

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt
Fifth Sunday of Easter - Year A
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Acts 7:55-60
Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16
I Peter 2:2-10
John 14:1-14
05/07/2023

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

[Jesus said to the disciples:] 1“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. 2In 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? 3And 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. 4And you know the way to the place where I am going.” 5Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” 6Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” 8Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” 9Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. 11Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of

the works themselves. 12Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. 13I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”

The Gospel of Our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Words

Good morning! It's no secret that I have a love for most things automotive. It's a passion that runs long and deep, well into elementary school. So, cars have often been a way that friends have connected with me. One friend, Jamie, was the campus director for Wheeling Jesuit University, and as we spent more and more time together, the conversation of cars would come up. But one occurrence sticks out in my mind because of the strange Philadelphia accent that Jamie had. “What do you think of Valva Tim?” he asked. “What?” I replied. “You know, Valva.” he said again. And back and forth we went for what felt like an eternity before I finally pieced together that he was saying “Volvo.” Jamie was saying a word, a word I even knew, I just didn't understand it.

It's a similar situation in today's Gospel reading. Jesus is speaking, using words that the disciples know and understand, they just aren't clicking. It begins with the phrase “the way.” Angela Parker, a New Testament scholar points out that *“In Greek the term hodos is the word for way, road, or highway. While the term can serve as an understanding for an actual road or way, hodos can also mean a journey or a trip. However,*

*there is also a connotation that serves metaphorical purposes. Hodos can also represent the ‘way’ or the ‘way of life’ that connotes behavior.”*¹ So while Jesus means one understanding of the word, the disciples take it another more literal way.

But you have to give the disciples some credit. Their misunderstanding can be somewhat forgiven when put into the context of the story. This section of the Gospel of John signifies the beginning of what scholars call the “Final Discourse” which begins with chapter 14. Jesus has just finished his last meal with the disciples in the upper room, and has told them a great many things, some of which we hear every Maundy Thursday. But chiefly among them was a strong reminder that Jesus is going to die, that his time with them is coming to an end. The disciples’ world has just been turned upside down. Another scholar summarizes their pain this way: *“The disciples who gather with Jesus for the farewell meal almost certainly have a measure of heartburn... They have been following Jesus since he began his public ministry, but they are, at best, adolescent in their understanding of his message, vision, and mission... They have been looking for a Messiah and believe they have found him. They believe the Messiah to be immortal, but he is about to be executed. They have a vision of a messianic strongman who will liberate the people from occupation, but he is about to be seemingly defeated by oppression. They believe that the Messiah will usher in an eternal kingdom of peace, but they are about to experience horror beyond their most terrified imaginations.”*²

¹<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fifth-sunday-of-easter/commentary-on-john-141-14-6>

² Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word. Year A, Volume 2.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. pp. 466-468.

And into this pain and confusion, Jesus speaks words of comfort and hope. If you were at Sharon's memorial service yesterday you will have heard a part of this Gospel text. It's been used for years to help bring comfort to those who mourn. In light of the shooting at the Allen Premium Outlets outside Dallas, Texas I can't help but wonder if groups of Christians will be gathering to read this text again as they bury seven more victims of gun violence.

I pray that these words can help those who have lost loved ones. Because, as one scholar pointed out, this isn't like one friend telling another friend to relax and not to worry. These are words spoken by Jesus Christ himself: *"As you commit yourselves totally to God in relation to trust, he says, so must you do to me. The pain of life, separation, the cross cannot last forever. Live in hope."*³ Hope... what a word. Some of you may remember the name my seminary professor picked out for the congregation they started in the Upper Midwest. People of Hope Lutheran Church.

Now, in that hope, in the season of Easter, we gather precisely because of God's radical work that took something that seemed impossible and made it a reality. Another scholar drives this home writing: *"The opening imperative of the Farewell Discourse is not just an affective command. 'Do not let your hearts be troubled,' is a direction to the disciples's will. It is a command to stand firm, even when their hearts abandon them. Their theology of a messianic strongman will be replaced with the revolution that only engaged compassion can bring. Birth and death are fraught with pangs and the potential for transformation."*⁴

³ Sloyan, Gerard S. *John*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. p. 178.

⁴ Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word. Year A, Volume 2*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. p. 470.

It's that idea of believing, even when my own heart may have abandoned me, that helps me see the hope in Jesus' words. God isn't done with us, and God won't let pain, suffering, or even death get the last word. And so, as the Psalmist has written, let us believe: *"1In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge; let me never be | put to shame; deliver me | in your righteousness. 2Incline your | ear to me; make haste to de- | liver me. 3Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe, for you are my crag | and my stronghold; for the sake of your name, lead | me and guide me. 4Take me out of the net that they have secretly | set for me, for you are my tow- | er of strength. 5Into your hands I com- | mend my spirit, for you have redeemed me, O Lord, | God of truth. 15My times are | in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who | persecute me. 16Let your face shine up- | on your servant; save me in your | steadfast love."*⁵ Amen.

⁵ Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16 NRSV