



# *Fifth Sunday of Easter*

## *Sermon by Revd Sharmain James*



7 May 2023

### READINGS

Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5,17-18; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14

## *Jesus the way and our cornerstone*

Prayer: Father, we pray that in the written word and through the spoken word we come to know the living God. Bless and anoint the words you have given me.

The passage we just read from the Gospel of John is often heard at funerals, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. . .I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3).

These words are fitting and reassuring on the occasion of a Christian funeral. However, it's worth noting that when Jesus first speaks these words, he's not officiating at a funeral. No one in his immediate circle has died, but, still, the disciples are grieving.

Today is the fifth Sunday after Easter and the readings for the last few Sundays have been about the Resurrection, but today's Gospel takes us back in time to an event in Jesus' life before his crucifixion and resurrection.

The passage from John's Gospel takes place in the context of the Last Supper. Jesus has just washed his disciples' feet, has predicted his betrayal by Judas and predicted his denial by Peter, and has given them a new commandment, telling them that it is the love they show others that will mark them as his disciples.

Jesus then informs them that his "hour" has come, that he is about to die, that he will be leaving them behind to return to his Father. So they are feeling anxious and uncertain. It is in this context that Jesus gives them a word of encouragement in the face of his impending death, saying "don't let your hearts be troubled because in my Father's house there are many rooms.

When Jesus speaks of "dwelling places", many have come to assume that Jesus is talking of a location, but his meaning is - relational. Elsewhere in John's gospel, whenever dwelling is spoken of, it is not about physical structures, but it's about family bonds such as the Father and Jesus dwelling in the believer.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the great symbol of God's dwelling with his people was the Temple. What we see in these verses is a re-interpretation of where God now dwells. It is no longer a building but a faith community, a living temple. Believers dwell in God, and he dwells in them.

But the disciples don't quite get what he means about the father's house. All this seems to lead only to confusion and misunderstanding on their part. Phillip and Thomas both challenge Jesus and seem to be

asking for some clarity and direction. Thomas says if they don't know the way - where Jesus is going, how can they follow him?

I envy those who can navigate directions well. They seem confident and sure of where they are going. Unlike me who needs Google maps. Whenever I must go to a place that I don't know I rely on that voice to tell me exactly where to drive and where to turn. I trust the lady's voice of google maps. And even if I miss a turn – the voice will tell take me on a new route to get me back on the right path to my destination, and it is such a relief when she tells me you have reached your destination.

Rather than giving them directions - Jesus answers with one of the most memorable lines in Scripture, 'I am the way, the truth and the life'. No one comes to the father except through me." Jesus claims to be the way. These are comforting words because they provide a road map to the Father: Jesus is the road map, he is the way.

In 1 Peter 2:2-10 we are given the same message: Jesus is not just the "Way" – He is also the foundation – the cornerstone on which we should build our lives, the firm rock from which everything else is built and takes its support.

But, 1 Peter declares that not only is Jesus a "living stone" all Christians are also "living stones" -- building blocks in God's great construction project as God builds up a "spiritual house," the true community of faith, the church.

God, not us, is the builder, who decides what goes where, and we are the stones, the materials which God uses. One of the challenges of faith is that we hand over control of our lives to the one who knows best. That is uncomfortable and is not a popular concept in this day and age, when we are all encouraged to be masters of our own destinies. But our faith demands that we are not the builder, but we are the bricks.

We do not decide how they fit together but are placed by the one who knows the plans for what is being built, and we contribute to the overall success. Last week, we were reflecting upon Jesus as the gate of the sheepfold, the way through which the sheep can pass into the pasture. Today - Jesus clarifies his earlier story with a clear statement. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me".

Our entrance into an existence with God, our refuge and place of safety, can only be built on the sure foundation which is Jesus - the cornerstone.

Amen