

EASTER SEASON PLANNING GUIDE

YEAR A

Easter 2 -7, Ascension Day

The Cross Preaches the Resurrection

Easter Texts Read Through the Theology of the Cross



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GOD'S WORD IS LIFE

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CONTENTS

Preface.....	4
Note to the Preacher.....	6
Commentaries and Sermons	
Easter 2.....	8
Easter 3.....	14
Easter 4.....	20
Easter 5.....	26
Easter 6.....	33
Easter 7.....	39
Ascension.....	43
A Hymn for the Easter Season.....	45
A Prayer of the Church.....	46

Preface

The temptation in preaching the resurrection is to move too quickly from cross to victory. From death to improvement. From despair to possibility. Resurrection becomes a message of uplift: a promise that things will get better, that life can be repaired, that with enough faith one can rise again. But this assumes that what is broken is still fundamentally intact.

The lives of those in the pews say otherwise. Beneath composure lies fracture, contradiction, and exhaustion. People cannot resolve themselves. They repeat what they regret. They fail to become what they believe they should be. And into that reality, the message of “try harder” or “step into new life” does not bring hope. It brings pressure. It returns the burden to the very self that is already collapsing.

This is the cruelty of a theology of glory. It speaks of victory without naming defeat, of life without acknowledging death. But the problem is not that we need assistance. The problem is that no remediation is possible. The law can guide, measure, and demand, but it cannot give life. It will accompany every effort all the way to the grave and fall silent there.

Preaching must begin where Peter begins: “This Jesus whom you crucified.” Not as blame for its own sake, but as truth. The human condition is not neutral or unfinished. It is resistant, curved in on itself, incapable of being managed into righteousness. It must be brought to an end. Then can the second word be heard: “. . . and God raised him.”

The resurrection is not a reward, nor a confirmation of human potential. It is God’s act in the face of failure. It does not continue what we are. The one rejected is vindicated. The one put to death is raised. And this raising is not separate from the cross. The wounds remain.

This is essential. The resurrection is not escape from suffering, but God’s victory within it. Christ returns still bearing the marks of crucifixion. And Thomas, who refuses a resurrection that bypasses reality, is not rejected. Christ comes to him. That is the task of preaching: to deliver Christ where faith cannot produce itself.

The Gospel is not a path of improvement. It is an end and therefore a beginning. “You have died.” Not will die. Not should die. Have died. And your life is now hidden in Christ. This breaks the old framework. A new life comes entirely from outside, given where none can be produced.

Thus, the resurrection is preached not as possibility but as reality, given through word and water. Easter is not for those who are rising, but for those who know they cannot. For those who stand, like Thomas, needing something real.

And into that place, Christ comes. The cross is not left behind in this proclamation. It remains the center. It does not look like resurrection; it looks like its denial. And yet, there God is at work. The resurrection does not correct Good Friday. It confirms that God was present all along, hidden under its opposite.

So the church does not move beyond the cross. It remains there, where death and life meet, where promise contradicts appearance, where God hides himself in order to be known. It is always useful to remember; the crucifixion came as spectacle, the resurrection as a whisper.

Note to the Preacher

Those who have worked through these lectionary studies will already recognize a deliberate restraint: I do not traffic in anecdotes or illustrative embellishments. This is not an oversight, nor a lack of imagination, or experience to draw from. It is a theological decision. The preacher's task is to speak God's Word into a particular people, in a particular place, at a particular moment. That requires a knowledge no writer from a distance can supply.

Illustrations, if they are to serve the gospel rather than distract from it, must arise from the lived reality of the congregation itself; their burdens, their histories, their anxieties, hurts, hopes, and questions. To import them from elsewhere risks turning proclamation into performance. Better, then, to leave that work where it belongs: in the hands of the pastor who stands among the people and who struggles to know where the Word must land.

M.C.A

Commentaries on the Lessons

The Second Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:14a, 22–32

Peter stands and preaches. But notice what he does not do. He does not tell the crowd how to improve themselves. He does not offer a path upward. He tells them what has already happened: *you crucified him and God raised him.*

That's the pattern. Always. The theology of the cross begins here: not with our seeking, but with our rejection of God. Not with our faithfulness, but with our participation in the crucifixion. Peter does not soften this. He does not say, "some people did this." He says, *you did this.*

And yet, this is the shock, this same Jesus is the one God raised for you.

The resurrection is not a reward for the faithful. It is God's verdict over the ungodly. The cross exposes what we are, resisters of God. The resurrection declares that God raises what we destroy.

Peter's sermon is not instruction. It is proclamation: The One you killed is your salvation.

1 Peter 1:3–9

Peter writes to people who do not see Christ. Faith, in the theology of the cross, is not built on visible strength or spiritual clarity. It is built on a promise spoken into absence.

"You have been given a new birth," he says. Given.

And what kind of life is it? One marked by trials, testing, and grief. That's not a detour from faith. That is its environment. Because faith does not grow in control. It grows where control is stripped away. Gold is refined by fire. Faith is not proven by success but revealed in clinging to Christ when nothing else holds.

“Though you do not now see him, you believe.” That is the life of the baptized. Hidden. Unimpressive. Real.

The theology of glory wants visible progress. The theology of the cross gives you Christ hidden in suffering, yet certain in promise.

John 20:19–31

The doors are locked. The disciples are afraid. And Jesus comes not to correct them, not to inspire them, but to stand among them and speak: *“Peace be with you.”*

That is the Gospel. And then He shows them His wounds. The risen Christ is not an upgraded version of Jesus. He is the crucified one, still bearing the marks. The victory is not apart from the cross. It is through it.

Then comes Thomas. We often treat Thomas like the problem. But Thomas is simply honest. He will not believe in a resurrection that bypasses the wounds. And he’s right. Because there is no Christ apart from the crucified Christ.

What does Jesus do? He comes again. For Thomas. Not after Thomas improves but in his doubt.

“Put your finger here.” The word of faith, of promise, always comes into our unbelief.

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” That is not a compliment to strong faith. It is a promise to those who have only the Word. And the Word is enough because it gives you Christ.

Psalm 16

On its surface, this is a psalm of confidence. But in the light of the cross, it becomes something deeper. These are not first David's words. They are Christ's words. Because David *was* abandoned to the grave. His body *did* see corruption.

But Christ was not abandoned. This psalm is fulfilled not in human trust, but in God's faithfulness to His Son. The Father does not leave Him in death. And He will not leave you either.

"Therefore, my heart is glad." Because death does not get the last word. The theology of the cross hears this psalm not as optimism, but as resurrection promise spoken into death itself.

Sermon

The Second Sunday of Easter

John 20:19–31

Friends in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The doors were locked. That's how the story begins. They were afraid. And it is worth staying there for a moment, because we are too quick to move past it. We want Easter to sound like triumph. We want resurrection to feel like progress. But here, in the first scene after the resurrection, the church is not bold or radiant. It is hidden. Defensive. Closed in.

