

twelvebaskets



EASTER 5A

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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Fifth Sunday of Easter - Year A

3rd May 2026



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

335 STF – Rejoice, the Lord is King! OR

456 STF – And are we yet alive, and see each other's face?

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

462 STF – Come with me, come wander, come welcome the world OR

248 STF – I heard the voice of Jesus say

Readings: Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14

Hymn:

745 STF – For all the saints who from their labours rest OR

519 STF – Father, I place into your hands the things I cannot do

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

415 STF – The church of Christ in every age OR

409 STF – Let us build a house

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

502 STF – I know that my Redeemer lives, and ever prays for me OR

470 STF – Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided

Blessing

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Call to worship

The Spirit of the Lord is here, amongst us.
The peace of God is in reach, around us.
The love of God is within us, in our hearts.

Help us to notice you, in our midst, O Lord, we pray,

Amen.¹

Hymn:

335 STF – Rejoice, the Lord is King! OR

456 STF – And are we yet alive, and see each other's face?

Opening Prayers

Let us pray,
we give you thanks for this world,
the beauty that is all around us,
the people that we share our lives with.

Let our soul sing out in awe and wonder...

Let us give thanks.

We know, though, that sometimes we forget the wonder of your world.

We don't respect and protect the beauty that surrounds us.

We can be unthinking and uncaring towards the people we share this world with.

We are sorry for the harsh words, the unsaid words,
times when our actions have caused pain.

We ask for your forgiveness.

Help us.

Breathe new life into us.

As you breathe that new life into us let us breathe deeply.

Giving thanks,
Appreciating all we have.

Help us breathe new life and love into your world in any way we can.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Lorna Dobson

All Age Talk

[Optional prop: a map]

Have you ever been somewhere new and not known the way? Perhaps you have been in a big shopping centre, a theme park, or even a city you have never visited before. You look around and think, “Where do I go now?” Often in those examples there is a map that can help tell you, showing you, this is where you are!

However, that feeling of being unsure is something many of us will have experienced before.

In our Gospel reading today, which we will hear a little later in our service, Jesus is speaking to his friends. The disciples are worried and confused. Jesus has been telling them that things are going to change. They do not fully understand what is about to happen.

So Jesus says something very simple:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

And then he says these famous words:

“I am the way, the truth and the life.”

Now notice, Jesus does not give them a map. He does not hand them directions written on a piece of paper. Nor is there a screen that has the answers.

Instead, he gives them himself. Jesus is saying that following him is not about knowing every detail about the future. It is about trusting the one who walks with us.

Think about when a child holds the hand of a parent while crossing a busy road. The child might not understand the traffic or the road rules. But they trust the person holding their hand.

That is the picture Jesus is giving here.

Life can feel confusing sometimes. Adults experience this just as much as children. We worry about decisions, the future, work, school, health, and relationships. Jesus does not promise that life will always be simple.

But he promises that we do not walk alone.

“I am the way.”

In other words, when we follow Jesus, we are not trying to figure life out by ourselves. We are learning to walk with him. And when we walk with Jesus, we discover something important. His way leads to life. His way leads to truth. His way leads us closer to God.

So, here is a simple question for us today. When life feels confusing, who are we following?

The good news of this Gospel reading is this: we do not have to know everything about the journey. We just need to know the one who leads it. So, the invitation is to not keep searching for the map but take the hand that’s on offer from God today.

Amen.³

³ All Age Talk written by Matthew Forsyth

Hymn:

462 STF – Come with me, come wander, come welcome the world OR

248 STF – I heard the voice of Jesus say

Readings: Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14

Hymn:

745 STF – For all the saints who from their labours rest OR

519 STF – Father, I place into your hands the things I cannot do

Reflections on the readings

What a remarkable character Stephen is!

In our reflection today, let's begin with a focus on this man of extraordinary courage, wisdom and spirituality. Of course, this saint and first martyr does have his own feast day in the church's calendar – but, being Boxing Day, 26th December, perhaps Stephen's story is sometimes overlooked amidst the Christmas celebrations!

In the previous chapter of Acts, Stephen is introduced as 'a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit' who is elected as one of seven deacons to assist the apostles, primarily in practical service. He is further described as doing 'great wonders and signs among the people'. This appears to trigger resentment amongst various groups who oppose him but 'could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke'. He was clearly an exceptional disciple.

Our reading today comes after a long and fascinating narrative of his story – reminiscent in many ways of the hostility towards Jesus and his arrest and trial. In similar words, we hear that Stephen was brought before the council where false witnesses accuse him of speaking against the temple and the law. Despite the tangible hostility, Luke observes (*in Acts 6:15*) that the council cannot help but notice 'that his face was like the face of an angel'.

