



Easter 5/A 10 May 2020  
Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14

I am not generally an anxious person. In fact, while Deb describes herself as Type A+ on the anxious scale, she often tells people that I am a B- - -. I just don't get worked up or worry over things. I'm not anxious . . . normally . . . But then, what – if anything! - feels normal about these days?

So, I must confess to feeling just a wee bit of anxiety over the past few weeks. And I think I have figured out why. It all feels so up in the air! Everything! – and I do mean everything! – just feels so uncertain, so tenuous, so unsettled.

I ask you: When have so many people, everywhere, throughout the nation and across the globe, lived with such uncertainty? When have we all had so many unanswered and unanswerable questions, all at the same time? When have so many plans and routines been upended, cancelled, suspended, put on hold?

When have so many official and authoritative guidelines carried caveats that warn they are only provisional, temporary, subject to revision? How long will this last? When will we get to go out again - gather again - travel again - return to work again . . . or for some, work at all? When will we once again be permitted to feel the warmth of a hug, or a comforting arm around the shoulders - the welcoming assurance of shaking hands - feel safe again? The grief of those who must accept that their loved ones are dying alone. The fear of wondering if every cough or sneeze may be the beginning of the dreaded illness. Mounting projections, each looking worse than the last; and sobering statistics, with tallies that boggle the mind, and numbers that continue to climb and end in too many zeroes. What will the 'new normal' look like? Or OMG, what if this is the 'new normal'?

This unseen virus, with its far-reaching, insidious tentacles that reach into our homes, and families, and communities, our churches and schools, hospitals, economy . . . this microscopic, unseen enemy leaves us feeling unmoored, untethered, adrift. We feel suspended, disconnected, unable to gain a foothold on something solid and dependable, concrete and unshakeable. Everything is up in the air. And we are anxious.

Our lessons and psalm for today have a message for our anxious state. To begin, the scriptures acknowledge the truth, the reality of where we find ourselves. We are met where we are . . . Yes, the feeling of uncertainty is real. Yes, the feeling of being off course without our regular patterns and way-markers is real. Yes, the longing for something unmovable yet lifegiving, solid yet sustaining, concrete yet creative is real. And yes, God gives us a way that is steadfast when all feels like shifting sand,

a truth that is certain when all feels slippery, a life that is assured when all feels unsettled. God gives us precisely what we need for this moment - and for all time - because our God chooses to come among us as a person, someone just like us, and then molds and forms us into a people, his own people. All our lessons this morning bear witness to this assurance, this place to get a foothold, this pledge of security no matter what.

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life,” says Jesus. In the midst of our anxious uncertainty, Jesus comes to us: the way - the truth – the life. With Jesus, we find sure footing, a clear path. With Jesus, there is a way forward. We may not see the next step, but he does. And if we stay close, follow him, and depend on him, we can move forward supported by the unmovable, unshakeable, unshifting ground that holds us, the guide that won’t leave us adrift, the God who won’t lose us or leave us behind.

Jesus assures us that if we will know him, we will also know the One he calls Abba, the One who created us, the One we call Father. And God the Great Creator is not capricious, aloof, or aloft; not beyond or separated from this world, but still very present in all its joys, and in all its troubles. God the Father is knowable to us, because Jesus, God the Son, is knowable to us.

What does this tell us about God? The God we know in Jesus Christ became flesh and dwelt among us, made a home among the poor, cared for the sick, lived humbly, fed the hungry, blessed children, washed the feet of his disciples, wept at the death of his friend, promised that death will not be victorious, met his disciples even when they had deserted him and isolated

themselves in an upper room, went on ahead to prepare a place for us, and will return and take us to himself, that where he is, we may be also. God is with us, even in our vulnerability, our uncertainty, our anxiousness, our flailing, and failing, and fear. Reach out, and the truth is that there is God. Reach out in any other direction, and there is God also. Take a step forward, God leads the way. Our footing is confident and sure. The path holds; the ground is firm. Jesus would have us know and believe that the truth of the matter, the truth of the Gospel, is that the way – his way - Christ's way - leads to eternal life.

