**Weekend of Sunday, May 7, 2023**

**5th Sunday of Easter/Lectionary X/Year A**

**First Reading: Acts 7:55-60**

**Second Reading: 1 Peter 2:2-10**

**Gospel Reading: John 14:1-14**

**Sermon Title: *“Speak the Name of Jesus!”***

**Theme**

Christ is the cornerstone of God’s saving work and the foundation of our lives. We are God’s chosen, holy people who continuously celebrate and declare the mercy of God we experience through Jesus Christ.

**Texts:**

**First Reading: Acts 7:55-60**

55Filled with the Holy Spirit, [Stephen] gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56“Look,” he said, “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” 57But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. 58Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 60Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he died.

**Second Reading: 1 Peter 2:2-10**

2Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation—3if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.
 4Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and 5like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6For it stands in scripture:
 “See, I am laying in Zion a stone,
  a cornerstone chosen and precious;
 and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”
7To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,
 “The stone that the builders rejected
  has become the very head of the corner,”
8and
 “A stone that makes them stumble,
  and a rock that makes them fall.”
They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.
 9But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.
 10Once you were not a people,
  but now you are God’s people;
 once you had not received mercy,
  but now you have received mercy.

**Gospel: John 14:1-14**

 [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.”

**Sermon**

This is a strange Gospel Reading for the 5th Sunday *after* Easter. We are back on the infamous night of his betrayal. Jesus and his disciples were gathered in the upper room to celebrate the Passover.

John, the author of the Gospel, barely mentions the meal, but as the night went on, Jesus's tone became more somber and sullen. He used elements of the Passover meal to reveal his ultimate mission. Just as his cousin, John the Baptist, had said years earlier, Jesus is 1:29"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

By the time of our Gospel Reading, Judas had already left the room to betray him and Peter had embarrassed himself twice.

In as clear of terms as he could have used, he told them about his imminent departure, but also told them why he had to go. For Jesus, to *go* means to *go* through death and resurrection to ascension to complete his ultimate mission, to prepare a place for them in his 2"Father's house."

In the KJV, Jesus said, “2In my Father's house are many mansions.” That sounds very glamorous. I’d be happy with a dorm room in God’s house. No matter what the digs are actually like, Jesus was referring to a permanent place of everlasting fellowship with the divine community, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That must have sounded good to his disciples who had been traveling with Jesus, seemingly aimlessly, for the past three years without, in their understanding, a clear mission.

Jesus had to *go* prepare a place for them, and all who call him Lord, because the *misseo dei*, the mission of God, and therefore his mission, was to draw all creation into oneness, full communion. To prepare for the consummation of the mission of God, Jesus had to *go* to do that work.

If I could separate myself from knowing how the story ends, and put myself in the room, I can understand:

* Why Peter refused to have Jesus wash his feet,
* Why Thomas asked what I think would have been a pretty obvious question: “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”
* And why Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”

We can just hear the exasperation with all of them in Jesus's voice when he responded to Philip.

9“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.

Now I took the time to re-read that part of the Gospel Reading because it is critically important. We are Christians because we are followers of Christ. And we are followers of Christ because we believe that in the person of Jesus, we have the revelation of God – I say that all the time, don't I? God revealed in Jesus Christ? Jesus Christ is how God has revealed God's self to us. To put it even more simply, Jesus is all we need to know.

Last week's sermon entitled, "Love God and Love Other People," certainly got the attention of many. If you recall, my issue in that sermon was that I think the Church (capital C, the larger, not Zion or any other local church specifically) tends to think that it and its perceived mission is more important than the mission of Jesus, which is pretty simple, "Love God and Love Other People." And while it might seem offensive to some to say that, the very documentation that I mentioned last week was void of the name of "Jesus," "Christ," or "Christian." Don’t those three words define the church - a community of little Christs under the lordship of the one Christ Jesus?

Now, as last week's sermon marinated in my brain, I thought of one simple solution to the problem. Are you ready? Here it comes: Speak the name of Jesus into your life – into your thoughts, into your conversations, and into your actions. And just to be clear about what I mean, I literally mean to speak the name of Jesus into your life.

* When asked what you're doing Sunday morning, just say, "Worshiping Jesus and learning how to be more like him."
* When asked what's on your mind just say, "Thinking about how Jesus would respond in this situation."
* When asked what gives you peace and joy, just say, "Jesus who already has a place ready for me to spend eternity."

Stephen, the faithful disciple and hero of the First Reading from Acts, knew this. As he faced imminent death, he had a vision of Jesus and he called out to him, he spoke the name of Jesus and that gave him the peace to face his death.

I have news for you. You're all gonna die! Me too. We have a choice. Just a couple of chapters earlier, Jesus said,

12:25Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.

So I exhort you again, speak the name of Jesus into all your life's situations because he has been working on our behalf for a blessed eternity.

**Raisin’ the Bar Challenge**

It must have been frustrating for Jesus. He was hours away from the greatest moment in human history – the salvation of humankind depends on his faithfulness!

He trained up his little band of disciples to carry on his ministry after his ascension, and then, at that pregnant moment, his own disciples, with whom he had been carrying out his ministry of preaching and teaching and performing signs and miracles for three years, seemed oblivious to the most basic concept of his messiahship – that

* he and God his Father are one;
* that all his activity was prescribed by his Heavenly Father;
* And that it all culminates in an eternal reward prepared for those who call him Lord.

So let me ask you an important question, Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?

In his letter, our Second Reading, Peter used the metaphor of a stone to describe what God is doing. He quoted Isaiah who prophesied that God was sending us a stone which is to become the cornerstone of Zion. That stone is Jesus Christ, and Zion is a metaphor for God's faithful people. And he further calls the faithful people "living stones" that are to be built into a spiritual house. Isaiah said of those living stones, those faithful people, whoever believes in him, the cornerstone, Jesus Christ, will not be put to shame.

But Peter also acknowledged that stones can be stumbling blocks for those who don't believe. So I ask you again, Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, God wants to be known through his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. And so that is why I say *"I speak the name of Jesus!"* And not only do I claim it as my tagline, but I also want you to claim it too. And not just claim it, I want you to do it. I want you to speak the name of Jesus into your life's situations because it will change everything for you in your life now, and in eternity. And it might also change everything for those to whom you speak the name of Jesus.

**Prayer**

Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ told us that he is the way, the truth, and the life. It's not that hard of a concept but sometimes we can be dumb as rocks. Be patient with us as we grow in faith by speaking the name of Jesus into all our life's situations, and help us to become living stones. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen