



FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

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May 10, 2020

Anglican Parish of Raymond Terrace
www.stjohnsraymondterrace.org

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Pray

May I speak to you in the name of GOD – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen



Our passage from the Acts of the Apostles talks of the first Christian martyr – Stephen. It is only 6 verses long; but it contains much. Stephen is described in verse 55 in this way: ⁵⁵But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.” And when he told the Sanhedrin what he saw, they dragged him out of the city and stoned him to death. While they were doing this, the second half of verse 58 tells us: and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul – later to have his name changed by GOD to Paul. What do we tend to do in situations like this? Like Maurie Mole from the Mines Subsidence Board, we should *walk in the opposite direction and report our detection* – preferably to the Police. Many times, though, we do nothing. We just

don't want to become involved. So, are we guilty of throwing stones or of watching the coats? During the week I read a news story about a 15-year-old girl from Manchester, England who was attacked on a tram on 19 April this year. She was sitting in the rear carriage of the tram when she was surrounded by a group of teenage boys and girls who then subjected her to a vicious and unprovoked attack which left her needing medical treatment. The attack was videoed and put onto social media where the attackers were heard to be laughing. 4 arrests have been made by Manchester police. The victim's sister posted the video herself because she "wanted to show the parents what their children were up to." The victim's sister said there were other adults on the tram – but nobody did anything – NOT ONE PERSON intervened. Whilst these people weren't throwing any stones, they were basically watching the coats of those who were! Harsh? Perhaps. But we need to do something – not something that will bring us harm though. Sadly, there aren't many people who have a

strong enough relationship with JESUS to do this: [Play Miss Clara clip](#). This is obviously from a movie and was scripted to make a point; but is a good reminder to always include JESUS in everything we do. Walking away and ringing 000 might be more appropriate.

In an article entitled “Are We Guilty of Throwing Stones or of Watching Coats”, North American academic Andre Johnson said that being faithful to the gospel got Stephen in trouble. He couldn’t help but wonder if Stephen silently recited Psalm 31, a psalm asking for deliverance from one’s enemies: “Rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.” But when deliverance does not come on this side of eternity, the good news is that we can commit our spirit into the hands of the one who has already prepared a place for us—the one who stands with us in the stoning pits of life, the one ready to redeem and forgive us even if we are guilty of throwing stones and watching coats.

The Apostle Peter talks to us about the symbolism of rocks and stone. No doubt Peter often thought of JESUS' words to him right after he confessed that JESUS was "the Messiah", the Son of the living God – You are Peter AND ON THIS ROCK I will build my Church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. What is the stone that counts in the building of the Church? Peter answers: CHRIST Himself. JESUS is called "a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." Some will stumble over CHRIST because they reject Him or refuse to believe that He is who he says He is. But Psalm 118:22 says that "the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," the most important part of God's building, the Church. ^The characteristics of CHRIST, the cornerstone are:

1. He is completely trustworthy
2. He is precious to believers
3. And, though rejected by some, He is the most important part of the Church.

People who refuse to believe in JESUS have made the greatest mistake of their lives. They have stumbled over the one person who could save them and give meaning to their lives; and they have fallen into GOD's hands for judgement.

We, as people, often base our self-worth on our accomplishments. But our relationship with JESUS is far more important than our jobs, successes, wealth or knowledge. We have been chosen by GOD as His very own, and we have been called to represent Him to others. We need to remember that our value comes from being one of GOD's children – NOT from what we can achieve. We have worth because of what GOD does; NOT because of what we do.

Our Gospel passage today gathers all this up under the heading of ^JESUS IS THE WAY TO THE FATHER.

JESUS' opening words of this gospel passage show the way to eternal life – though unseen is secure – as secure as our trust in JESUS. He has already prepared our way

to eternal life. The only issue that may still be unsettled is our willingness to believe.

There are few verses in the Bible that describe eternal life; but these few verses are rich with promises. Here JESUS says, “I am going to prepare a place for you,” and “I will come back.” We can look forward to eternal life because JESUS has promised it to all who believe in Him. Although the details of eternity are unknown, we need not fear because JESUS is preparing for us and will spend eternity with us.

JESUS goes on to tell us that He is the way, the truth and the life.

How can we know the way to GOD? Only through JESUS. JESUS says that He is the ONLY way to the Father. Some people may argue that this way is too narrow. In reality, it is wide enough for the whole world – if the whole world chooses to accept it – social distancing will certainly not be a problem here. Instead of worrying about how limited it sounds to have only one

way, we should be rejoicing by saying: “Thank you GOD for providing a sure way to get to you.”

As the way, JESUS is our path to the Father – the only living way. As the truth, JESUS is the reality of all GOD’s promises. And as the life, JESUS joins His divine life to ours – both now and in eternity.

JESUS is the visible, tangible image of the invisible GOD. He is the complete image of what GOD is like. JESUS explained to Philip – who wanted to see the Father – that to know JESUS is to know GOD.



JESUS is the cornerstone of our faith. Stones represent strength, refuge, fortress-like protection. St John’s is made of blocks of sandstone and has stood for almost 160 years. Stones are meant to be built on not thrown at people. JESUS’ way is the way on which we as Christians believe we should journey. In today’s gospel, Thomas is basically asking JESUS “Where is GOD?” As adult believers, we have hopefully come to understand that the “where-ness” of GOD is not so much GOD’s private address, but an awareness of GOD’s presence

within us. The message of JESUS to the disciples is that GOD dwells within the household of believers just as JESUS is in their midst. Divine presence is a household of many dwelling places, of many mansions, of many rooms. In other words, GOD is big enough to live in the whole community of believers – wherever they are.



May we pray:

GOD of joy, you enliven our Easter faith as we continue to live in communion with your Son, who calls us to eternal glory in your kingdom. Grant that as we believe in the words of the Gospel, we may imitate the works of His love This we pray through our LORD JESUS CHRIST, risen and glorified forever. Amen

Life Application Study Bible

Daily Prayer 2020

<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/living-word/may-10-easter-5-acts-755-60-psalm-311-5-15-16> Date accessed 4/5/2020

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/newsliverpool/girl-screams-for-mum-as-mob-surrounds-her-in-terrifying-attack-on-tram/ar-BB13xVay> Date accessed 4/5/2020