

# FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

## MAY 7, 2023



**JOHN 14:1 "TRUST IN GOD. TRUST ALSO IN ME"**

## ST. JOHN

### UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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#### \*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:

ONE: Gaze into heaven and see the glory of God.

Lift up your eyes to behold the risen Christ.

**MANY: God is our rock of refuge, a strong fortress.**

**Christ leads us and guides us every day.**

ONE: Indeed, you have tasted the goodness of God.

You have known the presence of Christ, God's chosen one.

**MANY: Every day we long for pure spiritual milk.**

**Each day, we are inspired by the living Christ.**

ONE: Then let us lay our troubles at Christ's feet.

Let us enter the sanctuary God prepares for us.

**ALL: We have come to find the way, the truth, and the life. We are here to ask and to receive and to serve.**

**\*INVOCATION:** Open your heavens to us, God of all worlds. We long for the pure spiritual milk you provide so we may grow into salvation. We are your people, sisters, and brothers of your Chosen One. Let us this day be built into a spiritual house, a community of your faithful people. Keep us from judging those whose views differ from our own, or from throwing stones at those with whom we disagree. Incline your ear to us and rescue us from ourselves, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**\*CALL TO CONFESSION:** We, who use our doubts and questions as excuses for irresponsibility, are called to account. We have disobeyed God's word and rejected the One who revealed God's love. Because we do not believe, we cannot see the goodness of God. Let us seek God's mercy and forgiveness.

#### \*UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION:

**We confess that sometimes we have covered our ears so we cannot hear your word of judgment, holy God. We seek to isolate ourselves from a world in pain. We become**

enemies and persecutors of Christ, who identified with poor, needy, and oppressed people. We reject the One you sent as the way, the truth, and the life. We do not pray, as Jesus prayed, trusting that you hear and respond. O God, deliver us from ourselves. Amen. Silence

**\*ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:** Let not your hearts be troubled. Whoever believes in God will not be put to shame. If you truly believe, you will show care for others. When you care, you will join in doing the things Jesus did to help all the people God loves. You are chosen to proclaim the mighty acts of One who called you out of the shadows into God's marvelous light. Rejoice! You have received the mercy of God.

**SECOND TESTAMENT READING: Acts 7:55-60**

<sup>55</sup> But Stephen, enabled by the Holy Spirit, stared into heaven and saw God's majesty and Jesus standing at God's right side. <sup>56</sup> He exclaimed, "Look! I can see heaven on display and the Human One standing at God's right side!" <sup>57</sup> At this, they shrieked and covered their ears. Together, they charged at him, <sup>58</sup> threw him out of the city, and began to stone him. The witnesses placed their coats in the care of a young man named Saul. <sup>59</sup> As they battered him with stones, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, accept my life!" <sup>60</sup> Falling to his knees, he shouted, "Lord, don't hold this sin against them!" Then he died.

**EPISTLE READING: 1 Peter 2:2-10**

<sup>2</sup> Instead, like a newborn baby, desire the pure milk of the word. Nourished by it, you will grow into salvation, <sup>3</sup> since you have tasted that the Lord is good.

<sup>4</sup> Now you are coming to him as to a living stone. Even though this stone was rejected by humans, from God's perspective it is chosen, valuable. <sup>5</sup> You yourselves are being built like living stones into a spiritual temple. You are being made into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup> Thus it is written in scripture, *Look! I am laying a cornerstone in Zion, chosen, valuable. The person who believes in him will never be shamed.*

<sup>7</sup> So God honors you who believe. For those who refuse to believe, though, the stone the builders tossed aside has become the capstone. <sup>8</sup> This is a stone that makes people stumble and a rock that makes them fall. Because they refuse to believe in the word, they stumble. Indeed, this is the end to which they were appointed.

<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God's own possession. You have become this people so that you may speak of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of darkness into his amazing light. <sup>10</sup> Once you weren't a people, but now you are God's people. Once you hadn't received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

## INTRODUCTION TO GOSPEL READING:

Our scripture passage for today is part of what is called Jesus' Farewell Discourse. In the Gospel of John, Jesus and the Disciples have finished their Passover Meal. Jesus has washed the feet of the disciples as an example of how to serve others. Jesus has foretold his betrayal; Judas has left the room. Chapter 13 has ended with Jesus foretelling Peter's denial.