They had said so much just days before. Promises. Loyalty. Confidence in themselves. But when the pressure came every one of those words collapsed. They ran.

And now they are together again, but not as heroes. Not as witnesses. As men trying to hold themselves together after discovering something they did not want to know about themselves.

That they could not do what they thought they could do. And that is closer to home than we like to admit.

Because we also live with a story about ourselves. A narrative that says we are decent, capable, maybe not perfect, but essentially intact. We believe we can manage our lives, navigate our choices, hold things together. Until something tests that. Until the moment comes when we do not act as we thought we would. When fear overrides conviction. When we protect ourselves instead of telling the truth. When we retreat instead of standing.

And then something is revealed.

Not just that we made a mistake but that the self we trusted is not reliable. Not stable. Not what we thought. And so we do what they did. We close the doors. Not always physically. But inwardly. We manage appearances. We keep certain things contained. We avoid looking too closely. We construct a version of ourselves that can still function, as long as the deeper fractures remains unexamined.

And even our religion can become part of that. A way of speaking about grace while preserving the idea that we are still basically in control. But the text will not allow it.

The doors are locked.

And inside are people who cannot fix what has been exposed. And then without warning, without permission, Jesus is there. He does not wait for them to open the door. He does not stand outside hoping they will gather themselves. He does not require a change in them before He comes. He simply stands among them. And He speaks. “Peace be with you.”

Just that word. Peace. He does not return as if the cross were behind Him. He brings it with Him. The wounds are still there. The marks of everything that has happened are not erased. He shows them His hands and His side.

What He is giving them does not come from recovery. It comes from His death. Those wounds are the answer to everything that has been exposed in that room. Their failure has not been overlooked. It has been carried. Their denial has not been excused. It has been borne. Their fear has not been corrected. It has been taken into His suffering. The room does not change. The men do not suddenly become strong. But something has happened. He is there. And that is enough.

But one of them is missing. Thomas. And when the others tell him what they have seen, he refuses it. Not politely. Not cautiously. Directly. Unless I see it. Unless I touch it. I will not believe. It sounds harsh, but there is something honest about it. He is not pretending. He is not borrowing the faith of others. He will not construct belief out of enthusiasm or pressure.

He knows what has happened. He knows what he is capable of. And he will not accept a version of resurrection that floats above that. So he waits. And a week later, the doors are still closed. And Jesus comes again. For him.

He does not address the group first. He goes directly to Thomas.

“Put your finger here.”

He does not argue. He does not persuade. He does not offer a theory. He gives him the same thing He gave the others. Himself.

Wounded. Risen. Present.

And that is where everything changes. Not because Thomas has resolved his doubt, but because Christ has entered it. That is how faith comes.

Not as something we generate. Not as something we build up inside ourselves. But as something that happens when Christ comes to us—into the very place where belief has failed—and gives Himself.

“Peace be with you.” That word is not locked behind those doors. It is not confined to that room. It is spoken now, here for you. Into your guarded places. Into your unfinished struggles. Into

the parts of your life that do not align with the person you thought you would be. You are not asked to repair yourself first. Christ meets you as you are with His peace, his forgiveness, His resurrection promise

And what meets you is not a demand, not a plan, not a path forward but a person. You have been baptized into Him. Crucified. Risen. Given. For you.

“May the peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds
in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Commentaries on the Lessons

The Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:14a, 36–41

Peter says the thing that undoes every listener: *You crucified him.* This is not religious rhetoric. It is a firm diagnosis. The theology of the cross begins by removing the last defense: the idea that we are neutral observers of God. We are not. We are implicated. The same instinct that rejected Christ then remains active now; subtle, refined, often religious, but real. And when that lands, the response is immediate:

“They were cut to the heart.” That is the proper work of the Law. Piercing the conscience. And the response? “What shall we do?”

Here is the decisive turn. Peter gives them something they cannot generate:

“Repent and be baptized... for the forgiveness of your sins.”

Receive what Christ has already secured. Baptism is the place where the verdict of the cross is applied. Where you are put to death. And a new life is given. Not the old life improved. A new life given and comprehended through faith alone.

1 Peter 1:17–23

Peter strips away every currency we trust. Silver. Gold. Achievement. Moral effort. Spiritual seriousness. All of it is declared perishable. This is more than critique. It is the demolition of everything we possess or produce that we trust to secure us. We assign value to ourselves and others based on what can be measured, earned, displayed. And Peter says that none of it holds up.

You were not purchased with anything that originates in this world. You were ransomed with blood. Which means your value is not derived from what you are or what you do but from what has been spent for you. The costly cross determines your worth.

And therefore, the call to “live in reverent fear” is not a call to anxiety or striving. It is a call to live without illusions. To recognize that nothing in you can secure what has already been given. “You have been born anew... through the living and abiding word of God.”

Again, the language is passive. You did not generate this life. You did not awaken it. It was spoken into you.

Luke 24:13–35 (Emmaus Road)

They are walking away. That is the direction of the text. Away from Jerusalem. Away from hope. Away from what they thought had been the center of everything. And they are talking, trying to make sense of it, trying to reconstruct meaning from disappointment.

“We had hoped...”

That phrase carries everything. And we know it all too well. Hope, now past tense.

Expectations now collapsed. The future is wisely, practically, revised downward.

And Jesus comes alongside them. But they do not recognize Him.

Not because they are inattentive but because recognition does not come from within them. It is withheld. This is critical. Christ is present before He is known. And what does He do?

He does not immediately reveal Himself. He does not interrupt their confusion with a display of glory. He does something else:

“He interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.”

He speaks and plants the Word in them. He reframes reality not by changing their circumstances, but by locating everything in His own suffering and death. Which is, in fact, the only work of the preacher.

“Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things...?”

Necessary is the operative word. The cross is not the failure of the story. It is the center of it. And still they do not recognize Him. Not yet. Only later at the table when He takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it will their eyes be suddenly opened. And just as suddenly He is gone. Why? Because now they have what they need. Christ given in the Word and the breaking of the bread.

The theology of the cross insists: Christ is not known by inner realization or visual confirmation. Christ is given where He has promised to be.

Psalm 116:1–4, 12–19

This is not theoretical. The psalmist is not reflecting on general hardship. He is naming something specific: death closed in. Distress and anguish took hold.

This is where the theology of glory has nothing to say. Because it cannot account for the experience of being overtaken, of losing control, of reaching the point where nothing within can resolve what is happening.

And that is where this psalm begins. “I called on the name of the Lord.”

Faith utters a cry.

And the answer is not immediate escape, but deliverance that comes from outside the self. “What shall I return to the Lord...?” Nothing. That is the answer. The only response is reception: “I will lift up the cup of salvation.” I will lift up what I have received.

This is the posture of faith.

Sermon

The Third Sunday of Easter

Luke 24:13–35

Beloved hearers of the Word of God, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

“We had hoped...”

That’s the sentence that tells you everything. Not just what they thought about Jesus, but what has happened inside them. Hope has slipped into the past tense. What they had built their future on has collapsed, and now they are left trying to rearrange what remains.

