and guide me.

<sup>4</sup> Keep me free from the trap that is set for me,  
for you are my refuge.

<sup>5</sup> Into your hands I commit my spirit;  
deliver me, LORD, my faithful God.

<sup>15</sup> My times are in your hands;  
deliver me from the hands of my enemies,  
from those who pursue me.

<sup>16</sup> Let your face shine on your servant;  
save me in your unfailing love.

Prayers of the People:

*O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. We pray this day that we may come to a clearer understanding that you have more interest in our character than in our comfort. Where we have need of correction, speak plainly to us and grant us the courage to make the changes you would bring in our lives. May the love we express for you on this Sunday morning continue throughout the coming week. Strengthen this congregation, we pray, in order that we may become more effective in our ministry, in our service, and in our witness to the community. Remind us to for those we have named this morning and let us never forget you hear and answer our prayer in the way that is best for each of us. Let not ever forget that our prayers do make a difference in the lives who we pray for. In the name of the risen Christ, Amen.*

## Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is The kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Lesson: Acts 7:55-60

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. <sup>56</sup>“Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

<sup>57</sup> At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, <sup>58</sup> dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

<sup>59</sup> While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” <sup>60</sup> Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Read the Epistle Lesson: 1 Peter 2:2-10

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, <sup>3</sup> now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

<sup>4</sup> As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— <sup>5</sup> you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house<sup>[a]</sup> to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup> For in Scripture it says:

“See, I lay a stone in Zion,  
a chosen and precious cornerstone,  
and the one who trusts in him  
will never be put to shame.”<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone,”<sup>[c]</sup>

<sup>8</sup> and,  
“A stone that causes people to stumble  
and a rock that makes them fall.”<sup>[d]</sup>

They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Read the Gospel Lesson: John 14:1-14

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God<sup>[a]</sup>; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup> My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. <sup>4</sup> You know the way to the place where I am going.”

<sup>5</sup> Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

<sup>6</sup> Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup> If you really know me, you will know<sup>[b]</sup> my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

<sup>8</sup> Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

<sup>9</sup> Jesus answered: “Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? <sup>10</sup> Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. <sup>11</sup> Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. <sup>12</sup> Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. <sup>13</sup> And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup> You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

## Message

As I read the Gospel, I immediately saw at least four possible ideas for a sermon so had to work hard to narrow it down to one. This scripture has been used many times in a funeral sermon, for it is a text that gives comfort to a grieving family as they long for some comfort and hope at the loss of a loved one. At the same time as I read it, I also saw it as a guide for living, for life especially when we face life's challenges.

These are words of encouragement, but they are not so much about our life after death but about our life after Jesus' death. It is about how we will live together as believers with the knowledge that Jesus has died for each of us. These are words meant as comfort for the disciples as they are forced to consider life without Jesus. For life as they knew it would never be the same again. They were faced with change that they neither welcome nor for which they felt prepared for. These are words for us to prepare us for a post-Easter life in a world that seems hostile and unwelcomed and words for our lives after Jesus' death. Jesus' words speak to us and our world, for we know the same fear, the same disorientation as the disciples so many years ago.

We live in a world of unprecedented change. We may be tired of hearing about it, but 'change' is nothing new and will not go away. In the midst of change we need something to give us hope, an anchor. And so we have these words, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." And "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

Words are sometimes too easy and never nearly enough. We can only imagine how the disciples received these words. Their lives were turned up-side-down. The glory years of teaching, healing, the crowds, were a thing of the past. The intimate times of the daybreak breakfasts at the seashore, quiet times in the garden, times with Jesus, a faint memory. The wheels have come off; arrest and crucifixion of Jesus, death, and now they were huddled in fear. They had no idea how to go on, how to live, what all of this meant for their lives in the future. "Do not let your hearts be troubled." Indeed!! These words, no doubt, seemed meaningless, for they were truly troubled, and Jesus seemed so far away, they felt so very much alone.

We can understand how the disciples must have felt. We, too, are faced with unwelcomed change, we are getting older, the "good old days" seem long gone and we are tempted to huddle in fear. The words come to us, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me." Many times we are tempted to say, "It's too late."

We know fear and doubt. Change has gripped our world for so many years now, and not much of it has been good. We long for the "good old days", for stability and an absence of fear. We feel lost and look for a way out of it all. We can understand Thomas' wonder, "Lord, we do not know where you are going, how can we know the way," also Philip who wanted a road map. "Show us the Father, show us a sure sign of your presence in our lives and we may be fine."

We want to cry out, “Lord, we’re afraid. Stop the change for a least a little while.” And Jesus says, “I go to prepare a place for you.” This is a relationship with Jesus Christ that will go with us into whatever we will find in the future. Nothing that we know, except the love of God in Christ Jesus, will be secure. Change will continue, but we need not be afraid because Jesus is with us. Jesus does not promise us an easy life, but he does promise we will not be alone. Thomas Aquinas is reported to have said, “If the primary aim of a captain were to preserve his ship, he would keep it in the port forever.” It is in the sailing of our lives that Jesus promises to be with us.

We will need to travel light, letting go of whatever nostalgia which would keep us from traveling into the future with Jesus. All that we might think will give us security, apart for Jesus, will only let us down. When jobs, health, family, wealth, politics, or whatever, let us down, all we can be sure of is that God is unchanging.

In the midst of all that changes, Christ assures us, “you will live in the presence of God, now and forever.” Change can be scary but it cannot destroy. So how do we live? We live as people “on the way.” Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” The way is a journey and not a destination. We are to live as people on a journey. The metaphor of “journey” has been a powerful image for all of humankind. All great religions of the world describe themselves as journey. Jesus says “I am the way, the truth and the life, and that is enough for our journey, our only guarantee.

We travel as a communal people, seeking to include everyone, because Jesus’ love includes everyone. We need to make room for others. Jesus is the truth for all we can really depend on, everything that has meaning for our lives is blessed by him. Love is to motivate us. It has been said, “through love alone can we be pleasing to God, and my sole ambition is to acquire it.”

The “way” is not about waiting for the time we check in to that “mansion just over the hilltop.” The “way” is about doing what Jesus had been doing in our life today, and we are assured that we will do greater things. Jesus’ ministry was only a short three years or so and covered very little territory. We are able to do much more. We are to do what Jesus did: feed the hungry, welcome the lost, heal the sick, lift up the oppressed. This text is not about life after death but about life in relationship with one who died for us. Jesus does not give us a how-to manual of life ahead, but he does assure us that he will be with us, that he is the way, the truth and the life.

In a time of change the words "do not let your hearts be troubled" can be difficult words to hear but these are the words that direct us to Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life. Jesus, the only one we can depend on when all else is changing. "I am the Way the Truth and the Life", Jesus says and we are invited to continue on the journey, not know what the journey may hold but only that Jesus goes with us, and that is enough. Amen.

Benediction:

*Go forth in peace, dear ones. Bring hope to this world. Go forth in love; bring joy to this world. Go forth in the knowledge that God goes with you, loving and guiding your steps. AMEN.*