

Sermon For Sunday May 3 2026

Building the Kingdom, Stone By Stone, Easter 5 (A)

“I go to prepare a place for you. ... I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.”

It sounds so wonderful. It sounds perhaps like what we imagine heaven to be. If that's so, then it's a future place, a place that we will “go to.”

That may be part of the promise Jesus was making to his disciples. The other part is in his answer to Thomas: “I am the way, the truth and the life.”

Yes, we are promised eternal life, but we are also promised that we are already housed by God, fed by God, carried by God. We already have a foot in that place Jesus prepared for us if we but look around, look within and listen. But as nice as that sounds, doesn't it often seem difficult to imagine that in this world, we should be seeing evidence of Jesus being the way, the truth and the life? If people truly believed that God is very much with us, wouldn't “the world” be a different place?

Jesus often talked about the Kingdom of heaven being here already – it's here and now – and that we must be in the process of building it. But we aren't terribly far away from the kinds of things that happened when our church was still in its formative era.

Today's reading from Acts shoves a dangerous and dark shadow into our Easter joy. Stephen, even though he was filled with the Holy Spirit and evidently giving witness to what a life lived in imitation of Jesus should look like, is stoned to death by an angry crowd. They covered their ears and shouted. Isn't that a frightening image? A manic crowd, hostile to goodness. Why? They couldn't imagine that God would become manifest in Jesus, live among human beings, die on the cross and rise. We might think to ourselves, “How sad. They had Jesus right in their midst and they missed him. We certainly wouldn't have!”

Yet, look at what happens today. People and pastors are shot in churches. Wars are started for no reason. Innocent children are hurt or killed in school shootings. Flood waters damage homes this year. Senseless car accidents involving drunk drivers kills innocent people just trying to go home. Where is this Kingdom of heaven? For that matter, where is Jesus? Has he gone to prepare a heavenly place for us and forgotten to come back?

Do our hearts become troubled? Yes, very often they do. We wonder how we can build our faith to the point where we can believe in a different world – where we can see God in the midst of hardship.

Look at Peter's letter and believe that we can drink that pure, spiritual milk that God offers us. That's where we can begin again, regardless of how old we've become in the church. We are offered that nourishment in many ways – through prayer, through the words and symbols of our liturgies, through the example of those who love us into loving ourselves because they believe in God's love for us.

Perhaps the most powerful way of growing in the spirit is through sharing in Holy Communion and believing that Jesus left this with us so we could touch him and know he is in us. There is the power. There is the mystery that explodes within us if we just open our hearts and minds to all God reveals to us. There is the well of power that helps us continue looking for ways to build that Kingdom of heaven here while we wait to take our place in the world to come.

Peter reminds us that we are chosen, we are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God. Do you believe that? Do you really?

If not, how can we help you to begin to grasp the meaning of those words?

When people do begin to believe these words, they find themselves doing amazing things. We might first think of those people like Stephen who give their lives for what they believe. But then we must also think of ourselves who may be called to build the kingdom in different ways, through teaching, writing, through the example of our integrity, and genuineness.

Jesus never promised a safe and trouble-free life for those who followed him – far from it. He was always very honest about the fact that “the world” would

most often cover its ears and shout, and sometimes throw stones. But if we try – if we believe that we are chosen, that there is truth in the saying that one candle brings light into the darkness – then we are building, piece by piece. We are adding stone upon stone, and we will feel the difference in ourselves.

We need to be careful, however, not to think we have to complete the building of the Kingdom either all by ourselves, or at least in our lifetime. Our human desire to be successful, complete, wholly satisfied, can be a stumbling block for us just as rejecting Jesus was a stumbling block according to Peter.

The Kingdom here will never be finished, it just continues to grow. We are a part, a critical and unique part, but not the whole. There is always more to learn and more to offer of ourselves to others. Evil will never cease trying to destroy the goodness of a holy place. And so the need to continue building ourselves up, but also to work together, pray together, become that holy nation, a holy community, right here with those sitting with and around you.

Each and every one of you is called. Each and every one of you is invited to follow Jesus who is our way, our truth and our life.

The Good News is that Jesus is with us. He has promised never to leave us. We are holy. We are chosen. We are God's beloved.