

Introduction

Welcome to St. Peter's Lutheran Church Estevan. Pastor Kleemola here to bring you a partial service for the Fifth Sunday of Easter – May 10, 2020.

Readings for the Fifth Sunday of Easter

First Reading: Acts 6:1-9, 7:2a, 51-60
Psalm: Psalm 146
Epistle: 1 Peter 2:2-10
Gospel: John 14:1-14

Text for today's Sermon is taken from John 14:1-6

¹[Jesus said:] "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ²In my Father's house are many rooms. 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, that where I am you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to where I am going." ⁵Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Sermon – The Way

Christ has risen! He has risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Dear friends in Christ Jesus; In the first three Sundays of the Easter season, we had this recurring theme that the disciples did not know Jesus until He showed Himself to them. There was Mary who thought Jesus was a gardener until He called her by name. There was Thomas who refused to believe in Jesus until he saw the marks of the crucifixion. There were the two disciples on the road to Emmaus who did not recognize Jesus until He revealed Himself in the breaking of the bread.

And in each of those accounts, we noticed that Jesus had often told His disciples what He was about to do, but they just didn't get it. Jesus told them He would be tortured and crucified and they didn't have a clue. He promised to rise from the dead and when He did, they didn't believe it. They never really got it until after Jesus actually did the dying and the rising. They never really got it until Jesus showed Himself to them in some way.

You can imagine that if they didn't get the crucifixion or the resurrection, that when Jesus began to tell them about the Ascension and Eternal Life, they would be totally lost. Today's Gospel tells us that this is pretty much the case. Today's Gospel takes us back before the crucifixion, and we see that there too, the disciples are having a really hard time keeping up with Jesus as He tells them that He is preparing a place for them in eternity.

Really, when you think about it, these situations really support the credibility of the Bible. If you were making up a religion, you wouldn't make yourself look so dumb. For example, when Jesus died on the cross you would tell how all His disciples gently took the body down from the cross and laid it in a special room. Then all the disciples would have gathered together for a vigil as they waited for Jesus to keep His promise to rise from the dead. You would want everyone to know how loyal you were – if you were making it all up. In reality, the disciples scattered to the four winds or hid in locked rooms. They were definitely not the heroic type. The actual history of the events does not show the disciples in a good light. It is definitely not the way you would tell the story if you were making it up.

The account in today's Gospel comes from the last teachings of Jesus before His arrest. He and the disciples were in the upper room. Jesus knew that soldiers would arrest Him in a few hours and that He would go to the cross the next day. As Jesus taught His disciples, He looked through the cross, past the resurrection, and out into eternity. He said, **"In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going."**

Of course, this all sounded very good to the disciples until Jesus said, **"You know the way to where I am going."** Thomas spoke for all the disciples and said, **"Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"** Thomas also speaks for us and everyone who understands his or her sinful nature.

We too would like to know the way – the way out of this sinful world of decay and death. We would like to know the way to a world without hardships or global pandemics. We would like to know the way to a world without terrorism or mass shootings. We would like to know the way to a place where we will never wear out and die. We all seek a place of eternal peace – peace with God and peace with man. We all seek a place without sin, sorrow, or death. That place is the Father's house. Therefore, we join with Thomas and ask Jesus about the way to that house.

E. Stanley Jones tells of the missionary who got lost in the jungle. After wandering around in the bush, he finally found a small village and asked the natives if they could lead him out of the jungle. One native said he could. So the missionary said, "Show me." He began to follow as the native led the way through the thick jungle. They walked for hours, hacking their way at times through the unmarked jungle. The missionary was getting worried and asked, "Are you sure this is the right way? Where is the path?" The native, said, "In this place there is no path. I am the path" – much as Jesus said, "I am the way, the path, out of the jungle of this world."

So, "the way" is not what we would expect. The way is not a route or a set of directions. Instead, it is a Person – Jesus Himself. We cannot travel this route. Instead Jesus must take us. In fact, that is exactly what He promised in the earlier verse when He said, **"I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."**

This way is totally different from all the false religions in the world. In some way, every other religion teaches that we must work our own way into God's good graces. Some of the false religions even refer to a path, but it is a path that we must walk in our own abilities. The false religions of the world set us up for Satan's one-two punch.

Satan is more than happy to feed our ego and tell us that we can earn our way into heaven, and the world is more than happy to help Satan out. The world sends us all kinds of messages that pump up our self-esteem – that tell us that the good works you need for heaven might be a bit of a challenge, but we can do it. We're basically good people. Most of us are nice guys. Heaven is within our grasp. We've got this. We just have to put in a little effort and it will be ours. This is Satan's first punch.

Many people succumb to Satan's first punch. They live a full and fulfilling life. They come to believe that everything is in order. They just follow the yellow-brick road, and all seems right

with the world. Then they die and discover that they had been on the broad road that leads to destruction all along.

There are some people, though, who are more perceptive. They begin to see through the lies. They are realistic enough to see that they are not going to be good enough on their own. They do a reality check and realize that Satan and the world lied to them and that they can never earn their way to heaven. It is then that Satan throws his second punch.

The second punch comes when Satan takes on his true identity as the accuser. He starts to load on the guilt. Suddenly, all the bad and evil things we have done in our lives come to our memory. We cringe as we see the foolishness of our youth. We re-coil at all the evil images that leap to our minds as memory after memory show us how truly twisted and evil we are – in our thinking if not in our actions. The forces that once lied to us to convince us that we could make it into heaven now whiplash us into another lie. They work tirelessly to convince us that our sin is more powerful than Jesus' forgiveness – that we've crossed a line where Jesus can no longer forgive us. This is the sin of despair. The poster child for this despair is Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus and then went and hanged himself.