It’s a familiar sentence. You don’t always say it out loud, but it runs quietly beneath your life. You build something; an expectation, a direction, a sense of who you are and where things are going and then something happens. Something you didn’t choose, didn’t foresee, something you can’t undo. And suddenly the story changes tense.

“I had hoped...” And from that moment on, you keep moving. You still show up, still talk, still go through the motions, but you are no longer walking toward what you once were. You are walking away from it. That’s where they are when He comes.

Not at the end of the road. Not when they’ve turned around. Not after they’ve sorted things out. While they are still walking away, Jesus draws near and begins to walk with them. But they do not recognize Him.

We tend to assume that if Christ were present, we would know it. That His presence would register somehow. Through clarity, or feeling, or certainty. But here He is, walking beside them, and they do not see Him for who He is. It’s not that they are distracted or careless. The text is more direct than that. Their eyes are kept from recognizing Him.

Which means that recognition of the Christ is not something they can produce. It does not rise naturally from within them. Christ is present, and they remain unaware. And yet He is no less present for that.

He asks them what they are discussing, and they stop, almost surprised that anyone could be unaware of what has just happened. They begin to explain it to Him. The events, the disappointment, the confusion, and then again that sentence surfaces.

“We had hoped that he was the one...” They speak it as a conclusion now. A closed chapter. Something that once carried weight but no longer does.

Christ listens. He lets them say it. And then He answers not by revealing Himself, not by interrupting the story with a sudden resolution, but by speaking into it.

“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe...” This is not harsh, it is honest. The problem is not that they lack information. They have all the pieces. The problem is that they cannot see how those pieces fit together if death on a cross is at the center. And that can be our blindness, too.

“Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” The cross is necessary. That is the scandal, the stumbling block.

That is the word that shifts everything. Because they, like we, understood suffering and death as the end of hope. As the collapse of what should have been. But Christ Jesus names His suffering and collapse as the center, the place where the story was always heading. And as they continue walking, He begins to speak the Scriptures to them not as disconnected fragments, but as a single story that finds its meaning in His suffering and death.

Their circumstances have not altered. But what the Word they are hearing starts to reframe everything they thought they knew. So it is when God’s Word is heard. By the time they reach the village, the day is nearly over. Jesus acts as though He will continue on, but they urge Him to stay. There is something about Him now, something they cannot quite identify, but do not want to lose. “Stay with us.”

And He does.

They sit down at the table, and the ordinary act of a meal unfolds. Bread is taken, blessed, broken, and given. And in that moment, their eyes are opened. Not on the road, not during the conversation, not in the explanation, but here, in the breaking and the giving, they see Him.

And just as suddenly, He is gone. Which might seem like loss again, except now it is not. Because what has been given remains. They do not need to hold on to His visible presence. They have received Him in the way He intends to be known through the Word that interprets everything and the bread that is broken and given. They look at each other and say what they could not say before.

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road...?” Only now do they recognize it. Not as something they followed, not as something that guided them in the moment, but as something that had already been happening while they were still confused, still uncertain, still unable to see. The Word was implanted.

Christ comes while you are still walking away. He speaks before you understand. He gives before you are ready. He is present before you recognize Him.

The recognition, faith, comes later, and even then, it does not rest on what you see or feel, but on what He has already done, on the Word He has spoken, on the gift He has given. You walk your own road. You have your own versions of that sentence of resignation, your own places where hope has shifted into the past tense. You try, as they did, to make sense of what has not turned out the way you thought.

Christ is there. That is the promise of your baptism. Not waiting for you to turn around. Not waiting for you to fix what has broken. But walking with you, speaking into what you cannot resolve, giving Himself in ways you do not control. And when you see, even if only in hindsight, you realize that He had been there all along. Not because you found Him. But because He came to you. And gave Himself. Christ is there. That is the promise of your baptism.

Christ waiting for you to turn around. Not waiting for you to fix what has broken. But walking with you, speaking into what you cannot resolve, repenting you with His Word, giving Himself in ways you do not control. Faith is nothing more than being caught up in that. Not a step you take toward Him, but the end of your running, when He catches you on the hopeless road, takes what is His, and makes it yours.

“May the peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds
in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Commentaries on the Lessons

The Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:42–47

They devoted themselves, the text says, to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers. They held things in common. They shared what they had. They were together.

And it sounds, at first, like a picture of what the church should become. Right? A kind of ideal life, something to recover, something to aim at if only we are serious enough.

But the moment we hear it that way, we have already shifted the weight back onto ourselves and into the law. We begin to imagine that this life can be built through commitment, through discipline, through better alignment of priorities. We hear devotion, and we turn it into effort.

The text itself refuses that. These are not people who decided to be devoted. These are people who were just cut to the heart, people who had heard, "This Jesus whom you crucified..." and had nothing left to defend. They were not reorganizing their lives. They had lost control of the one they thought they had. And into that loss, something was given. Forgiveness. Baptism. A new life that did not originate in them.

So, what you see here is not the cause, but the result. Not the work of a committed people, but the life that appears when the old project of securing the self has ended. They are no longer trying to become something. They are free to receive, free to give, free to belong. Even the growth is not theirs. "The Lord added to their number." Which means the church is not something you sustain. It is something you are gathered into.

1 Peter 2:19–25

And yet we resist that. We would still prefer to be capable of becoming what is required.

When we hear this text, we instinctively reach for it as a guide. Christ suffered without retaliation, so we should do the same. Endure better. Respond better. Become more like Him.

But the moment suffering becomes real, that collapses. Not in theory but in practice. Whatever image you had of your capacity dissolves under pressure. And that is precisely where Peter

turns the focus away from you. “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.” You cannot resolve your own failure. You cannot become what you are commanded to be.

So. Christ does what you cannot.

He carries your sin, becomes your sin, owns your sin. He absorbs what would destroy you. He entrusts Himself to the Father in perfect trust where you cannot. “By his wounds you have been healed.”

John 10:1–10

There are voices everywhere. Voices that promise life, direction, identity, control. And we listen to them, because we assume life is something we must build and protect. And in the law that is true. We have no options there but to strive. So we follow whatever seems to offer help and advantage.

But those voices do not give life. They place the burden back on you. They leave you responsible for making of this life what you can. And eventually, everything gives way.

“I am the gate,” Jesus says. Not one option among many. Not guidance among alternatives. Not the gate to more effective striving in the law.

The through which life is entered apart from law. And then He says the thing that makes it unmistakable:

“I lay down my life for the sheep.”

That is where life comes from. Not from your movement toward God. But from His movement toward you, through death.

“My sheep hear my voice.”

He speaks. And what He speaks gives what it says.

“I came that they may have life.”

Not work for it, aim for it or achieve it.

Have it, as gift.

Psalm 23

And this is why the psalm begins the way it does. “The Lord is my shepherd...”

