

## Fifth Sunday of Easter – The Jesus Way

- Acts 7:55-60                      *The story of Stephen, Deacon and martyr*
- 1 Peter 2:2-10                    *... like living stone ... be built into a spiritual house*
- John 14:1-14                      *I go to prepare a place for you ...*
- Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16              *Into your hands I commend my spirit*

**Collect:** *Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

**Give ear O heavens, and I will speak; let the earth hear the words of my mouth.**

**For I will proclaim the Name of the Lord, and ascribe greatness to our God.**

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

What’s he talking about?

Some years ago Barb and I were living down in Federal Way, and we would often go down to the Hylebos Wetlands where they have this wonderful nature trail and boardwalk. We’d go down to get in our “steps,” and although you could hear the the sounds of the city with cars passing by off in the distance, and see the jets flying overhead on their way to or from SeaTac, you really had the sense of being away from all that. You feel like you’re in the heart of a primeval forest, with the squirrels and chipmunks chattering in the trees above, the foxes shuffling through the underbrush beneath, and the birds calling out to one another in the dense canopy of a broadleaf jungle.

It really is a magical place to spend some time together and apart.

One day when we had finished our walk we were coming back to the car and I noticed one of my shoes didn't feel right as I walked through the parking lot. When I got to the car I lifted my foot and saw the remains of one of the biggest, juiciest slugs we've got in these parts.

Yuck!

Well, I grabbed a stick and tried to get rid of those remains, but they were stuck on the shoe and in the tread, and the slime just wasn't coming off, so I took off the shoe, tossed it into the trunk and drove home with a shoe on one foot and sock on the other. I figured I would take care of my shoe when I got home (where I had tools and a variety of cleaning solutions available).

I got home and worked on my shoe for a few minutes and nothing worked. Don't tell anyone, but I am not a very patient man when it comes to things like that, so I decided I would just toss my shoes out. They weren't new or valuable by any stretch of the imagination; it wouldn't be any great loss.

Our daughter Jen came over to see what I was doing and I told her what had happened. After she got done laughing she said, "Here, let me try." And she went to work, patiently & diligently scraping away until she got the sole of my shoe all cleaned.

It dawned on me: She was willing to do for me what I wasn't able or willing to do for myself.

**That's the Jesus way.**

You may remember on Maundy Thursday during Holy Week, we always have the story from John's Gospel of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. Jesus says, "Let me do this for you," and the disciples are horrified. Most of them consent because that's the way most of us are. We do as we're told. Peter objected strenuously, though, and I think most of us can relate to that.

Most of us watch where we step and are on the lookout for slugs, snails, and doggie-doo; we wear shoes and socks and bathe or shower regularly, we really don't want strangers or even people we kind-of-know looking at, let alone touching our ancient, gnarly feet.

So while some will go through the foot-washing ceremony, others will sort of take advantage of the handwashing option, and yet others will quietly sit and pray in their pews, and all of that's OK, because ...

**That's the Jesus way.**

You see, like my daughter, Jesus is willing to do for us what we are unwilling or unable to do for ourselves.

**That's the Jesus way.**

In the other Gospels, Jesus reminds his disciples that we aren't to be like the Gentiles. The Gentiles are always jockeying for position, seeking to lord it over one another. In Jesus' day, everyone had their place and everyone knew their place. There were those who would bow down to you, and there were those to whom you would bow down.

But Jesus says, “Take the lowest seat at the banquet so that you may be invited to come up closer.

When someone strikes you on the one cheek, they have stolen your dignity. When that happens, offer them your other cheek; that is your gift to them.

When someone compels you to walk a mile through a slug-infested jungle, they have stolen your body. When that happens, go an extra mile; that is your gift to them.

When they steal your cloak, they have stolen your shelter. When that happens, give them your shirt; that is your gift to them.”

Why? Because ...

### **That’s the Jesus way.**

I tell you this because the foot-washing episode in John’s Gospel takes place at the Last Supper, which is where today’s Gospel reading takes place, and context is everything.

