

**Weekend of Sunday, May 10, 2020**

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

**First Reading: Acts 17:55-60**

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

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

**Sermon Title: “Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life”**

## **Theme**

*On the night that he is to be arrested, Jesus shares final words with his disciples. As the one through whom God is known, he promises to go before them and act on their behalf.*

## **Text**

[Jesus said to the disciples:] <sup>1</sup>“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>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? <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>And you know the way to the place where I am going.” <sup>5</sup>Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” <sup>6</sup>Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup>If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

<sup>8</sup>Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” <sup>9</sup>Jesus 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’? <sup>10</sup>Do 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. <sup>11</sup>Believe 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. <sup>12</sup>Very 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. <sup>13</sup>I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup>If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”

## Sermon

As far as the Gospel Reading is concerned, here on this Fifth Sunday of Easter, we find ourselves back on the infamous "night in which he was betrayed."

Yes, that's right, we are at the beginning of what Bible scholars call, Jesus' "Farewell Discourse," a three-chapter talk that Jesus had with his disciples just before he left the safety of the upper room, where he had celebrated the Passover, his last supper with his disciples before he led the remaining eleven Disciples out to the Garden of Gethsemane where he will be betrayed leading to his eventual crucifixion.

I bet that Jesus thought this last talk would clear up the mystery of what was about to take place. But as you can tell, the Disciples were still in the dark.

For example, Thomas who was stuck in the present dimension, can't understand where Jesus could possibly be going that he and the others can't follow. And Philip tried to just short-cut the whole purpose and Passion of Jesus by saying, "Jesus, just show us the Father, and all our confusion will be cleared up, and so will our doubt."

Have you ever experienced a time that was as confusing as that? Well, likely we have. Likely, the time we are living it right now, a time unprecedented in human history.

- We have dissension between the Federal government and the states.
- We have dissension between the states.
- We have dissension between the states and their constituencies.
- And we have dissension between the countries of the world.

There are several strategies for how we will get through this Covid-19 pandemic, and no one is happy about any of them. If someone could just tell us how this all works out, we too "will be satisfied," to borrow language from Philip.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, welcome to this 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pandemic. It has now been eight weeks since we had the opportunity to gather in this holy place to sing praises to God, confess our shortcomings, hear his words of assurance, celebrate the means of grace around this altar of the LORD, and enjoy each other's fellowship.

If you are a news junkie like me, then you know that the experts and our civil authorities are just as unsure about what happens next as the Disciples were on that fateful night.

I am very familiar with this Gospel Reading and that is because it is a favorite to be read at funerals. And that is no surprise because in it Jesus foretold that he was going ahead of his Disciples to prepare a place for them in his Father's house where they will once again be reunited.

It only makes sense to me anyway that this kind of a comment would be confusing, and the two issues raised; one by Thomas, and the other by Philip, are questions that all the Disciples wanted to be answered, and the answers are of critical importance to us too. Let's dig in a little deeper.

I'd like to start with Philip's question first. Jesus said he was going ahead of them, to prepare a place for them where they would eventually be reunited. This place is in "his Father's house." Check it out for yourselves, no one throughout Biblical history dared call the God of Israel, Father. It was at his baptism where God himself called Jesus his beloved Son, and after that Jesus began calling God his heavenly Father. But Jesus also taught that God was "our Father" too, and while we are used to hearing this kind of language, it was radical talk then, and to the Jews, it was blasphemous.

And since God, our Father is just as mysterious to us as God the Father was to the Disciples 2000 years ago, we can relate to Philip who, out of exasperation said, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."

Have you ever asked a question that sounded more intelligent in your head, than it did the moment it left your lips? I have. This is one reason that I will not get nominated to be bishop of the NEOS – I am not very well-known. And the reason I am not very well-known is that I rarely stand up at Synod Assemblies and say something. And the reason I rarely stand up at Synod Assemblies and say something is that there are a lot of people there who are a lot smarter than me, and I fear embarrassing myself and sounding stupid – all of which are great reasons not to nominate me to be bishop.