There is a phrase that Jesus uses here in this text, over which some people are tripped up: “No one comes to the Father except through me.” Don’t let those words make you stumble. Some will only see this as a claim to exclusivity. But do not imagine the Jesus Way as constructed of paving stones that can be pried up and used as weapons to drive others away, projectiles hurled against our neighbors. Jesus is describing his power, his ability to overcome both our inability and our pride as they relate to our faith. He is reminding his followers that none of us makes our own way to God. We do not - cannot - earn our way to God through our faith, or our practice, or our piety. We aren’t succeeding in something that people of other faiths are destined only to fail at. That’s not Jesus’ point here. The point is that, though we are weak, Jesus is strong. Though we get distracted, Jesus stays focused. Though we stumble, Jesus supports us and holds us up.

Jesus was talking to people whose families and friends thought they might be crazy for following him. Perhaps you can relate. He was talking to people who were risking the loss of their loved

ones, their livelihoods, and even their very lives to call him Savior. In some parts of the world that is still true. He was talking to people who were worried that the consequences of Jesus' reputation as an outsider would rub off on them; Jesus' reputation as someone:

- who disturbed the status quo,
- someone who associated with the wrong people,
- who got lifted on a cross instead of climbing a ladder,
- whose healing of the man born blind proved that you can't look at someone who is ill, and judge them, and reject them as a sinner,
- whose death proved that innocence isn't a guarantee against suffering,
- whose resurrection proved that death isn't the end of the story,
- whose ascension to God's right hand means that there is nowhere that our scarred and frail human flesh cannot be taken, and live, even in the very presence of God,
- whose whole life proved that nothing is stronger than the God who is Love, and Mercy, and Grace, and Compassion.

"I am the way, (I am) the truth, (I am) the life." Keep going, Jesus tells us. Keep on keeping on. The footing is sure. The path is solid. You cannot get lost. God won't let you go. Jesus offers assurance that following him is the way to know God, the way to an abundant life, the way to peace and joy, no matter our circumstances. Following Jesus is not crazy, a waste of time, or a dead-end road. Jesus is the way. Stay on the path and keep going. God gives us a way that is steadfast when all feels like

sinking sand, a truth that is certain when all feels slippery, a life that is assured when all is shifting, feels only temporary and uncertain, because God gives us a person, Jesus, the very Son of God, to be the Way for us.

Keep going. Keep going and depend on the God who is our rock, a strong castle to keep us safe, our crag, and our stronghold. This psalm was on the lips of Jesus and Stephen when they were letting go of their lives to hold firm to their faith: "Into your hands, O God, I commend my spirit." When it all feels unstable, shifting, unsettled; when we feel like we've come untethered, when it's all up in the air, rely on the God who is our rock.

God gives us a person and makes us into a people. "Come to (Jesus), a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Resting and relying on Jesus as our foundation stone, chosen and precious in God's sight, God makes us into a people, builds us into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, a dwelling place for God, a new Temple that cannot be destroyed, a place from which and in which God works and is worshipped, made of stones – living stones.

This spiritual house is both solid and dynamic. It's tougher than concrete, yet life-giving. It's more lasting than granite, yet nimble. It's stronger than marble, yet supple; more beautiful than anything that can be carved from dead rock, even by the most talented human artist, because these stones have life,

these living stones – we ourselves, carry within us the very breath of God.

This temple made of living stones - us, you and me, all the children of God, called and loved and gathered, and built up together by God, even when we are physically apart – this temple is a marvel, a wonder. In making us into a building God sustains through all time and space, spanning and including all generations of the faithful, God is not granting certainty at the price of stagnation. We are not just holding it all together — don't move a muscle, if we all just stay still, encase it in concrete, we'll be fine. No. This temple of living stones, built on Christ, the sure foundation, is dependable but creative and dynamic, just like the God in whose image we are made. Living, and life-giving. Tough, tenacious, true, together.

These are good words, truthful words, when it all feels up in the air.

What's not up in the air, not temporary, not shifting, is Jesus' love for us, and Jesus' power, and passion, and perseverance to love us through any and every uncertainty. The reliability of Jesus, Jesus' love, Jesus' care for us forever is not provisional, mercurial, unknowable. It cannot be canceled, doesn't need to be rescheduled. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Rock-solid, and sure. God is our rock, a strong castle to keep us safe, our crag, and our stronghold. Jesus Christ is the unshakeable, firm foundation on which we are joined together, bound one to another, being built into a temple made of living stones.

Amen.