

The Fifth Sunday after Easter
May 3, 2026
St. Michael's Church
The Rev. Joshua Wong
Gospel reading: John 14:1-14

Let us pray: *Holy Spirit, guide us into all truth, that we may know you as you truly are, and in knowing you, find our true selves. Amen.*

Today is the fifth of the seven weeks of Eastertide. Between now and Pentecost Sunday on May 24, we will continue exploring Jesus' teachings on faith and intimate communion with God. This week's reading from the Gospel of John is rich in so many important truths, but it also includes one of the most famous verses in the New Testament: "Do not let your hearts be troubled, Believe in God, believe also in me."

This sentence is found in the midst of Jesus comforting his followers before he heads to the cross and his ascension to heaven. Jesus tells them, "I am with you only a little longer" and "Where I am going, you cannot come" We catch the disciples at a time of great anxiety for they waited so long for the Messiah to arrive to save them, and they have bore witness to the power Jesus, and now he is leaving them? What will they do? Thomas says out loud what they're all thinking: "How

can we know the way?” They must have felt a sense of abandonment and confusion. It is at this place of panic, that we find this today’s passage.

In Pope Leo’s recent address to Archbishop of Canterbury, Sara Mullally during her visit to Rome, he said,” ‘Throughout these days of Eastertide, the first words spoken by the risen Christ resound throughout the Church: “Peace be with you.” This greeting invites us not only to accept the Lord’s gift of peace, but also to be messengers of his peace.”

Although our gospel passage is short, but it is filled with relevancy that affects our world today. We need peace in a world that pulls us away unity with God and one another. We have political leaders that want to destroy other human cultures and the ecological world. What do we do when we are stressed out in life? What does the phrase, “The peace of the Lord be always with you mean?”

In this section of John, Jesus speaks about his departure and that the Holy Spirit is replacing him. The post-Easter church is about to be born, a community that, Jesus insists, will go on to do even “greater works” than he did. For the writer of John,

the rise of the Spirited-church is an even “greater” phase of God’s redemptive work.

“How can we know the way?” Thomas’ question is one of the important gems of this passage. Jesus’ response assures his companions that his imminent departure is not abandonment, but rather is a move that will make way for an even deeper intimacy. It’s as if he’s saying, Don’t worry — I’ll still be with you but in a deeper way!

In other words, Jesus insists that even though he’s leaving, his followers’ everyday lives should embody his teachings — especially the new commandment he’s just given, to “love one another as I have loved you” — a sure sign of their ongoing communion with him. Jesus assures them to stay on the path to God, and they will remain together — for I AM the way, the truth and the life! No one comes to the Father except through me! No one can harm you, and nothing can separate us.

Just like the disciples of Jesus’ day, we are living in a time of change. As we see the injustice and immorality of our world leaders, we may be asking, “where is

God in the midst of all the chaos? Have you abandoned us? His own bewildered disciples wondered how will they survive if he leaves them? Where will they go? What will happen to their cherished plans?

Unsurprisingly, the anxious disciples respond to their predicament by demanding certainty. Thomas asks Jesus for a roadmap: “How can we know the way?” Philip asks for proof: “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” What they want is a religion with a built in GPS, a five point plan, the twelve steps, the ten commandments. “Do A, B, and C, and you will arrive at Destination D.”

Jesus’s response? “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” “If you know me, you will know my Father also.” No roadmap. No master plan. No PowerPoint presentation. Just himself. Just the messy, intimate, ever evolving, and often confusing business of relationship.

If you think of all the people Jesus encountered throughout the Bible, it was always about building a relationship with God, not a roadmap. Maybe because no one person’s path is the same. Take Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the boy born

blind, even the annunciation of Mary...all required trust and vulnerability. No roadmap, but trust. Who knew that our lives require us to un-know ourselves as well? Like the old adage, we need to “Let go and let God. Following Jesus means to shed our neat concepts of who the divine is, like shedding old snakeskin, and emerge into the world bare, vulnerable, and new, again and again.

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, C.S. Lewis portrays Eustace shedding dragon skin to find his true self, illustrating that transformation requires divine grace rather than self-effort. Eustace tries to peel off his own skin but fails, needing Aslan’s painful, deep claws to remove the "dragon" self and reveal his human, redeemed self. Only Aslan (representing Christ) can remove the final, deep layer, symbolizing that only God can perform the necessary spiritual transformation.

The 13th century mystic Meister Eckhart wrote, “Let us pray to God that we may be free of God,” implying that our concepts of God must always fall short, always fail in order to discover something new. Meister Eckhart suggests that we create imposter gods because we fear the Mystery who really is. Let’s admit that we shape these gods in our own image, and that they serve us as much as we serve them. Let’s dare to commit ourselves to the long goodbye,” he says. And this is

exactly the good-bye Jesus' disciples were about to face in order to build the next phase of their faith.

What do we need to shed in order to build our faith? What “imposter” images of god do we have in our own life? Do we hold onto images for the sake of fearing what the true God is trying to change in our life? Maybe we still think of God as a bargaining, transactional God: if I do A, then god does B. Or maybe we portray God as the god whose omnipotence guarantees my safety, who eliminates diseases, conquers depression, ends anxiety, eliminates terror, and postpones death. Sometimes we see God as one who provides “good fortunes” in our lives.

Have you heard the prayer for securing a good parking spot? “Hail Mary, full of grace, help us find a parking space.” This may be humorous, but we may all be guilty of creating an image of God as Santa Claus. The opposite maybe true—maybe we see God as a god of vengeance. We see this thinking in Bible stories during Jesus' time when they meet someone who is blind or with leprosy.

Layer by layer, Jesus is asking us to peel back what is not God in order to see the true God. What is holding us back from maturing in our faith?

When Thomas and Philip asks, “How can we know the way?”, or “show us the Father”, Jesus respond by suggesting, “You already know the Way! You know the Way we’ve been traveling, the Truth we’ve been learning, the Life we’ve been living — so just keep going, and when you do, we’ll be together as you go...

Jesus continues to say to them, in fact, our companionship will be closer than ever. Today we walk side by side — but in the days to come I will live in you, and you in me. You will be my body, my hands and feet and word for a world that needs healing and justice and good news.

Today, we may be worried, scared about the future. Jesus said, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. 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.” We know

the way, it is by following the example of Christ's teachings. He has not abandoned us but has given us the Holy Spirit to walk with us, to do even greater things through his Church. Let us not fear, for just as Easter happened, Christ will conquer at the end when he returns to finally heal our world. Let us not forget that we are on the side of victory. Amen.