

5th Sunday of Easter (A)

He is the Way

John 14: 1–14; Acts 7:55–60

You may know what it's like to stand at a kind of crossroads – when the path you assumed you were on suddenly disappears, and there isn't a clear sign pointing you forward. It may be a medical diagnosis or a relationship changing shape. Sometimes it's simply the gradual realisation that life isn't going to unfold the way you expected.

In those moments we want clarity. We want a plan – a sign that says, “This way. Follow these steps, and you'll be okay.”

But in today's Gospel Jesus does something else. He knows he will soon die, and he can see his friends starting to wobble. He doesn't give them a map of what lies ahead. Instead, he gives them the gift of himself:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled...
Believe in God, believe also in me.”

The verses we hear this morning come from Jesus' farewell discourse – that long, intimate conversation that runs from chapter fourteen to the end of chapter seventeen in John's Gospel. Jesus knows his death is drawing near, and he speaks out of that awareness: words shaped by urgency, tenderness, and, above all, profound love.

Time is short, and he wants those he loves to hold on to what truly matters as they learn to live without his physical presence.

Some of his words feel especially poignant, perhaps because we so often hear them at funerals – when grief is raw and hearts are unsettled.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

Jesus doesn't deny the reality of suffering or loss. He doesn't promise that the path ahead will be easy or clear. Instead, he offers the disciples something deeper: the assurance that their relationship with him won't end with his death. It will certainly change, but it will also deepen and become something new and lasting. He'll no longer be physically with them, yet they won't be abandoned.

That promise reaches beyond the disciples, to us. We can't always see the way ahead, and the future can feel uncertain – even frightening. And yet Jesus is here with us.

“Believe in God, believe in me.”

When Jesus speaks of belief here, he's not talking about intellectual certainty – having the right answers or ticking the correct theological boxes. He's talking about trust: trust in the love that holds us; a love that, as Paul reminds us, neither death nor life, neither the present nor the future, nor anything else in all creation can separate us from.

We see that trust embodied powerfully in Stephen as he meets his death by stoning. Stephen doesn't panic. He knows Jesus is with him. And so, even as the stones are thrown, he can pray, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,” and then – with astonishing grace – ask forgiveness for those who are killing him.

Stephen is able to die like that – with an untroubled heart and remarkable mercy – because he has learned, over time, to trust God, and because he knows that Jesus is with him.

It's this kind of trust that opens us to the promise Jesus goes on to offer:

“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. 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, so that where I am, there you may be also.”

This isn't a promise designed to help us escape the tough realities of life; it's a promise that grounds us in belonging. It speaks of a home prepared for us – a place held open in love. It echoes a prayer we often say at the end of the Prayers of the People:

...at the end of our journey,
we know the joy of our homecoming
and the welcome of your embrace.

Then Thomas speaks up – probably expressing what the others thinking.

“Lord, we do not know where you are going.
How can we know the way?”

It's such a human question—honest and vulnerable.

And Jesus responds with words that have echoed through the centuries:

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

More than anything, these familiar words point us towards relationship. Jesus doesn't offer a map or a formula, but himself; not a set of instructions, but companionship – with him, trusting him, letting him guide us on the journey.

Regrettably, these words are sometimes used by Christians in ways that can sound arrogant or excluding – suggesting certainty without humility, answers without listening. Yet the deeper I try to follow Jesus, the more I experience this *way* not as certainty without questions, but as a lifelong journey of discovery: a journey that includes doubt and searching, struggle and growth – but always in the company of Christ.

Jesus isn't removed from the messiness of life. He walks with us through trial and tragedy; he also shares in our laughter, our tenderness, and the ordinary stuff of our days.

W. H. Auden captures something of this journey in his epic poem *For the Time Being*:

He is the way.
Follow Him through the Land of Unlikeness;
You will see rare beasts,
And have unique adventures.

He is the truth.
Seek Him in the Kingdom of Anxiety;
You will come to a great city
That has expected your return for years.

He is the life.
Love Him in the World of the Flesh;
And at your marriage all its occasions
Shall dance for joy.^[1]

Auden reminds us that if we walk with Jesus, we learn to expect the unexpected. There are rare beasts and unique adventures. Just when we think we've got it all worked out, something new appears; just when we think we've arrived, another challenge – or another invitation to grow – is waiting.

He also suggests that truth isn't found by outrunning our anxiety, but by turning towards it – meeting what frightens us with open hands. And it's there, in the flesh and vulnerability of life, that we discover God: not outside it, but within it – in our living and loving, our failing and beginning again, our longing and hope.

We find God in one another, too. And we love Christ by loving the world of which we – and he – are a part.

He is the way – follow him.
He is the truth – seek him.
He is the life – love him.

This is a lifelong journey of relationship, one that culminates not in certainty but in trust; not in fear but in joy – a journey held by a love that will never end and will never let us go.

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