Now we have Jesus completing his message to the 11 disciples. In my opinion, these words that begin Chapter 14 are some of the most beautiful and powerful words we could ever hear. To me it's as if Jesus is summarizing all the teachings he has given the disciples and followers in the last three years. He has brought those teachings together as a condensed version (*like the Reader's Digest's Condensed stories*). He has summarized why he came and everything the disciples should do to continue what Jesus started.

There's no parables, no healings, no miracles, no signs, in this intimate message for those he truly loved. It begins bluntly and to the point; "Trust in God. Trust also in me."

These few words are so very important. If they and us trust in God and Jesus, all the rest falls into place. We don't have to worry about memorizing laws and rules. We don't have to wonder how things have and will happen. Just trust.

I'll use my imperfect analogy. The Passovers over Rt 64 that we have – one over Bunkum Road for example. Someone designed the overpasses and someone else poured the concrete for them. Every time we drive over

them do we worry about if they will collapse. Hopefully not? Why? Because we trust the designer and the laborers.

If we trust God the designer and Jesus the laborer, we don't have to worry about things anymore. Things like are we loved? Who will take care of us? Where we will go next after our time on earth is complete? Jesus tells us he has a place for us, all of us. We don't need to worry about flights being canceled or gas in our cars to follow Jesus wherever he goes. We don't have to know our destination. Trust Jesus to take us to his Father. Jesus knows the way.

One more word about verse 6 when Jesus answered Thomas concerning how do they and us know the way. Jesus answers, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

In my "Interpreter's Study Bible" there is a large footnote or excursus, an aside, about verse 6. It's important. "John 14:6 expresses the central theological conviction of the Gospel of John: Jesus is the tangible presence of God in the world (1:1-18). The language of Father and Son points to the intimacy of the relationship between God and Jesus. Humanity's encounter with Jesus the Son makes possible a new experience of God as Father. Yet John 14:6 is often interpreted in ways that misuse its central theological claim. What John intends as particularism, many contemporary Christians wrongly interpret as exclusiveness. John 14:6 celebrates how Jesus reveals God for those in that **particular faith community** where John is establishing a church 60 years or so after the ascension of Jesus. IT IS NOT a statement about the relative worth of the world's

religions. The author of this Gospel is concerned with helping Christians recognize and name their God and the distinctiveness of their identity as a people faith."

*(As I researched John 14:6, I found many places where this passage has been misinterpreted to say that Jesus is THE ONLY way. I don't see that word "only" in that sentence. However, there are some people in our day and age that think the only way to Jesus is "their" way, "their" church, "their" beliefs. Personally, I believe that God is bigger than "them". I believe God will accept anyone even if they have never heard of a man named Jesus.)*

This passage in John is very "meaty". It has much to teach us. It could take many sermons to cover all of these 14 verses. For now these seven words are enough, "Trust in God. Trust in Jesus also." What do you think?

**\*GOSPEL LESSON: John 14:1-14**

**The way, the truth, and the life**

**14** "Don't be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. <sup>2</sup> My Father's house has room to spare. If that weren't the case, would I have told you that I'm going to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too. <sup>4</sup> You know the way to the place I'm going."

<sup>5</sup> Thomas asked, "Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?" <sup>6</sup> Jesus answered, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup> If you have really known me, you will also know the Father. From now on you know him and have seen him."

<sup>8</sup> Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father; that will be enough for us." <sup>9</sup> Jesus replied, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been with you all this time? Whoever 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 the Father is in me? The words I have spoken to you I don't speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me does his works. <sup>11</sup> Trust me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or at least believe on account of the works themselves. <sup>12</sup> I assure you that whoever believes in me will do the works that I do. They will do even greater works than these because I am going to the Father. <sup>13</sup> I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father can be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup> When you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

**PASTORAL PRAYER:**

God of many rooms prepared for those who place their trust in you before their journey's done, we are grateful for your love and care for us. No other being can be so generous to show us mercy when we have failed, and joy when we achieved. Thank you.

Today we offer our prayers for many of our brothers and sisters. For those in positions of power, we pray that they are benevolent leaders who listen to needs of their people.

We remember all the workers who make our roadways safe and the police officers who enforce the rules of the roads.

We pray for all teachers, especially those who teach drivers' ed. May they have nerve of steel as they ride with new drivers.

We remember all those who are in pain from physical or mental issues. May they know your loving presence with them.

