

## **Finding the Way**

Easter People: Part 3 “Finding the Way”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael –May 7, 2023

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

**Readings:** 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14

**Reflection:** Psalm 31

**Greeting:** Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones.

**Prayer:** Lord of Life, submitting to death, you conquered the grave. By being lifted on a cross you draw all peoples to you. By being raised from the dead you restored to humanity all that we had lost through sin. Throughout these fifty days of Easter, we proclaim the marvelous mystery of death and resurrection. For all praise is yours, now and forever. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 31

*In you, O Lord, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me. Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me. You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name's sake lead me and guide me; take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God. You hate those who pay regard to worthless idols, but I trust in the Lord. I will exult and rejoice in your steadfast love, because you have seen my affliction; you have taken notice of my adversities and have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy; you have set my feet in a broad place. Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also. For my life is spent with sorrow and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away. I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbors, an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me. I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel. For I hear the whispering of many— terror all around!— as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life. But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, “You are my God.” My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors. Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.*  
(Psalm 31:1-16 NRSV\*)

We read the words of Psalm 31 and hear of God's deliverance. That we can rejoice because of God's love and faithfulness. That even when things are at their worst, God is there to help us. That we can always call on the Lord to be our refuge. Was there a time in your life where you

felt hopeless? Have you felt the comfort that the Holy Spirit brings in times of trouble? How can we share the security that we find with God? How can we share the hope of Christ with others? How can we come together and celebrate God's incredible love? How has your life been changed because of Christ's death and resurrection?

**Prayer:** O God, our grove, our lover, our well: In the resurrection of your Son you have brought us into your garden. Marry us for now and for ever, and give us to eat from the tree of life. We thank you for all you have already done and the great love that has been shown to us. We lift up our joys and our concerns, bringing all things before you. May we experience your grace in our laughter and our tears. May you strengthen us in sorrow and in celebration, knowing you are with us. And may you guide us in love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Alleluia.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Sermon:**

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 2 through 10.

*Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like 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. For 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." This honor, then, is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner," and "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. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:2-10 NRSV\*)*

Our next reading comes from John chapter 14 verse 1 through 14.

*"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. And you know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." 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'? 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. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, but if you do not, then believe because of the works themselves. 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. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it. (John 14:1-14 NRSV\*)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This week we'll look at finding the way. This can be difficult, mostly because when things get difficult is when we lose our way. It happens often because we lose focus, or we question things to the point that we no longer know which way is up. We forget what it is that we should be doing, and we've confused ourselves into not knowing where to go. And the message that we get from Christ in all of this is to trust him because he is the way. And this can be easy, and it can be difficult. It can be easy because when we're not sure what to do, we can put our trust in Christ and rely on him. It can be difficult because we don't always know what that's going to look like. And as somebody that has dealt with high anxiety throughout his entire adult life, I can tell you that it can be a struggle to let go of worry and to trust. It can be extremely hard, especially with uncertain futures. When we don't know what's coming next it can be like a weight settles on us that is too hard for us to lift. But the good news is that Christ is there to do the heavy lifting because he is our foundation. We see that in first Peter. We see Peter refer to Jesus as the stone was rejected that has become the cornerstone. Christ is there so that our feet are on steady ground. That we stumble when we're not putting our trust in Christ. Because he is our solid ground. But we have to know where to look for him. And that can be difficult. I think the difficulty is in looking for Christ where we want him to be instead of searching for Christ to know where we need to be. And what I mean by this is that we have a tendency to decide what it is we need. Then we start looking for Christ in that direction. We think it is where we should be, so we search only there for where Christ is. And the truth of the matter is that we may be on the wrong road completely. Why? Because we're trying to get Christ to go where we want him to go instead of following Christ to where we need to be. And that is hard. It's hard because we like to be in control. We like to know what's coming next. And we like to be the ones deciding everything. And that doesn't always work.

I say this because our readings today help us to understand the kind of trust we put in Christ. We see that in our reading from John. It starts with some words that I tell myself a lot. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me." And I have those words as part of my daily prayers. I have to remind myself that Christ is there to help me not have a troubled heart, to not worry and be anxious, and it's hard. But Christ tells us he's preparing a place for us and he's not leaving us behind. He isn't abandoning us. That wherever he goes we will be able to find our way there. And of course, the disciples are worried. Thomas speaks up for the group that they don't know where he's going. How are they going to find their way? How do they know which way to go if they don't know where Jesus is going? How can

they follow him if they don't know where they're following him to? And Jesus says something mysterious and profound. Sometimes more mysterious than we would like. "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." And this can be interpreted in a lot of ways. I point this out because we can get too caught up in one aspect and miss the rest. And it can cause us to miss everything Jesus is saying here. Jesus helps us to understand what he's saying though. Part of what he says is that you will know my father through me. He tries to tell the disciples that they will know God the Father through Christ the Son. They will know him to trust in him. And Philip speaks up now. Philip speaks up for the disciples and he asks Christ to show them the Father. This is that worry again. Thomas was worried about not knowing where Jesus is going to go to. Jesus says trust me and believe in the Father. They then ask Jesus to show them the Father. They want to see to believe. Jesus basically asks Philip "Don't you know me?" Basically, Jesus is trying to tell them that if they have seen him, they have seen the Father. Because he is in the Father and the Father is in him.

