

Sermon, Year A, Fifth Sunday of Easter, May 10, 2020¹

We long for your house to be our house and our house to be your house and to understand why what happens, happens. May it be so,
AMEN

Today's readings are full of marvelous promises Jesus makes to his disciples and to us as believers. He calls us to believe in him, trust him and serve him as living stones.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled,” Jesus says to us. Haven't you always loved those seven words? Right now, many of our hearts are troubled, mine included, for all kinds of reasons. We miss our freedom to come and go. We miss our family and friends who we cannot be with right now. We miss the hugs, the passing of the peace at church, going out for dinner, or going to the movies. I needn't go on because you know even more than I do what you miss the most. Jesus says to us “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” He's

¹ Acts 7:55-60
1 Peter 2:2-10
John 14:1-14

talking to the disciples who he will leave soon but he's talking to us, too. He knows what we are missing, the sadness in our hearts, the anxiety that CV19 brings to us, for our family's safety, and our own safety.

Jesus says "I will go and prepare a place for you." What a promise from Jesus! He is preparing a place for us. Not only that but he says "I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." It takes one's breath away to realize that Jesus is telling us that we will always be with him in a place he has prepared for us. I think an AMEN would be an appropriate response to his words. () These are words that help us no matter what our circumstances are.

He goes on to say: "Believe in God, believe also in me." He is telling us that we are never alone because he is always with us. During times like these it is normal to ask questions like where is God in all of this? Why did God allow this? He neither caused it nor allowed it because God is not the author of evil. It came from a virus first appearing in animals and passed on to humans. This has happened before. Could God stop it? Of course he could! Why he chooses not

to only he knows. We don't always understand God's will because it is God's will not our will.

I remember when my brother died and I couldn't reconcile that event with my belief in God. It's almost as if I believed that if I trusted in God, nothing bad would happen to me. I read Rabbi Kushner's book: When Bad Things Happen to Good People. I resonated with his point that things happen because they happen. It is tempting to become resentful, to wallow in self-pity and anger but this is not the answer. The answer is to understand that things happen which are beyond our control and it is our job to accept them. The Lord says "do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me."

When we read about Stephen, the first martyr, he doesn't seem to be asking "Lord, why is this happening to me? He barely notices because he is filled with the Holy Spirit. All he sees is God standing with all his glory, next to Jesus. All he can say is what he sees of the glory of God and of Jesus. The crowd drowns out his words. The crowd covers their ears so as not to hear him and they rush against him. After dragging him out of the city they begin to stone him and

Stephen cries out “Jesus receive my spirit...do not hold this sin against them.” And then he died.

I know I have covered up my ears when I didn't want to hear what God was saying to me. Have you ever shut your ears so you didn't hear what you didn't want to hear? It's not a fair comparison to think of ourselves as causing a person's martyrdom when we close our ears to God's voice; though we may shut ourselves off from a unique opportunity to serve God.

To go back to John chapter 14 have you ever asked yourself: I wonder what Jesus means when he says in his Father's house are many dwelling places? The fun is to take that phrase literally and say to yourself; what will my dwelling place look like? Will my dwelling place be full of my love of Danish modern furniture? The words dwelling places are a metaphor for our constant eternal presence with God after our earthly life is ended. There are times when that sounds like a wonderful option compared to how life goes on earth! My thought is that when we get there we won't care because earthly desires of a particular style of furniture or anything else, won't have meaning next to the glory of God and Jesus which shines on our

faces. Jesus tells us he will prepare a place for us and he will come again to take us to himself. Wherever he is, there we will be also. This is such a glorious thought.

Of course, then we come to good ole doubting Thomas who asks Jesus how will we know the way to where he is? Jesus says to him some of the most famous words of all of Scripture: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” We would think that by this time, the disciples would not be asking questions like how will we know the way to where you are or “Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied” and Jesus answers him saying: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” This dialogue takes place not long before Jesus’ arrest, death and resurrection. One would think the disciples would know who Jesus is by now. But even after Jesus’ death and resurrection it will take Pentecost for true believers to emerge from this experience.

As we turn to First Peter, we uncover yet another beautiful series of passages in Scripture about who Jesus is and who we are because of our life in Him. Jesus is called a living stone, a cornerstone– chosen and precious, a living stone upon which the Church is built. A stone

rejected by some builders and yet that living stone, Jesus Christ, has become the very head of the building, a cornerstone upon which the whole integrity of the building which is the Church, depends. We are built into the building, that is the church, and we are living stones. So, imagine in your mind a building built of all of us and the Cornerstone holding us together is Jesus. AMEN yes? Together we make the Church.

Therefore, we are a chosen race, meaning God has selected us to be his own people, and

a royal priesthood, yes that means we are all priests in God's sight, and

a holy nation, dedicated to God's glory and committed to serving him as he has called us to do, and

God's own people... we belong to him, we do not have to have troubled hearts, we have a place prepared for us and Jesus Himself will show us the way;

and we are called to proclaim the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.” We are beloved and blessed by God. AMEN