It does not begin with what you will do, or how you will manage your life, or how you will find your way. It begins by naming something that is already true. And in doing so, it removes something from you. Because if the Lord is your shepherd, then you are not. And that is not especially flattering. But it is true.

It means you are not the one directing the course, who finally knows the way things must go. The psalm simply assumes this and moves on. “He leads me...” and you follow, not because you have mastered the terrain, but because you are being guided through it.

“He makes me lie down...” Even that is not yours to initiate. Rest is not something you achieve once everything is under control. It is something given sometimes against your own resistance because you would otherwise keep going, keep striving, keep trying to hold things together. And then the psalm says what everything else in us would prefer to avoid. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...”

Not around it. Through it. There is no alternate route. No careful planning that bypasses it. No version of life you can construct that avoids passing through that valley. It is simply where the road goes. And it is there, not before it and not after it, that the psalm speaks its central word. “You are with me.” You are not alone in it.

The Shepherd does not remain at a distance, calling out directions from safety. He enters the valley. And more than that, He has already gone ahead of you into the one place you cannot master, death itself, and He has come out the other side. He has prepared the way, become the way for you.

Sermon

The Fourth Sunday of Easter

John 10:1–10

Friends in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are always voices speaking into our lives. They come to us in different forms and from different places. Some come from the outside, through expectations and pressures that shape what we think we should be, and others from within, narrating who we are, what we lack, and what we must become. Over time, these voices begin to feel natural, almost indistinguishable from our own thinking. Yet they are constantly directing us, promising that if we follow them closely enough, we will arrive at something stable, something secure, something that finally holds everything together. So, we listen.

We listen because we want what they promise. We want a life that can be managed, a self that can be improved, a future that can be secured if only we make the right decisions, apply the right discipline, or find the right clarity. Even the gospel can become entangled in this. It can begin to sound like one more voice among many, offering guidance and direction, but still leaving us responsible for whether anything actually works.

For a time, that can seem convincing. As long as life remains manageable, as long as nothing presses too hard, it is possible to believe that we are, in some meaningful sense, holding things together. But eventually something gives way.

Something breaks, or shifts, or refuses to cooperate with the structure we have built. And when that happens, the voices that once sounded like guidance begin to reveal themselves as something else entirely. They no longer reassure; they accuse. They no longer direct; they demand. What once sounded like possibility now sounds like pressure, and what once felt like control begins to feel like burden. You should have known better. You should have done more. You should be stronger than this by now. What is wrong with you?

And underneath all of it is a single, unspoken assumption: that your life is ultimately your responsibility to secure, and that if it is not holding together, the failure rests with you. It is precisely at this point that Jesus speaks, and it is striking that He does not begin by offering comfort in the

way we might expect. Instead, He names what is happening with a clarity that cuts through the illusion. There are voices, He says, that do not give life. They take it. They draw you in with promises of security and direction, but in the end they leave you carrying a weight you were never meant to bear.

He calls them thieves and bandits, not because they are obviously false, but because they do something far more subtle and far more destructive. They return your life to you as a task, as something to be managed, improved, and secured, as though you were capable of holding it together. And the truth is, you are not.

That is the point at which everything begins to change because something false has finally been exposed. The idea that you can secure your life, that you can become stable by effort or clarity or discipline, begins to collapse under the weight of reality.

And into that collapse, Jesus does not offer a better strategy. He offers Himself.

He says, "I am the gate."

Not one option among many, not one voice among others, but the place through which life is given. And what He means by that becomes unmistakable when He says, "I lay down my life for the sheep."

This is not guidance. It is an action that He takes, entirely apart from you and entirely for you. Because the problem is not that you need better direction. The problem is that your life cannot be secured by you at all. It cannot be held together by your effort, your decisions, or your ability to get things right. Left in your hands, it will always remain uncertain, always vulnerable, always at risk of falling apart.

So He removes it from your hands. He takes hold of you in baptism with His word of promise. He places Himself between you and what would undo you, and He takes into Himself the full weight of it; your failure, your fear, your inability to hold things together, and even the death that stands at the end of every human attempt to secure life.

"I lay down my life for the sheep." That is where life comes from. His movement toward you, through death and into resurrection. And this is why He can say, without qualification, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

Not that they may achieve it, or discover it, or gradually grow into it through spiritual effort, but that they may have it. As something given. As something that does not originate in them and does not depend on their ability to sustain it. This is what distinguishes His voice from all the others.

It does not return your life to you as a task. It does not place the burden back on your shoulders. It does not demand that you become what you cannot become. It gives.

“My sheep hear my voice,” He says, and even that is not a description of your ability, but of His action. He speaks, and in His speaking, something happens.

“I lay down my life for the sheep.” Your life no longer rests on your ability to secure it. It rests on Him. When the voices return, when the pressure rises again, when the sense of instability reappears, as it inevitably will, the foundation will hold. Christ will hold.

Your life is not your own. It is His. You are not holding on to Him. You are baptized into Christ. He is holding on to you. And He will never let you go.

“May the peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds
in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Commentaries on the Lessons

The Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 6:1–9; 7:2a, 51–60

The church grows, and immediately the illusion is exposed: growth does not produce harmony. It produces friction. Complaint. Neglect. The widows are overlooked, and with that the myth of a purified community collapses. The church is not a society of the improved. It is a gathering of the needy, and that need does not disappear once the Word takes root. It becomes more visible.

The temptation is immediate: solve the problem, stabilize the structure, make the system work. But the apostles resist the deeper danger; that the church might become defined by its management of visible needs rather than by the Word that creates it. This is not a rejection of care, but a refusal to let the gospel be absorbed into a project of human ordering in the law.

And yet Stephen stands precisely at that intersection of Word and service. And in him the contradiction becomes unbearable. He speaks, and the law does what the law always does when it is not softened: it accuses. Not generally. Not historically. Personally. “You stiff-necked people.” The theology of glory always assumes progress, spiritual development, religious refinement, a gradual ascent. Stephen names the truth instead: resistance. Always resistance. The same refusal dressed in different garments.

And so, the cross appears again as repetition. The Word that exposes must be silenced. Stones answer what arguments cannot. This is what happens when God comes near in truth: he is rejected.

This is the theology of the cross: God is not known in the removal of suffering, but in his presence within it. Stephen’s death does not justify him. It reveals that he has already been justified. He dies not achieving forgiveness but speaking it, because he has already received it.

And this is where the offense sharpens: the church itself becomes the place where this contradiction is most visible. Not a purified community, but a community in which the same resistance to God continues to surface now even under the sound of the gospel. The theology of the cross does not allow the church to imagine itself as the solution to human failure. It is the place where that failure is exposed most clearly, and where forgiveness must therefore be spoken again and again. Stephen does not stand over against Israel as its correction. He stands within it, as one

more sinner carried by the mercy he proclaims, and that is precisely why his death can only be understood as gift received, not victory achieved.

