

Easter 5, 2026

Sermon: “Do not let your hearts be troubled” (John 14: 1-14; Acts 7: 55-60)

May I speak in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

When Scripture passages are read out on a Sunday, do you sometimes wonder how the readings can belong together? Or, how are they connected? Those questions did pass through my mind as I started to prepare this sermon.

In the gospel passage, Jesus speaks words of comfort: “Do not let your hearts be troubled...I am the way, the truth and the life.” But in the passage from Acts 7, we witness violence, chaos and death in the stoning of Stephen. We have one passage that is reassuring, and the other is raw and disturbing.

And yet, the Church of England’s lectionary places them together on this Sunday in Eastertide because they answer a deeper question: How are the promises of Jesus lived out in the lives of Christians?

There are moments in life when the ground beneath us feels unsteady, when plans fall apart, when loss comes too close, or when the future seems uncertain. In our gospel passage, we step into a deeply emotional moment when Jesus was speaking to his disciples on the night before his crucifixion. They were confused, afraid and anxious. Everything that they thought was secure, suddenly felt fragile. It was into such a moment that Jesus spoke these words, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.”

He was not saying that everything was about to make sense, nor was he promising that the road ahead would be easy, or that everything would be hunky-dory. But he said what he said because of who he is. Jesus was not offering a plan. He was offering himself when he declared, “I am the way, the truth and the life.”

Notice what Jesus did not say, “I will show you the way” as if he were a guide standing at a distance. He said, “I **am** the way.” The path forward is not a map to follow, but a relationship to trust.

For the disciples, this was very unsettling. Understandably, they wanted clarity and Thomas articulated what they were all thinking, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

It’s an honest question, and it’s also our question. We would like certainty and directions. And we would like to know how things will turn out. But Jesus redirected the disciples’ focus because the way forward is not about having all the answers. It’s about knowing him, about knowing Jesus.

Faith is not about mastering information. It is about trusting a person, and that changes everything. If Jesus is the way, then even when life feels confusing, we are not lost. If Jesus is the truth, then even when voices around us are loud and conflicting, we are not deceived. If Jesus is the life, then even in the face of death, we are not without hope.

In today's gospel passage, Jesus was preparing his disciples for a world that would feel uncertain and dangerous. He knew that they were going to face confusion, loss and persecution. And so, he instructed them: "Do not let your hearts be troubled." But he did not say "Nothing bad will happen." Jesus did not promise safety, but he did, and continues, to promise presence.

He declared, "I am the way." He did not provide a map or instructions. But what he did provide is a relationship with God. Jesus stated to his disciples, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." God is not a distant God, but through Jesus Christ, God is made visible in love.

Jesus then said to his disciples, "You will do the works that I do" which some theologians interpret as Jesus saying, "My life will continue in you."

When we turn to our passage in Acts 7, we see Stephen, not in a peaceful upper room, not surrounded by friends but by an angry crowd with stones in their hands. But if we listen carefully to Stephen, his words tell us that he is living inside Jesus' promise. Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." Stephen's heart was steady.

Jesus said, "Whoever believes in me will do the works that I do": Stephen did the works of Jesus. And as the stones fell, Stephen looked up and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

Stephen's words were not just similar to Jesus' words on the cross, in fact, they are of the same spirit, the same love, the same life. When Jesus said, "I am the way," we see Stephen walking that way.

But the crowd looking at Stephen, well, they did not see the truth. They had certainty, but they were blind. Stephen, on the other hand, he looked up and saw heaven open. The Acts passage says, "Full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God."

While others saw expressed threat and anger, Stephen saw Christ. And this connects to Jesus' words, "If you know me, you will know the Father also." Stephen knew Jesus, and in the moment of death, he was not lost. He knew exactly where he was going because he knew the way.

And what about us, two thousand years later, listening to these Scripture passages read aloud on the fifth Sunday in Eastertide? When we hear Jesus' words, "Do not let your hearts be troubled," we may find these words positive, but they may seem a tad unrealistic because our hearts do get troubled. We worry about the future. We fear loss. We struggle with conflict, injustice, pain. We are normal human beings living with the realities of life.

Stephen's story does not deny that reality. It intensifies it. But it also shows us something powerful, that a heart anchored in Christ can remain open, even in the hardest moments.

Stephen did not close down in fear, nor did he harden in anger. He stayed opened to God, and stayed opened even to his enemies. This kind of heart is not natural, but it is a heart formed by trust in Christ.

When Jesus said, “I am the way,” he was not talking about how we get to heaven after we die. He was speaking, he is speaking, about a way of living now – a way that is marked by trust in God, by courage in the face of fear, by love even towards enemies, and by a hope that goes beyond death.

Stephen demonstrated that this way is real, and costly. But it is also filled with glory. Stephen saw Jesus standing and welcoming him.

Today’s readings remind us that faith is not about avoiding trouble. It is about trusting Christ in the midst of trouble. Jesus does not just show us the way. He shares his life with us so that we can walk the way with him.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled”. These are Jesus’ words to us. Life is not easy, but he is present with us. We don’t know the future, but we do know the way. And the way is not a path that we walk alone because the way is Christ himself, alive, present and leading us, even through the valley of the shadow of death, into life. Amen.