I suspect the moment Philip uttered his question, he regretted it, but it was too late. Those words were out there.

And I can hear the exasperation in Jesus' voice. It is quite literally the eleventh hour, and Philip, speaking on behalf of the rest, had just articulated that they don't understand what is going on. We can relate, can't we. We want our lives back and yet they are in the hands of others, who we hope are smarter than we are when it comes to global viruses and their effects.

Jesus turned to Philip and said,

***"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'?"***

Oh man, knowing what we know now, I don't ever want to hear Jesus say words like that to me.

From there Jesus went on a short diatribe about how he and the Father are one, and therefore if they have seen himself, then they *have* seen the Father. There is more, but essentially, Jesus said, if we know him then we know all we need to about God our Father because his purpose in coming from the Father was to be the revelation of the Father; Emmanuel – God with us; the incarnation of the Father.

Sisters and brothers, this is my first important point: The reason it is of critical importance to know Jesus is because Jesus is how God wants to be known. And because of his human nature, Jesus *knows us* and is himself *knowable* and wants to grow that relationship.

And now to Thomas' question. Remembering that this evening was at the end of a confusing week in which Jesus seemed to grow more and more agitated and confrontational as the week went by, Jesus just cryptically told the Disciples that he was leaving them to go to his Father's house, his Father being a being that they were not very clear about, to prepare a place for them to reunite. Jesus said, <sup>4</sup>"And you know the way to the place where I am going."

'Wait, what? Um, no, Jesus, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Thomas said, but he was speaking for all of them, and I must say,

us too. You see, Thomas, and we too, we need data. You know, so we can plug it into the GPS of our cars.

In 1978, I had a job as a pizza delivery man when I was in college in Angola, IN. Now you might think that someone from out of town might have had a rough go of delivering food in a strange city before GPS. But the thing you need to know is that the town had a town circle and the streets were perfectly aligned NSEW from there. In other words, every street had an east or west end or north or south end. So to find 546 West Mill Street, I only had to know how many streets north of the city center Mill Street was, then turn left and travel for five blocks and look for the house on the left side of the street.

That was the kind of data that Thomas wanted. His Lord Jesus was leaving them to go prepare a place for them to reunite and he, Jesus, presumed they knew the data on how to get there.

But once again, Jesus is speaking of a place that is not on a map, there is no data to plug into a GPS. In a sense, at least for Jesus, it's much easier than that. My second important point is that we need to get out of our human way of thinking and think spiritually to understand what Jesus is saying, to know specifically where he is going so that we can be reunited with him there.

He, Jesus, said, ***"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup>If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."***

### **Raisin' the Bar Challenge**

Thomas knows neither the way nor where Jesus is going. And Philip wants to see God.

These disciples represent us, now, in our need and confusion, don't they?

But Jesus himself explained, *he is* the way, the truth, and the life. *He is himself* the presence of God. The amazing thing is that he went to God then by going to the cross, and he made that place of suffering to be the very dwelling place of God with us.

So we could say that in every place of suffering, we ought to see the risen Christ, already there, already at work through his Holy Spirit. Today, in hospitals, and food distribution outlets, in the wellness check of our neighbors, everywhere there are those who know God by knowing Jesus, there is an opportunity to bring a little Jesus to the suffering of others.

We miss gathering together for worship and fellowship in this house of God – oh how we miss it. But it matters not that we are not in this one great house together. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, God has mercy on us and *makes us* the house of God and the witnesses to God's mighty acts, that may well be performed with our hands. In the Spirit, Jesus' words come to us, to our own homes, and make our homes to be part of this house of God with many rooms.

### **Prayer**

Merciful God, look upon us, we who consider ourselves faithful, as we ask you to strengthen our spirits for the living of these days. We are tired of it, and we want to get out of our homes and back to our lives. Remind us that no matter where we are or what we do, that you are always with us. And then, when our days are full, take us to your house where we can live with you forever. We pray this in Jesus' name.  
Amen