As Christians, as Children of the Resurrection, we are invited (“commanded,” really) to approach the world “Jesus’ Way.”

If we want to know “What Would Jesus Do,” we really only need to look and see what Jesus did.

In the Gospel today, Jesus says, “Fear not. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.”

That word “believe” has little to do with what goes on up here between our ears. It has to do with what goes on here in our heart. To “believe” is to embrace. Just like in the Nicene Creed, when we say

“We believe in one God ... we believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ ... we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life,” we’re not speaking from the intellect, but from the heart.

We embrace God who created each of us AND all of us. We embrace God who redeemed each of us AND all of us. We embrace God who sanctifies each of us AND all of us.

Jesus says, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

“Why?” we ask.

“Because,” says Jesus, “in my Father’s house there are many mansions (KJV) ... many “dwelling places” (NRSV). I’m not leaving so much as I’m going to prepare a place for you.”

Jesus, the Carpenter, ever the son of a carpenter, says, “I’m going to make room for you; I’m going to make space for you.”

Those words “mansion” and “dwelling places” don’t really convey what Jesus is saying. He’s not talking about building single family dwellings, condos, casitas, granny flats, or guest rooms. He’s really talking about making room for all of us – expanding the living space for an ever-larger family of God.

So, what does that look like?

There’s a story (I think it’s a true story) of a small village nestled in the Alps. During the War the doctor had been called away to serve the military, so an old nurse was transferred in to take care of their medical needs. She would function as the mid-wife when babies were

born, bandage up wounds, set broken bones, and take care of folks as they were dying. She would administer medical care as best she could with what few supplies they had.

On Sundays there was only one small church in town, but she was the lone Protestant in a Catholic village. When the bell would ring on Sunday mornings the village would gather to worship, and Elsa the nurse would join them. They would pray to God in Latin, while she would sit in the back pew and pray to God in Luther's High German. They would receive communion by mouth, while she would "feed on him in her heart by faith, with thanksgiving" – in Luther's High German.

After the war ended, Elsa stayed on, continuing to serve the village, taking care of all their medical needs until the day finally came when Jesus called her home.

Although she wasn't Catholic, she was buried from the village church. She wasn't Catholic, so she couldn't be buried in the church graveyard. The villagers begged the priest and bishop to make an exception, but the Canons forbade it, so they had to bury her in an unconsecrated grave in the commoner's graveyard that sat next to a stone wall that separated it from the Catholic graveyard.

That evening, when day was done, villagers snuck out to Elsa's grave and, in the light of a full moon, began to dismantle the wall alongside Elsa's grave stone by stone. Over the course of a few hours they expanded and reassembled the wall so that the wall that once had kept Elsa out now included her in.

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

You can read that statement as something exclusive: If you’re not part of my group, my tribe, my faith ... if you vote for the wrong color or the wrong candidate ... if you pray in Latin instead of High German, or Spanish instead of Elizabethan English, or standing instead of kneeling, you’re beyond the pale. No Ticket, no Laundry!

But that’s not ... .. **the Jesus way.**

Instead, Jesus says, “I’m going to make space for you, and for you, and for you, and you ... This stone the builders rejected is going to be the keystone, the cornerstone, the centerpiece of God’s creation.”

The question left for us, as the children of the resurrection is this:

How will we participate in the building of God’s kingdom? How will we move the stones further out to bring more people in?

Jesus says, “When you feed those who hunger, you’re moving stones. When you give drink to those who thirst, you’re moving stones. When you visit those who mourn, you’re moving stones. When you visit those in prison or help them in their freedom, you’re moving stones. When you clean slimy gunk off the old man’s shoes, you’re moving stones. When you do for others the things they cannot or will not do for themselves, you’re moving stones.”

We do these things as children of the resurrection. Why? Because ...

### **That’s the Jesus way.**

Sermon delivered by the Rev. Keith Axberg (Ret.) to St. Paul’s Episcopal Church (Mount Vernon, WA)  
Easter 5 (05/03/2026)