Psalm 31:1–5, 15–16

“Into your hands” is not pious language. It is surrender in the face of collapse. The psalm does not arise from stability. It arises from threat. Enemies press in. Shame lingers. The future is uncertain. And the human instinct is to grasp, to secure, to control, to stabilize oneself against the chaos. But the psalm cuts against that instinct. “My times are in your hand.” Which means that what appears most out of control is precisely what has been given over.

This is where the theology of glory breaks. It insists that God’s presence must be seen in improvement, in protection, in visible blessing. The psalmist confesses the opposite: God’s hand holds even what appears to contradict him.

“Let your face shine...” is not a demand grounded in worthiness. It is a plea grounded in promise. The one who prays has no leverage. No claim. Only this: that God has bound himself to the sinner. And so the prayer does not resolve the situation. Faith relocates the self. Not in safety, but in the hands of God where even death itself becomes a place of entrusting.

Faith here is not a movement upward toward certainty, but a relinquishing of certainty altogether. The theology of the cross refuses to let faith become a tool for securing oneself against the future. Instead, it leaves the future entirely in God’s hands, even when those hands appear hidden. To say “into your hands” is to confess that God’s faithfulness will have to be enough, because there is nothing else left to hold onto. Faith does not resolve the darkness; it entrusts itself within it, precisely because God has already entered it in Christ.

1 Peter 2:2–10

“You are being built.” That alone overturns the religious instinct. The theology of glory imagines a project of self-construction, moral formation, spiritual progress. But Peter removes the subject. You are not building. You are being built.

And what are you built upon? Not success. Not wisdom. A rejected stone. This is the scandal that cannot be resolved. God chooses what the world discards. Which means that to belong to him is to be placed not at the center of recognition, but at the site of refusal. Faith does not elevate you above the world. It locates you within its rejection of Christ.

And this is precisely where identity is given. “Chosen... royal... holy...” Not as descriptors of achievement, but as declarations spoken over those who have none. Once you were not a people. That is not metaphor. It is judgment. You had no standing, no identity that endured before God. Now you are God’s people. Not because you discovered it. Not because you claimed it. Because it was spoken.

The theology of the cross insists: identity is not constructed upward. It is given downward, out of mercy, to those who had none. Life built on this cornerstone will always appear unstable by the standards of the world. There will be no visible coherence, no obvious confirmation that this structure is secure. The theology of the cross strips away every external marker of certainty and leaves only the Word that declares what is not yet seen. You are God’s people, not because it can be demonstrated, but because it has been spoken. And that Word stands even when everything visible seems to deny it.

John 14:1–14

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.” But they are. And they should be. Jesus is leaving. The future is uncertain. Death stands ahead. The disciples are not calm seekers of truth; they are anxious men losing their ground. The theology of glory would answer this with clarity, with vision, with a plan. Jesus does none of that. He gives no method for inner peace. He gives himself.

“I am the way.”

A person who will be crucified.

Philip’s request, “Show us the Father”, is the perennial religious demand: make God visible in a way that satisfies expectation. Show us something unmistakable, something that confirms. And Jesus answers with the offense: look at me. Look at the one who will be betrayed, abandoned, crucified. There is the Father.

The theology of the cross shatters expectation here. God is not hidden behind suffering. He is revealed in it.

“I go to prepare a place...” a relationship secured through death and resurrection. Your future, then, is held by Christ’s refusal to let you go, even into death.

The comfort Jesus gives is not the removal of trouble, but the redefinition of where God is to be found within it. The theology of the cross refuses every attempt to locate God outside of suffering, uncertainty, and death. Instead, it anchors faith in the one who goes ahead into death and

remains present within it. The troubled heart is not calmed by explanation, but by promise: that even where Christ is no longer seen, he is still the one who holds, prepares, and keeps.

Sermon

The Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 6:1–9; 7:2a, 51–60

Beloved hearers of the Word of God, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The church was growing, and if you had been there, it might have looked like everything was finally coming together. The numbers were increasing. The word was spreading. There was movement, energy, a sense that something real was happening. The glory train was on the tracks. And yet, almost immediately, something else surfaced, something far more familiar. A complaint arose. Widows were being overlooked. The daily distribution was failing. And the picture shifted. What had seemed like a gathering of the faithful revealed itself to be what it truly was: a gathering of people still marked by need, still capable of neglect, still carrying all the fractures in the self that do not disappear simply because God's Word is being spoken.

And if you listen closely, you begin to recognize yourself in that moment. Because you expect that where God is at work, things should improve. You expect clarity, order, some visible sign that the chaos has been overcome. But what appears instead is something else entirely. The Word gathers people, but it does not remove what they are. It exposes it. It brings into the open what was already there; the need, the blindness, the quiet ways people are overlooked. And your instinct in the face of that is the same as theirs: to fix it, to stabilize it, to make it work, to turn the whole thing into something that can be managed.

The apostles act, but not in the way you might expect. They refuse to let the life of the church be swallowed up by the endless effort to solve what is visible. They insist that the Word must remain at the center. This not because the needs are unimportant, but because something deeper is at stake. The real problem is not simply that widows are being overlooked. The real problem is what lies beneath that failure, something that no structure or system can correct.

And that deeper truth is what comes into the open in Stephen. He stands there, at the intersection of service and proclamation, and when he speaks, he does not smooth things over. He does not offer improvement or adjustment. He names what is there. The history of God's people is

not a steady movement toward faithfulness, but a pattern that repeats itself again and again: resistance. “You always resist the Holy Spirit.” And those words do not remain in the past. They land in the present. They land where you are. Because the same resistance that ran through them runs through you. The resistance to being exposed. The resistance to losing control. The resistance to a word that leaves you with nothing to stand on.

Once that is spoken, the moment cannot hold. The reaction comes quickly, almost instinctively. They cover their ears. They rush him. They drag him out. Stones are lifted, and what began as a dispute becomes something brutally final. The Word that exposed them must be silenced. And as it unfolds, the scene begins to feel strangely familiar, as though it has happened before. The pattern is the same. When God comes near in truth, he is not welcomed. He is rejected.

Stephen stands in the middle of it, not above it, not outside it, but within it. The stones fall. His body gives way. There is no interruption, no sudden reversal, nothing to suggest that God has stepped in to stop what is happening. Everything looks exactly as it does in your own life when things fall apart, when what you hoped for does not come, when what you cannot fix remains, when it feels as though God has withdrawn. And yet, in that very moment, something is given to him.

He looks up, and he sees the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing. Not after the suffering has passed, not after things have been set right, but right there in the middle of it. What cannot be seen from the outside is revealed to him: Christ is present. Not preventing what is happening but standing to receive him through it.

And that changes the meaning of everything, even though nothing outward has changed. Because now the words that come from Stephen are no longer shaped by what is happening around him, but by what has already been given to him. He entrusts himself, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”, not as a final attempt to secure his future, but as one who knows that his future is already held. And then, even more striking, he speaks again; “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” Those words do not arise from strength or resolve. They arise from mercy already received. The forgiveness he speaks is not something he produces. It is something that has already taken hold of him.

