

Sermon Notes Easter 5 May 3 2026

The witness of the stoning of Stephen in Luke-Acts captures the joys and struggles of Jesus and followers in living out God's grace in their lives. This message captures our attention as our faith dreams are challenged by the day-to-day ups and downs of life. The Gospels of Luke-Acts and John persist in the abundant blessings of God that continues to transform our world.

Acts 7:55-60

Luke's narrative in Acts now makes clear that besides idyllic success, the apostles encountered also hardship and death. The details of the story of Stephen's martyrdom parallel both Jesus' baptism and his crucifixion. Stephen was one of the seven men appointed by the apostles to fill the role of deacon, caring for the poor. Luke also places in his mouth a long speech in which Christ is seen as the replacement of the Jewish temple. Luke's reference to Jesus as the Son of Man allows the persecuted community to trust that at the end of time, Christ will return as apocalyptic judge to vindicate all who have suffered for their faith. (Sundays and Seasons)

John 14:1-14

"This text is frequently read at funerals, and for good reason. It contains promises that are profoundly comforting in the face of the death of a loved one. The challenge is to help listeners understand that this text is not only about life after death, but is a text that has everything to do with our lives here and now.

The setting is Jesus' farewell address at his last supper with his disciples. Jesus has washed his disciples' feet and has explained to them what this means (13:1-20). He has foretold his betrayal by Judas, and Judas has slipped out into the night (13:21-30). He has told his disciples that he will be with them only a little while longer, and that where he is going, they cannot come (13:33). He has also foretold Peter's imminent denial (13:36-38). No wonder the disciples are troubled. Their beloved teacher is leaving them, one of their own has turned against them, and the stalwart leader among the disciples is said to be on the cusp of a great failure of loyalty. It is as though the ground is shifting beneath their feet.

Jesus responds to the anxiety of his disciples by saying, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me" (14:1). Jesus calls them back to this fundamental relationship of trust and assures them that he is not abandoning them. Rather, he is returning to his Father, which is good news for them. In speaking of his ascension to the Father, Jesus assures his disciples that this is also their destination. There are many dwellings in his Father's house, and he goes to prepare a place for them, so that they will be with him and dwell with him in his intimate relationship with the Father (14:2-3)."

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