

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

MAY 10, 2020

GATHERING

(As we continue to celebrate the fifty days of Easter, today's gospel includes Jesus' promise that he goes to prepare a place for his followers in his Father's house. Our baptism commissions us to share Jesus' mission in the world. As 1 Peter reminds us, we are a holy people, called to proclaim the one who called us out of darkness into light. In words and deeds we bear witness to the risen Christ—our way, our truth, our life.)

Thanksgiving for Baptism

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at baptism.

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Joined to Christ in the waters of baptism, we are raised with him to new life. Let us give thanks for the gift of baptism.

We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning you created us in your image and planted us in a well-watered garden. In the desert you promised pools of water for the parched, and you gave us water from the rock. When we did not know the way, you sent the Good Shepherd to lead us to still waters. At the cross, you watered us from Jesus' wounded side, and on this day, you shower us again with the water of life. We praise you for your salvation through water, for the water in this font, and for all water everywhere. Bathe us in your forgiveness, grace, and love. Satisfy the thirsty, and give us the life only you can give. To you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Amen.

The Prayer of the Day

P: Let us Pray,

C: Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. Give us grace to love one another, to follow in the way of his commandments, and to share his risen life with all the world, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

WORD

First Reading: Acts 7:55-60

Stephen was one of the seven men chosen by the apostles to serve tables so that the apostles could be free to serve the word (Acts 6:1-6). Stephen does more than distribute food, however. For his preaching of God's word, he becomes the first martyr of the faith.

⁵⁵Filled with the Holy Spirit, [Stephen] gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶"Look," he said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" ⁵⁷But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. ⁵⁸Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.

Reader: The Word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

¹In you, O LORD, have I taken refuge; let me never be | put to shame;
deliver me | in your righteousness.

²**Incline your | ear to me;
make haste to deliver me.**

³Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe, for you are my crag | and my stronghold;
for the sake of your name, lead | me and guide me.

⁴**Take me out of the net that they have secretly | set for me,
for you are my tower of strength.**

⁵Into your hands I commend my spirit,
for you have redeemed me, O LORD, | God of truth.

¹⁵**My times are | in your hand;
rescue me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who | persecute me.**

¹⁶Let your face shine up- | on your servant;
save me in your | steadfast love."

Second Reading: 1 Peter 2:2-10

Christ is the cornerstone of God's saving work and the foundation of our lives. We are God's chosen, holy people who continuously celebrate and declare the mercy of God we experience through Jesus Christ.

²Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation—³if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

⁴Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and ⁵like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶For it stands in scripture:

"See, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

⁷To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,
"The stone that the builders rejected
has become the very head of the corner,"

⁸and
"A stone that makes them stumble,
and a rock that makes them fall."

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

⁹But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

¹⁰Once you were not a people,
but now you are God's people;
once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy.

Reader: The Word of the Lord.

Congregation: Thanks be to God.

Gospel: John 14:1-14

On the night that he is to be arrested, Jesus shares final words with his disciples. As the one through whom God is known, he promises to go before them and act on their behalf.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴And you

know the way to the place where I am going.”⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.⁷ If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

⁸ Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works.¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.¹² Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.¹³ I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.¹⁴ If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

Congregation: Praise to you, O Christ.

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Sermon John 14:1-14 “Sheer Promise”

What’s the difference between a promise and a threat? Consider this statement: “I will always love you.” Clearly a promise. But what if one says, “I will always love you, if you love me.” Still a promise, but now it’s conditional. And lurking behind the condition is an implied threat: “If you don’t love me, or even if you don’t love me as I think you should, then I won’t love you.”

This is very much like what is going on in today’s lesson. In this story, we are back at Maundy Thursday, the evening Jesus gives his disciples the great commandment to love one another, and then prepares them for his imminent death and return to God. In response to the disciples’ reaction to his news that he is leaving, Jesus promises: “Though I go away, it is to prepare a place for you in the presence of my Father. I will come back for you, and we will be united again.”

