

Sermon for the Fifth Sunday of Easter May 3, 2026 jj

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Let not your heart be troubled. There's definitely a reason why our Lord says that. And it's just as much needed now as when He first said it to His disciples. Lots of trouble and worry; violence is ever-present in our world. Everything that used to be loved and preserved for the good of our society seems now to be ridiculed and condemned as false, superstitious, or bigoted, unfair, racist and unloving. That's what people say about us, about you. It seems like a stark contrast that we have a summer in which we celebrate 250 years and thank God for giving us this free land, while at the same time we have so much unrest and negativity. All around us we see evil, and it does not want to share any space in peace with the good things for which we are thankful. We cannot avoid problems, persecution, misunderstanding, and conflict.

No matter what your age, you know what it's like to live with uncertainty, under pressure and stress with all that is demanded of you every day. As a member of this Lutheran Church you affirm that you have been taught the faith as summarized for us in the Catechism and taught in the Bible. You have made a public confession of the faith in full unity with this congregation. You say by your presence here, Yes, I believe this Christian faith, I make it my own, and I promise to stay in the faith for the rest of my life. I am here to be at peace with God and my neighbors, to grow in this faith and make it strong in my heart all the way to life everlasting. That very confession of yours puts a target on your back, as it does for all of us. Yet, in the midst of the "gloom and doom", for us as publicly confessing

Christians, there is still a bright spot to lift and cheer you all.

You can see that bright spot in the very first words of this reading: "Let not your heart be troubled." These words mean a whole lot more to you than simply "Don't Worry, Be Happy," especially when they come from Jesus. He doesn't stop with simply making you feel better; He is doing something real for your eternal destiny. He adds: "You believe in God, believe also in Me." And that last part, "believe in Me" is the real answer for all of us who live here in this valley of danger and sorrow. John wrote that Jesus came from God and was now returning to the Father, that is a short expression encompassing the entire mission that He accomplished for the salvation of the world, all that we say together in the Creed about what Jesus did. Jesus explained to His disciples that soon it will be time for Him to go. He was going to the cross, then He would rise from the dead, and ascend back to His Father all so that by accomplishing this entire mission He would prepare a place for them - and for us, then He would return.

Think about that and recall it to your mind whenever you face rejection and trial in this evil world. When anything in the news frightens you or repulses you, do not be discouraged. Remember that you will always belong to the Lord. And you know that where He's gone, there also is an eternal home reserved for you. Our Lord's return to heavenly glory, which we will celebrate on Ascension Day, should remind us every day: we are not of this world – you live here for a very short time. Jesus raised up our sights

away from all this evil around us and every day He gives us an eternal perspective - your ultimate goal in life is not to be found in grabbing for yourself all the valuable things of this world that you can, but rather seek ye first the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life with our Father in heaven. The only way you will have any real peace or tranquility as you endure the troubles of your life, is by looking at it the way Jesus speaks about it, and the way the Catechism teaches it.

The Jesus who ascended, will certainly also one day return for all those who are His own. He'll raise our bodies from the dust of the ground, from the depths of the oceans, or wherever else they might be. Jesus promised you a room in His Father's house, a spot in His eternal kingdom, and you didn't have to do anything to earn that privilege. The door is open to your mansion! You may sometimes feel abandoned, but that has not happened. Jesus is coming back for you – let not your heart be troubled. Jesus gave His disciples - and you as well – three important foundations for your faith to remain constant, just as you vowed to do when you joined - even in the midst of the greatest of troubles that you have to face in life. Those three foundations are: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

It might be hard to predict when will be the next time you ask the question: "Why me?" But it will probably happen sometime. And considering what we've just heard from our Lord - does it not seem crazy that any strong Christian would be so filled with doubt and confusion regarding the future? Has there ever been a time when you've played the role of Thomas and thought: "Lord, I don't even know where You're going next in my life... how can I know the way?" We know

the answer, of course, we all learned it from the Bible and Catechism. But it is so easy still to fail to realize this and make it apply every day in our life. We prefer to search in some vain hope that we'll uncover some new insight, some new truth, or some better slant on life to help us through yet another day. I can make myself a better me, so I'm told. Still our Lord's Word and Promise for us stand. His answer is there even when we refuse to see it. As Christians, we not only know where our Lord Christ has gone, but we also know how to get there.

Jesus responded to Thomas' desperate-sounding question and lays it out quite simply. He alone is the Way to everlasting life - the way of the cross with all its death and shame - the Way of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world - the Way of the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His wayward, wandering sheep - the Way of the Door of the sheepfold who lifts us over the threshold of heaven. He is the Way - and He becomes our Way when the old man of sin who lives inside us is put to death through Baptism, which is the "rebirth of water and the Holy Spirit."

But not only is Jesus the Way, He's also the Truth. He's not simply one of many who claim to have found some truth that we were searching for, but He Himself is the Truth, whether we looked for it or not. In Him Truth has its beginning and end. In Him - in the One who existed from all eternity, He who created all things and set it all in motion with the Word of His mouth – in Him Truth had its beginning and its fulfillment. When you and I are tempted to doubt and wonder like Pontius Pilate did, saying what is Truth, we need look nowhere else than this One who is the Truth – to Him who was condemned to death by lying

witnesses - and who often wasn't believed even by His own followers or family. He's our Truth, we confess Him boldly – He's the Word of God through whom we have been forever set free from the power of sin, death, and the devil.

Finally, He's not only the Way and the Truth, but - perhaps greatest of all - He's the Life. Even though He would soon be handed over to the darkest death on the cross, He achieved something magnificent. Even in that moment of deep darkness He was still the Life and the Light of men. As we sometimes hear in the Liturgy, He's the One through whom our Lord has given us the "power to become the children of God." His death is our Life, and the one who trusts in Him - even though he die - yet shall he live. For God's promise is that whoever places their trust in Jesus shall never die. He is the Life.

To fight those battles that will someday or another come your way, to stay true to the promises you made in your confirmation, you need those strong words of Jesus: let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. Those Spirit-filled words give you in your heart a faith which can sustain you through any deeply troubling time. By His gracious work on you, to claim you as His very own, your complete trust is placed in Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life - He who came from the Father, suffered, died, rose again, and then returned to the Father to prepare a place for you - He who is God Himself in the flesh of man - He who comes to His people even today in Word, water, bread and wine. He is the One in whom alone is all your trust and confidence. From Him come all our blessings of daily bread, including our freedoms and nation. And then He is coming

back on the Last Day to bring into His heavenly Paradise all who belong to Him by faith. He has prepared for you and me a place in His, and our Father's house. He is the One to whom we can confidently listen, for it's in His Word that you admit to others is true, and in His Word alone, that true peace may - and will be found. Let not your heart be troubled.

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.