This is where the story turns toward you.

Because the same pattern continues to unfold in your life. You look for God where things improve, where situations resolve, where life becomes stable and makes sense. You wait for that moment when you can finally say that God has shown himself. But again and again, what you

encounter instead are places where things remain unresolved, where you are confronted with what you cannot change, where control slips away and the sense of God's presence seems to fade.

And it is precisely there that the cross speaks. Not by changing the situation, not by removing the difficulty, but by revealing what is already true within it. That Christ has already entered into the places you fear most; into suffering, into loss, into death itself and has made them his own. Which means that even when nothing outward suggests it, even when everything looks like absence, you are not outside of his presence. You are within it.

The story does not end with Stephen rising from the ground or overcoming those who oppose him. It ends in a way that cannot be seen from the outside but can only be spoken as promise: he is received. He is held. He is forgiven. And the mercy that has claimed him continues to speak.

Today that same word is spoken to you. Not when your life comes together, not when things improve, not when you finally understand but here, now, in the midst of what is unresolved, what is exposed, what you cannot control. You are baptized. You are forgiven. You are held. And this is not a new word, not a private comfort spoken only here, but the very proclamation Paul the Apostle himself has set before us:

“For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

“May the peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds
in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Commentaries on the Lessons

The Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 17:22–31

Athens is full of devotion, systems of meaning. Humanity reaching, striving, naming the divine. “I see how religious you are.” And that is precisely the problem. Religion is the theology of glory in its purest form: humanity ascending toward God, constructing meaning, stabilizing existence through devotion.

But Paul does not refine their religion. He ends it. The true God is not the object of human search. He is the one who has already acted. Who gives. Who sustains. Who does not need. And then, judgment. This is where all religion collapses. Because judgment means the end of self-justification. The end of systems. The end of reaching. And the proof is not an argument. It is a man raised from the dead.

The resurrection is not an idea to consider. It is an event that judges every other claim. The Word does what it always does: it divides. Some mock because the cross always appears foolish. Some hesitate because it threatens control. Some believe because the Spirit creates what it commands.

And this is why the proclamation cannot be adjusted to fit the religious instinct. It must confront it. The theology of the cross does not offer a higher form of religion or a more refined system of meaning. It announces the end of all such systems in the face of the God who acts apart from them. The resurrection ends human searching. It declares that God is known not where we reach, but where he has already come; in the crucified and risen Lord, apart from every human attempt to secure God.

Psalm 66:8–20

“Bless our God...” But what is there to bless? “You brought us into the net... laid burdens on our backs...” This is not the language of triumph. It is the language of affliction attributed to God himself. The theology of glory cannot speak this way. It must separate God from suffering. It must locate him only in what appears good, successful, upward. But the psalm refuses.

God is at work in the constriction, in the weight, in the fire as the hidden work of the one who leads through death into life. “We went through fire and water...” Through. Not around. The spacious place is not achieved. It is given on the other side of what could not be survived apart from God. And prayer? Not a performance. Not a spiritual technique. “I cried...” And he heard. That is the miracle. Not the quality of the prayer, but the faithfulness of the hearer.

Faith names God where he seems most absent. The theology of the cross refuses to divide experience into places where God is present and places where he is not. Instead, it confesses that God is at work even in what contradicts him. In what is hidden, unrecognized, and often resisted. The cry of the psalm is therefore not the language of resolution, but of persistence: God hears, even when nothing else suggests that he does.

1 Peter 3:13–22

Suffering is not accidental. It is structural. The theology of glory promises that righteousness will produce visible blessing. Peter dismantles that illusion. You may do good and suffer precisely for it. So what now? “Do not fear...” But fear cannot be commanded away. It must be displaced. And it is displaced by Christ. “Christ suffered once for sins...” Once. For all. Finished.

This is the center. Not your endurance. Not your faithfulness under pressure. His completed work. Baptism now saves not as a decision or moral turning point, but as a promise spoken over you. A drowning and a rising that you did not accomplish. Your life is not secured by your response to suffering, but by Christ’s action within it.

The Christian life is no longer measured by outcomes, by visible success, or even by endurance under pressure. Those are the metrics of the theology of glory. The theology of the cross measures everything by Christ alone; his suffering, his death, his resurrection given to you. When your own life appears fragmented, fearful, or failing, it remains held within a completed work that does not depend on your ability to sustain it.

John 14:15–21

“If you love me...” And immediately we land on the word “if” and the law does its work. The sentence turns inward. Do I love? Is it enough? Have I failed? That is exactly what the law does. It curves the self back upon itself to begin the inventory.

But Jesus does not leave it there. “I will ask the Father...” The decisive movement is not your love toward God, but God’s giving toward you. The Spirit comes not as reward for obedience,

but as the presence of Christ among those who do not love as they should. “I will not leave you orphaned.”

That is the gospel in its simplest form: you are not left to yourself. Your failure to love does not sever you from the one who has bound himself to you. “Because I live...” That is the ground. Not your life. His.

And this is where the command is finally transformed. It no longer stands as a condition to be met, but as a description of a life that will be created by the presence of Christ himself. The theology of the cross refuses to let the command become a ladder by which we ascend. Instead, it places it within the promise: the one who commands is the one who comes, dwells, and remains. Love, then, is not the ground of the relationship it is its result, fragile and incomplete.

Sermon

The Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 17:22–31

Friends in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul stood in Athens, and as he walked through the city, he was surrounded by altars. They were everywhere; names carved into stone, images shaped by careful hands, devotion rising in every direction. It was not a city without belief. It was a city overflowing with it. And as he looked, he saw something that was not confined to Athens alone. He saw the human instinct laid bare. The need to reach, to explain, to secure something ultimate that might hold life together.

And if you stand there with him long enough, you begin to recognize it. Not in their statues, perhaps, but in yourself. Because the forms change, but the instinct does not. There are always places where you try to steady your life, ways you try to make sense of what you cannot control, altars built out of understanding, effort, hope, fear. And somewhere among them, whether you would name it or not, there is always something left unresolved. Something unknown.

Paul begins there. He does not dismiss what he sees outright. He names it. “I see how religious you are.” And for a moment, it almost sounds like affirmation. But it is not. Because what fills that city is not the solution. It is the evidence of the problem. All of it, every altar, every offering, every system of meaning, is the same movement: humanity reaching upward, trying to close the distance, trying to find God. But the God Paul proclaims is not found that way.

He points to an altar that bears the name “unknown” and he speaks a word that breaks the entire pattern. The one they are trying to reach is not waiting to be discovered. He is not served by human hands, as though he needed anything. He is the one who gives. Life. Breath. Everything. Which means the movement is not from humanity to God. It is from God to humanity. And with that, the entire structure begins to shift.

Because if God is the one who gives, if he is the one who comes near, then everything built on human reaching, climbing, striving, begins to fall away. The systems, the explanations, the efforts to secure something stable no longer hold in the same way. And what remains is not a clearer path upward, but something far more unsettling.