Jesus then says something I find fascinating. If you don't believe me, then believe because of the works themselves. And I find this terribly interesting because it seems like Christ is basically saying "if you can't just trust me, look at what's being done and trust in God's work." And it's fascinating for me because of what comes next. "The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these." What I see here is Jesus leaving some room for doubt. Jesus is saying that if they can't just believe what he says then believe in what they see. If they have doubts when just trusting what he says, look at what is being done. I find some comfort there because Jesus recognizes that trust doesn't always come easily. We are so often incredibly strict when we talk about our beliefs, to the point that some can be disheartened if they can't believe everything all at once. That if it is too much for them, it becomes overwhelming and they can't believe because everything is so rigid. And yet, here we have Christ saying that if we can't just believe then we should see the works that are done because of God. And if we can see those works, then trust in that and believe because of what is seen. And it opens the door to overcoming doubts.

And this is especially important to me. As somebody who worries about nearly everything, it's like that pat on the back saying "I know this is a lot but look around and see what's going on." And I think it tells us something about how others will see Christ because of those works. That the one who believes in Christ will do his works. Christ even says that people will do greater works because he is going to the Father. What that tells me is that others are going to see Christ and come to believe because they will see those doing the work of God, pointing the way to Christ. They will see people who make a point of feeding the hungry. They will see people who give to those in need, even if they are just passing through. They will see people who genuinely love and care for each other. People who love their neighbor as themselves and love God. And even if someone isn't sure about believing in Christ from what they've heard about him, they can come to love Christ by seeing what Christ inspires in his followers. They will see God's love in action and come to believe because they have seen the

love and the wonder. And they will find the way because they find others who believe. And they come to believe because they can fully understand God's love because of what they have seen.

And so, when we finish our reading from John, we hear the words “I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.” I always put a caveat here, because it is such an easy line to abuse. People will use this verse to turn God into a wishing well or a magic lamp. And we forget that Jesus says that it is so that Father may be glorified in the Son. Which means that whatever we're asking must glorify God. So, I'm sorry but asking for a new sports car or a yacht isn't going to cut it. I don't think those are going to glorify God. But asking Jesus for the strength to stand up for the least in the last? I think that counts. Asking Christ to help us to continue to do the work that we do and helping others? Yes. Because we want all that we do to glorify God and point the way to Christ. We do this so that others may come to know that he is the way, the truth, and the life. Because we find that Christ is those things. Because he is the way that we learn to love one another. He is how we find truth because we cannot be dishonest if we want to honor God. We cannot be deceitful, and we cannot hate our neighbor. And we find life from the one who gives us life and gives it to us abundantly. The one who died on a cross so that we may know God's love and so that we could be set free from slavery to sin and death and find life everlasting. That we may know the way and that we may point the way to our risen Savior. That all may know his love, and that all may share in the hope of Easter. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Our Current Series – Easter People**

Our current series looks at how we live as people who are forever changed by the Easter miracle. Each week we explore another aspect of how our lives are changed because of Christ and how we are called to live as Easter people.

April 23rd – Eyes Open – 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35

April 30th – Stray Sheep – 1 Peter 2:19-25; John 10:1-18

May 7th – Finding the Way – 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14

May 14th – One in Love – 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21

May 21st – Yours, Mine, and Ours – 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11; John 17:1-11

## **Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup	Ambulance Crew	Our Healthcare Workers	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart
Phyllis Gabel	Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor
Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert	Phil Hawickhorst	Ray Carr
Jane Williams	Alice Sherwood	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks
Steve Carlen	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz	Donna Carlen
Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser	Corine Howard
Don Gilmore	Shirley Jester	Connie Brown	Jack Pitcher
Don Blade	Leo Westjohn	Marsha Overton	Darin Pease
Linda Carlen	Michael Nichols	Larry Heueman	Paul Cox
Family of Raymond Shook	Taylor Waldorf	Harriet Tucker	Becky McGuiness
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson
Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Greg Williams	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte	Lavon Figgins	Kara Newton	

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