

Bible Study
Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year A
May 14, 2017

[RCL] Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14

Acts 7:55-60

The ministry, arrest, and death of Jesus echo through the story of Stephen. The apostles who knew Jesus prayed over and laid hands on Stephen to commission him in his ministry. Stephen's work following the way of Jesus threatened the established power structure and authorities; he was arrested, brought before the council and the high priest, and put to death.

These echoes continue as Stephen prays for the Lord to receive his spirit and for those who are perpetrating his gruesome murder to be forgiven. Stephen's story, however, is more than a recapitulation of Jesus' own story, as though in the parallels Jesus may be dimly found. Even unto death, Stephen perseveres—by the power of the Spirit—in *proclaiming* the glory of God and the presence of Jesus at God's right hand.

Though the crowd may have “covered their ears,” Stephen's words and actions in proclaiming Jesus will live beyond him, participating in the resurrection reality promised by Jesus. New life will come forth as the Good News spreads; remember that a “young man named Saul” has been witness to all of these events.

- When have you known someone to continue to proclaim Jesus even in the face of great adversity?
- Name a time when you were acutely aware of the glory of God.
- When have the words and/or actions of others in proclaiming Jesus brought forth new life in you? When have your words and/or actions in proclaiming Jesus brought forth new life in others?

Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

Deliver me—rescue me—lead me—guide me—save me.

This selection from Psalm 31 is a prayer for relief, addressed to the one constant source of strength. In the midst of chaos, uncertainty, and oppression, God is refuge, rock, and stronghold. This is a prayer of trust and commendation to God, who is faithful and whose love is steadfast: “Into your hands I commend my spirit. . .” These are the words spoken by Jesus on the cross (Luke 23:46) and likewise by Stephen at his death (Acts 7:59).

As Jesus and Stephen show us, trusting and commending ourselves to God often means letting go of the ways we may want to be delivered, rescued, led, guided, and saved. This is, therefore,

not an easy psalm to pray. To commend our whole selves to God means to trust *all* to the refuge of God's love.

- Have you ever prayed these or some other similar words?
- Have you ever experienced God's deliverance in a way that you did not envision or expect?

1 Peter 2:2-10

This passage from First Peter speaks of what it is to be God's people, "chosen and precious in God's sight." We are reminded of the Baptismal Covenant we renewed together on Easter with a commitment to "continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers."

Study, prayer and worship, and fellowship are the pattern of Christian life. They are the marks of disciples—the footprints of those who follow Jesus. And we follow Jesus *together*, as a community; we are not only God's *persons*, but also God's *people*. We must engage our individual lives of faith with the life of the community—seeking the "pure, spiritual milk" of God's word in study, offering our praise and thanksgiving in worship, and then proclaiming "the mighty acts" of God to the world. There is always room for growth among God's people—we are "living stones," not a people set in stone.

And we do all of this the only way we know how: with God's help.

- As a follower of Jesus, how are you engaged in study, prayer and worship, and fellowship?
- How does your community support you in living this pattern of Christian – that is, disciple – life? How do you support your community in living this life?
- Where do you sense room for growth in your community?

John 14:1-14

This passage shares a story—a conversation between Jesus and his disciples—which took place before the Great Three Days, and we now have the opportunity to listen to the conversation with Easter ears and Resurrection eyes.

Thomas and Philip address Jesus with a title of respect and deference: "Lord." They recognize who Jesus is—the Word made flesh, the light of the world, the bread of life, the Good Shepherd—but do they *know* Jesus—do they *believe*?

Jesus reminds them of the intimate relationship between himself and the Father: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." To know Jesus is to know the Father. To know the "works" of Jesus is also to know the Father, but even more than this, those who know and believe will participate in the work of the Son and the Father. This is the work of Easter people—to know

and believe God dwelling in each of us and then to participate in the work God is calling us to in the world.

- What does it mean to believe and to know? Are these the same? How might they be different?
- To what work is God calling you in this place and at this time?

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