Paul speaks of a day that has been fixed. A day of judgment. And suddenly what had seemed like a search becomes something else entirely. Because judgment brings an end to the search. It brings an end to every attempt to justify oneself, to explain oneself, to stand on something constructed. It exposes all of it as insufficient. And the proof of that judgment is not an idea. It is a man. A man raised from the dead.

At that point, the conversation cannot remain abstract. It cannot stay at the level of philosophy or speculation. Because now everything is anchored in something that has happened. Not a principle. Not a system. A person. The one who was crucified and whom God has raised. And that is where the word becomes difficult to hear.

Because it means that God is not where we have been looking. Not in the upward reach. Not in our carefully constructed, generous explanations. He is found in the one who was rejected, who suffered, who died. And the resurrection does not move away from that. It confirms it. It declares that God was at work there, in the place that looked like failure, like absence, like the end.

The responses in Athens unfold. Some mock. Some hesitate. Some want to hear more. The word does not produce a single reaction. It never does. It meets people where they are, and it exposes, unsettles, draws, divides.

And the same word continues to move. This is not a scene locked in the past. It is a word that still finds its way into the places where you are still reaching, still building, still trying to hold things together. It moves into the quiet spaces where your life feels uncertain, where your understanding does not reach far enough, where something in you remains unresolved.

And there, it does not invite a stronger effort or a clearer system. It announces something that has already taken place. That God has already come near. The one who was crucified has been raised. Which means that the end you fear has already been entered. The judgment you cannot escape has already been borne.

What remains is no longer the task of reaching God, but the reality of being held by the one who has already come for you. What began as a search becomes something else. Not a striving toward what is unknown, but a being found by the one who is no longer hidden in the way we expect. Found not in what is constructed, but in what has been given. Not in what can be secured, but in what is spoken in Word, water, bread and wine.

What is spoken does not depend on whether everything has come together, or whether life has become clear, or whether understanding has finally reached its goal. It is spoken here for you no as you are. In the midst of what you have left unresolved. In the places where your control slips. In

the spaces where the fearful unknown still presses in. And what it says is simple, though it runs against everything else.

You are not the one who must reach to control. You are the one who is found. You are baptized, your sin is forgiven, and your life is held together in mercy and hope by the one who was crucified and who now lives.

“May the peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds
in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Commentaries on the Lessons

The Seventh Sunday of Easter

Acts 1:6–14

“Is this the time?” The question never changes. When will things be set right? When will we see it? When will control be restored? Jesus does not answer. He refuses the premise.

“It is not for you to know.”

The theology of glory seeks knowledge, visibility, control over the divine timetable, a peek into the future. Jesus removes all of it. “You will receive...” Not seize. Not construct. Receive. And then he is gone. No visible Christ. No immediate fulfillment. Only absence. This is the shape of the church, waiting. Not mastery, but dependence. Not sight but promise.

This waiting is not passive. It is the crucifixion of the need to know, to control, to secure the outcome of God’s work. The theology of the cross teaches the church to live without visible confirmation, without immediate resolution, without possession of what has been promised. What remains is only the Word and the promise that what is given will come, not when it is grasped, but when it is received.

Psalm 68:1–10, 32–35

God acts. Enemies scatter. The righteous rejoice. The action of God is specific mercy. Father of orphans. Protector of widows. This is where God locates himself. Among those who have no defense. And God leads them through the wilderness. Not around it.

The theology of glory wants God to eliminate the wilderness. The theology of the cross confesses that God leads precisely there and remains.

The power of God must be redefined. It is not the elimination of weakness, but God’s decision to dwell within it. The theology of the cross reveals that divine strength is not displayed in domination, but in faithfulness to those who cannot sustain themselves. The wilderness, then, is not a detour from God’s work, but the very place where his sustaining presence becomes known, though never in the way we would choose.

1 Peter 4:12–14; 5:6–11

“Do not be surprised...” But suffering always surprises. Because we expect faith to function as insulation. Peter says: no. It is participation. To suffer is not to fall outside of Christ’s life. It is to be drawn into its shape.

“Humble yourselves...” Which is not an achievement, but a collapse of self-reliance. “Cast your anxieties...” Not solve them. Not manage them. Cast them because you cannot carry them. Why? Because he cares. That is the entire ground. Not your capacity. His care.

And this care of God does not remove the burden but carries you within it. The theology of the cross refuses the illusion that anxiety can be mastered or suffering resolved. Instead, it directs everything outward, away from the self and toward the one who bears what you cannot. To cast your anxieties is not to solve them, but to abandon the attempt to hold them alone, trusting that the one who has entered suffering will not leave you orphaned to struggle alone.

John 17:1–11

Jesus prays.

And what is striking is not what he asks but what he assumes. “They were yours... you gave them to me...” Everything begins with God’s action. Not human decision. Not spiritual awakening. Giving. “I have made your name known...” Revelation is not discovery. It is interruption. And the prayer is not for removal, but preservation.

“Keep them...” That is the final word. Not that they hold on. That they are held. The theology of the cross ends here: the church does not endure because it is strong, faithful, or perceptive, but because it is kept by the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit.

And this keeping is the deepest offense to the theology of glory, because it removes every ground for confidence in the self. The church does not endure because it understands correctly, believes strongly, or remains consistent. The church is broken, weak and inconsistent. In the eyes of the world, it is a farce. The church endures only because it is held, in ways that cannot be seen, measured, or verified. The theology of the cross leaves the church with nothing but this: that the Father keeps what the Son has given, and that this keeping will remain hidden until the end. And yet, it is already certain, comprehended in faith.

Sermon

The Seventh Sunday of Easter

John 17:1–11

Friends in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is praying, and you are drawn into it before you have time to decide what to do with it. You are not standing outside the moment, observing something sacred from a distance. You are already inside the words. Already included. Already being spoken about. And what you hear is not what you might expect.

You might expect him to speak about what you should become, what you must do, how you are to remain faithful once he is gone. But that is not where he begins. He begins with what has already been done. You hear him say that you have been given to him.

And that shifts everything. Because you may be used to thinking of your life with God as something that began with your movement, your decision, your seriousness about God. But here, in this prayer, that entire structure is set aside. Before you moved, before you understood, before you even knew what was happening, you were given. Your place with Christ does not begin with you. It begins with the Father. And then the words press further. You do not belong to yourself.

That is not stated as an argument or a command. It is simply spoken as reality. You were the Father's, and you have been given to the Son. Which means the way you have come to think about your life as something you must hold together, manage, account for does not stand in the way you assume. What feels most certain to you, that your life is fundamentally yours, is quietly taken from you here. And in its place, something else is spoken.

You are held within a relationship that does not depend on your ability to sustain it. A relationship with God that was established with you in your baptism.

As the prayer continues, you hear that what you know of God has not come from your reaching or your searching. It has been made known to you. It has come from outside of you, spoken into your life, given rather than discovered. And even as you hear that, something in you resists it, because you know how unsteady your grasp of it feels. You know how easily what you believe seems to shift, how quickly clarity fades, how often you find yourself unsure, distracted, turned inward again.