This one-two punch of Satan's is the reason we can take great comfort in the fact that Jesus Christ is the one and only way. Jesus is the only One who endured the worst temptations of the devil and the world and remained without sin. As the only perfect human, Jesus is the only One who could satisfy God's Justice. He is the only One whose holy life was a sufficient ransom to appease the wrath of God against sin. His holy nature makes Him the only One whom death could not hold.

Jesus is the only one who could do all this because He is the only One who is very God, begotten of the Father from eternity and also true man born of the Virgin Mary. Jesus left His Father's house and came to this earth to do the works of His Father. In His human nature He lived a righteous life under the authority of the law. He lived the righteous life that we could not live and He lived that righteous life for us. In His obedience to the Father's plan, He allowed the authorities to arrest Him, torture Him, and put Him on a cross. By doing these things He satisfied His Father's wrath against our sin. This is how He became *the way* for us to enter His Father's house. We have confidence that He is the way because He rose from the dead. This is the reason He could say, **"If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."** His resurrection assures us that we too shall rise from death and that He will take us to live with Him.

Notice, also, that Jesus said, **“I am the way.”** He did not say, “I am a way,” as if He were only one out of many ways. He did not say, “I will be the way,” as if our salvation was only somewhere off in the future. He is the way for us now. That means that we do not wait for the day when all the rooms in the Father’s House will be ready – the Last Day when all the dead shall rise. Eternal life does not start when this life ends. We have it right now. It is our present possession, just as Jesus assured Martha before He raised Lazarus from the dead: **“Whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”** (Jn 11:26) Remember that where Jesus is present, there His kingdom is present. And where is Jesus present? He is with us! Has not Jesus promised, **“Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”?** (Matt 18:20) He also said, **“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”** (Matt 28:20) His promises tell us that He is with us even though we cannot see Him and that means that eternal life with Jesus has already begun for those who believe in Him.

What gracious words Jesus shared with His disciples in that upper room on the evening before He went to the cross. His words are full of comfort and reassurance. How gracious it is of Christ to prepare a uniquely perfect room for each and every one of us in His Father’s house. How comforting it is to know that Jesus will bring us to His Father’s house safely because He Himself is the way. How reassuring it is to know that Jesus is the full presence of God with us even now. How marvelous it is to know that although we cannot see Him, Jesus is here with us now and He brings heaven and all its blessings with Him. Amen

Prayer of the Church

As newborn infants who long for the pure spiritual milk, so let us come before the Lord seeking His mercy with confidence that His grace will be sufficient for all our needs.

Almighty Father, everlasting God, Your Son has revealed You to us as a merciful Lord. Give to us Your Holy Spirit, that we may believe in Him whom You have sent and do the greater works He has told us we will do in His name.

Lord God, You have promised to build up Your Church to be a holy priesthood, that Your people might offer the spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving acceptable to You. Bless Your Church and bring all congregations back together again. Bless all pastors who proclaim Christ to us. Bless all church workers and those preparing for full-time church vocations, that Your

Church may be supplied with faithful leaders and servants of Your Word. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, Your power brought all things into being and still You preserve what You have made. Bless our Prime Minister, the Parliament of Canada, our Premier, and all elected and appointed civil servants so that they may honour You and Your purpose, establishing order and justice, encouraging virtue and protecting all life. Give wisdom and moderation to them in their leadership for the well-being of the nation. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O merciful Father, You have compassion upon the sick and those in need and have promised not to ignore them in their afflictions. Turn back the pandemic across the globe, and give us relief. Bless the sick with healing, those who suffer with strength and patience, and the dying with peace. Hear us on behalf of those who have requested our prayers, Pattie Berday, Dean Euteneier, Gerald Olson, and Wanda Stang.

Gracious God, You have established the home and blessed those who show us Your love. Bless all mothers and the children in their care. Bless all families and make their homes places of blessing and love, where Your Word is spoken, forgiveness reigns and love is displayed. Give us good examples to inspire youth to all that is good and pure, and to seek after these things.

Heavenly Father, You have given us the wisdom of faith that through the Spirit we might know Your Son to be the way, the truth and the life. Bless all those who teach and all who learn, that the goal of our knowledge may be to know Christ and to make Him known. Do not let Your Word be bound, but let it have free course among us. Preserve those in isolation from idleness, and instead let our minds be renewed in Scripture and prayer.

Compassionate Father, You are not aloof from the needs of this body and life, and You have called us to love our neighbour in need and give aid to the poor. Give us courage and faith, that we may not fear sharing the resources You have supplied with those who live in want, especially the widow, the orphan and the unemployed. Let love be perfected among us to drive out selfish fears.

Eternal Father of an eternal mercy, You have raised up witnesses in every age and blessed us with those who endured suffering and even death in faithfulness to Christ. We give You thanks for these faithful saints and martyrs, and we pray You to make us strong when we face the day of test, that at length we may be brought with them into the joy of Your presence and the glory of everlasting life.

We praise You, God, for Your goodness in hearing the prayers of Your people and granting us confidence to approach Your throne of mercy. Hear us now in the name of and for the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, through whom, with whom and in whom, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honour and glory is Yours, almighty Father, both now and forevermore. **Amen.**

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.