This is sheer promise. Nothing conditional about it. But the disciples don’t understand and mistake his metaphorical reference to a place (his father’s house) for a physical, geographical place. So Thomas asks for directions to plug into his GPS. Jesus then says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” This is also sheer promise. In other words, Jesus is telling Thomas, “You ALREADY know the way.” Precisely because Thomas knows Jesus, he can’t get lost.

But then comes the next line. Jesus continues, “No one comes to the Father except through me.” So here’s the question. Is this a promise, or a threat? Lots of Christians hear it mostly as a threat. Sure, there’s a promise about being joined to the Father, but there are conditions. And here’s where the threat comes in. “If you don’t believe in Jesus, you’re finished.” Or even, “If you don’t believe in Jesus the right way, your salvation is at risk.”

But Jesus doesn’t stop there. He goes on, “If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” Grammar matters. The Greek words are not conditional, but instead state an already existing state of affairs, which makes Jesus’ promise sound more like this, “If you know me – AND YOU ALREADY DO! – you will know the Father.”

Jesus’ words are not meant to keep people out, but rather to assure his followers that they are really in. Jesus spells it out more: “If you have seen me” – AND YOU ALREADY HAVE! – “then you have seen my Father.”

And with that one statement we are back to one of the themes of John’s gospel, stated at the beginning of his story about Jesus where he writes, “But God the Son,” the word made flesh – “who is at the very bosom of the Father, he has made God known” (1:18). Jesus’s in-

carnation, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension are about one thing: revealing the loving nature of God (3:16) for the entire world!

At its core, this passage, and all of John's gospel, is not about who's out, but who's IN – everyone who has come to know God's nature by the way Jesus lived his life.

And just in case we're still not sure, Jesus adds another promise: "Very truly I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do, and in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. What are those works? To live as Jesus did – loving others. No exceptions.

The way, the truth and the life is not believing the right way about Jesus of Nazareth. The way, the truth and the life is living the way that Jesus lived, reflecting the very nature of God who loves without exception. Now and into eternity. May it be so!

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Uplifted by the promised hope of healing and resurrection, we join the people of God in all times and places in praying for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

Build us up, mothering God, as living stones united in your spiritual house. Continually strengthen your church as it is sent forth to proclaim your love. We pray especially for new congregations and those in redevelopment. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Humble us, creator God, as part of your creation. Fill us with respect and awe for the world you have made, including volcanoes, ocean currents, tropical rainstorms, glaciers, and other forces that both destroy and create. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Align our ways to your love, O God. We pray for countries, leaders, and other organizations as they prepare places for those seeking refuge and safety (*aid organizations may be named*).

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

God of healing and rest, help those whose hearts are heavy and weighed down by many troubles. Comfort their suffering, ease their distress, and carry their burdens. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Nurturing God, we pray for those who tend and teach young children, for the safe pregnancies of expectant parents, and for families who struggle with infertility and miscarriage. We give thanks for all who have shown mothering care, and we remember all for whom this day is difficult. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Generous God, you call into your brilliant light all who have died. Give us faith to take hold of the promise of your eternal life. Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

With bold confidence in your love, almighty God, we place all for whom we pray into your eternal care; through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Offering

Please remember to mail in your offerings so that Grace can continue to serve you.

Offering Prayer

Merciful God, our ordinary gifts seem small for such a celebration, but you make of them an abundance, just as you do with our lives. Feed us again at this table for service in your name, in the strength of the risen Christ. **Amen.**

THANKSGIVING FOR THE WORD

O God of justice and love, we give thanks to you that you illumine our way through life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, awaken us to the needs of others, and at the end bring all the world to your feast; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever.

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.

Blessing

May the One who brought forth Jesus from the dead raise you to new life, fill you with hope, and turn your mourning into dancing. Almighty God, Father, ✝ Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever. **Amen.**

Please keep in your prayers this week: Kevin Johnson, Barbara Metzger, Rob Johnson and Steve Lindberg (Streeter Family Friend's & Kin), Noah Klenken (Fred Fixsen's Nephew), Ellsa Sorenson, Cal Curtis & Patty Thompson (Carole Holten's Son-in-Law & Sister), Bill Warner, David Warner.