A question begins to form, even if you do not speak it aloud. If this depends on you, if it rests on your faith to hold onto what has been given, then what will happen when you cannot?

That question is not answered by turning back to you. It is answered within the prayer itself.

Jesus does not speak to you and tell you to hold on. He turns to the Father and speaks for you. He asks that you be kept. And in that moment, the entire weight shifts away from you. What you assumed rested in your hands is placed somewhere else entirely.

You are not the one who must secure this. You are the one who is being kept.

And that does not immediately feel like relief, because it takes away what you are used to relying on. It removes the illusion that you can stabilize your life with God through effort or consistency or clarity. It leaves you without control, without a way to guarantee the outcome. But it also leaves you with something you did not expect.

The one praying for you is not standing apart from what lies ahead. He is moving into it. Into suffering, into abandonment, into death. And he carries you with him as someone already given, already named, already held within what he is about to do. He carries your sin to the cross in order that you may be set free in Him.

The world does not change around you. The tensions remain. The uncertainties do not resolve themselves. You are not removed from what presses in on you. You are not lifted out of it into something clearer or more secure. Within the business and messiness of your life, a Word has been spoken that does not depend on how steady you feel or how clearly you see.

Beneath all of that, the Word of baptism's promise holds. God's grip in the Spirit does not loosen. You are held and sustained in grace by Christ Jesus who intercedes for you, who went to the cross and who was raised for you.

“May the peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds
in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Sermon

The Ascension of Our lord

Matthew 28:16–20

Beloved hearers of the Word of God, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

They go to the mountain because He told them to. Not because they understand, not because they are ready, but because He said to go. And when they see Him, something happens that is almost too honest to preach cleanly: they worship Him—and they doubt. Both at once.

There is no clean line here between faith and unbelief, no purified group who have finally arrived. They stand there divided within themselves, drawn to Him and unsure of Him at the same time. And that is where He meets them. He does not wait for the doubt to resolve. He does not correct them first or sift them into categories. He comes to them as they are and speaks a word that does not arise from them at all:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

It is not a statement about them. It is not a condition placed upon them. It is a declaration about Him. Whatever is about to follow does not depend on the strength of their faith or the clarity of their understanding. It rests entirely on Him who stands before them. And only then does He send them.

“Go...”

But now the going is different. It is not a burden placed on uncertain people so that something might be accomplished. It is the movement that flows from His authority. They are sent because He reigns, not so that He might. And what they are given to do is strangely simple.

To go into a world no different from themselves, where worship and doubt live side by side, and to bring people to the place where Christ has promised to act.

“Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Not persuading them upward. Not producing something in them. But placing them into something that does not come from them at all. In that water, with that name spoken, a person is taken hold of. Given an identity that does not rise or fall with their certainty. Claimed. And then, teaching.

But not as a ladder to climb back to God. Not as a system by which they secure what has already been given. The teaching comes after the naming, after the claiming. It is what life begins to look like when it is already held by Him. And yet even here, nothing in the scene suggests that they suddenly become capable, confident, or consistent. The doubt has not disappeared. It remains in the background, as it so often does.

So, He gives them one more word. Not instruction. Not demand.

A promise.

“I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

He binds Himself to them.

To this group, who worship and doubt, who will fail and scatter and misunderstand, He gives Himself without reserve.

And that is where the scene settles. Not on their going. Not on their obedience. But on His presence.

And that is how they leave. Not as those who have resolved their doubt, but as those who are held within His promise. Not as those who finally understand, but as those who have been sent by the One who does. And the last word that follows them down the mountain is not what they must do. It is who He is. With them. With you. Always.

“May the peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds
in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

A Hymn for the Easter Season

Now From the Grave the Silence Breaks

Text: Pastor Mark Anderson, Meter: 888 888 and Alleluias, *“Now All the Vault of Heaven Resound”*

1.

Now from the grave the silence breaks, The crucified from darkness wakes;
Alleluia, alleluia!
Not crowned by might, nor robed in power, But bearing still the wounded hour.
He is Risen! Alleluia!
Christ is Risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!

2.

No triumph wrought by human hand, No strength that we could comprehend;
Alleluia, alleluia!
But death undone by death He bore, The hidden God restores once more.
He is Risen! Alleluia!
Christ is Risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!

3.

Where we had thought that God was gone, Where all seemed lost, and hope withdrew;
Alleluia, alleluia!
There, in the depths no eye could see, Was sown the seed of victory.
He is Risen! Alleluia!
Christ is Risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!

4.

O Christ, in weakness you were known, In suffering you claimed your own;
Alleluia, alleluia!
No path around, but through the grave, You entered death, the lost to save.
He is Risen! Alleluia!
Christ is Risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!

5.

And so to us this word is said: You who are bound, you who were dead,
Alleluia, alleluia!
No death can hold those He has named; In Him Baptized, in Him reclaimed.
He is Risen! Alleluia!
Christ is Risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Prayer of the Church for the Easter Season

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their need. Almighty and ever-living God, you brought forth from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, triumphing in Him by the hidden victory of the cross:

Grant that your Church may live not by what can be seen, counted, or admired, but by your Word, which goes forth and never returns empty.

Where she is tempted to exchange the foolishness of the cross for the wisdom of the age, turn her again to those places where you have chosen to be found: in Word and sacrament, among the ungodly, the guilty, the undone.

Teach her to speak not of herself, but of Christ alone; and in that speaking open the hearts of the spiritually dead, that they may hear and live.

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

O God, whose kingdom comes as dawn upon those who sit in darkness:

We pray for the nations of the earth, for rulers and for all in authority.

Disappoint the designs that flourish in pride; bring low what exalts itself; and raise up what serves the neighbor.

Where the world builds its towers, remind us how they fall;

where it trusts in power, show again the strange reign of him who rode into his city on a colt and mounted his throne upon the cross.

Grant such peace as the world cannot give, and such justice as does not perish with the passing of powers of this age.

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Merciful Father,

whose Son still bears the wounds by which we are healed:

Look with compassion upon all who suffer: those whose bodies fail, whose minds are troubled, whose hearts are heavy with grief, fear, or shame.

Meet them not at a distance, but in the very places where they are brought to an end of themselves.
In the long night of pain, be their unseen light; in the silence of abandonment, be the Word of
promise that cannot be taken away.

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Gracious God,

in baptism you have hidden our life with Christ:

As you did not abandon your Son to the grave, bring us through the last shadow into that morning
where death is no more;

not as a reward we attain, but as a gift already secured in him who was slain for us and lives.

Keep us in that sure and certain hope, until the veil is lifted and we behold you face to face.

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray:

for we are dust, and our words are frail,

yet you are faithful, and your promise stands.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord,

who was crucified in weakness, raised in glory, and even now gives himself to us in mercy,

and who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and forever.

Amen.