We pray for all people and places where God is called by different names. God's message is the same no matter where and what God is called – love one another.

We pray all these things in the name of your Son, Jesus . .

#### **THE 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 debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

**OFFERTORY INVITATION:** There are moments when the heavens seem to open to us, and we sense the vast possibilities for life that God offers. We long to reach our God-given potential and to offer that opportunity to others. The tithes and offerings we bring are devoted to that purpose.

**\*UNISON OFFERTORY PRAYER: We commit ourselves to you, gracious God, as we dedicate material gifts that represent our labor. When we ponder the amazing wonder of life, we are filled with awe. When we remember Jesus as the cornerstone of the spiritual house**

**you are seeking to build in our midst, we are eager to help. Let your face shine on us and on this offering, that your mighty acts may be proclaimed to all the world. Amen.**

#### **\*HOLY COMMUNION:**

May the God of every way be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift your hearts to the One who is the Truth for God's own people.

**We offer them to the One who warms them with love.**

Sing praises to God, who is our Life.

**Glad songs are offered to the One who provides shelter for us.**

You made a way through chaos, Constructing God, the Word echoing on mountaintops and whispering in valleys; the Spirit teaching songs to the stars, and breathing life into those created in your image as your precious children. You longed to cradle us in your lap, breastfeeding us with grace and hope, but we slipped out of your grasp, covering our ears as you called us to come back home to you.

Prophets came to remind us that you would not put us to shame, psalmists sang to us of your longing to cut the net of sin and death and set us free, but , together, we rushed into the open arms of temptation.

Then you sent Jesus, so that in knowing and believing in him, we would know and believe in you.

With those who have nothing and with those who give everything away, we lift our voices to you:

**Holy, holy, holy are you, God who pulls us to safety.**

**All creation kneels down to worship you.**

**Hosanna in the highest!**

**Blessed is the One who shows us the Truth.**

**Hosanna in the highest!**

You shape a safe place for us, Imaginative God,  
and send your Child, Jesus, to show us the Way.

Born a tiny baby as we are, he shows us how to grow into  
your people. The cornerstone of your kingdom, he uses us  
to build a spiritual home for all. Committing his spirit to you,  
he entered the emptiness of death, so we might stand on  
the solid grounds of the resurrected life.

Even as we celebrate the Life which was his,  
as we claim the Truth that all are one with you,  
we take refuge in that mystery called faith:

**Christ died, trusting in God's promises;**

**God raised him from the dead, promising the same for us;**

**Christ will come, fulfilling all the promises of God.**

Once, we were nobodies, alone and hopeless,  
but by your mercy, Living God, we are now a family,  
gathered in your love around this Table,  
where the Spirit sanctifies the bread and cup.

You lean over to serve us the bread, enveloping us in your  
grace so we might go to be your people. You offer to us the  
cup of hope, which can heal our troubled hearts  
and strengthen us to serve our world.

And when the Way leads us home to you,  
when your Life gathers us with our siblings

around the Table which is prepared by your Truth,  
we will sing glad songs of praise to you forever,  
Amen.

### **SHARING THE ELEMENTS**

#### **\*UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

**Eternal God, we thank you for your presence in the  
simplicity and splendor of this holy meal. By the power of  
your Holy Spirit, unite us with all whom Christ welcomes,  
that we may be the servant church of the servant Christ, in  
whose name we pray. Amen.**

#### **\*RESPONSIVE BENEDICTION AND COMMISSION:**

**ONE:** Jesus sends us out into paths of service.

We are summoned to greater works than Jesus did.

**MANY: How is it possible for us to do more than Jesus  
did? Can we preach and pray and heal as Jesus did?**

**ONE:** We are chosen as Christ's representatives.

We are the church, the body of Christ on earth.

**MANY: Together we can make a difference.**

**God is at work in us to heal our world.**

**ONE:** Christ has gone ahead to prepare a place for us.  
Following in Christ's way, we know fullness of life.

**ALL: We believe God dwells in us and among us.  
God's mighty acts are revealed through us.**

**Amen. Amen.**

**PRAYER LIST:** Urban Baum, David Seneczyn, Theo Mally,  
Becky Ballard, Rosemary Williams, Ronald Bopp, Syd Safriet,  
Mary Holcomb, Beth Sheldon, Marilyn Paul, Gloria Coble.