Stephen's response is a lengthy, impassioned, articulate and scholarly summary of much of the story of the Old Testament, from Abraham onwards. He is bold and forthright in how he accuses his accusers of opposing the Holy Spirit, persecuting prophets and breaking the law. It is no surprise that this does not go down well and Stephen becomes the focus of an episode of mob violence, with his enraged listeners grinding their teeth at Stephen. As the anger rises, Stephen is given an extraordinary filling of the Holy Spirit and a vision of heaven itself. Describing what he sees seals Stephen's fate and the company drag him out of the city and stone him to death. Further similarities to the death of Jesus are included as Luke reports that Stephen calls on God to receive his spirit (*in Luke 23:46*) and also appeals to God for forgiveness for his murderers (*a few verses earlier in Luke 23:34*).

Through this fearsome incident, Stephen becomes the first Christian martyr, and an inspiring witness... but perhaps we feel a little daunted looking at his story? What might we find in this story which encourages us, rather than making us feel that we could never have behaved as he did?

- Stephen is gripped by a passion to tell the story of God accurately, to an audience who have twisted the truth for their own ends. We might look for opportunities to do the same – to be witnesses to what we know, what we have experienced, what we believe, whatever other people are saying.
- Stephen is ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’. In his truth-telling, in his faithful witness, in his exposure of self-interest and fake news, God is right beside him, right inside him. We never step out alone for God, for God is before us. Later we shall hear again today’s psalm, which might almost have been spoken by Stephen.
- Even in the face of extreme injustice and cruelty, Stephen does not retaliate. He prays and asks for forgiveness for his persecutors. Perhaps that is the most remarkable part of the story, for we know how easy it is to become defensive and self-centred when we are under pressure.

Most of us find scenes of violence hard to witness or even imagine – this is not a scene from the Bible at which many of us would have wanted to be present. But a tiny, fascinating inclusion is that Luke notes that amongst those who were present, and by implication approving, is Saul, later to become Paul.

Pause for a moment to picture that... Saul, the young, gifted, brilliant Jewish scholar and man of action watching as another young man, clearly also gifted and brilliant, is stoned to death – and going so far as to assist those doing the dreadful deed by watching over their cloaks while they roll their sleeves up for bloody violence and murder. What impact might it have made on Saul? How did he respond to those last cries of Stephen, calling on Jesus to receive his spirit and then asking forgiveness for his murderers?

I wonder... we don’t know. There is no place anywhere in the letters of Paul where he refers back to this incident. Perhaps he was too ashamed, wanting only to put it out of his mind and memory, but surely it must have been a significant step in his own conversion.

The Gospel passage for today is often used at funerals, and may be familiar to some of us from that context. The words of Jesus recorded in John 14:1-14 were spoken on the last evening of Jesus’ life, as part of what we refer to as the ‘Last Supper’. Stephen was not present – as far as we know, he was not at that point a follower of Jesus, but the words take on a deep significance as we think of them in relation to Stephen’s life and witness – short as that was.

Jesus tells his followers not to ‘let your hearts be troubled’ – effectively not to worry. Easier said than done for some of us! The grounds for the confidence that Jesus wants his followers to have is that God is trustworthy and Jesus himself goes before us into death to prepare a place. When Thomas asks for more direction about how to find that place, Jesus replies with the words, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life’. Still the disciples are anxious and uncertain, Philip comes in with his question about seeing God. Again, Jesus reassures him; by following Jesus, they are on the right track.

Stephen demonstrates the truth of all that Jesus said to his disciples on that final, fearful night. Stephen has discovered already that Jesus embodies the **Way** which he wants to follow; Stephen recognises that it is in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus that the **Truth** of the whole history of God’s relationship with humanity makes sense and he seeks to demonstrate to the Jewish leaders how they have twisted that truth in not recognising the identity of Jesus. Finally, by his death and his beautiful vision of heaven, Stephen shows that the **Life** offered by Jesus is the true life, abundant life, eternal life.

As we prepare to go from here into the demands of the week ahead, whatever they may be, let us take something of the spirit of Stephen with us, especially into the difficult,

hostile, or challenging situations. Let us walk in the way of Jesus, let us speak of the truth of Jesus and let us experience the life of Jesus.

We close with the significantly more ancient words from Psalm 31, which we can imagine on the lips of Stephen, and which can be as true for us in the 21st Century as they were for Stephen in the 1st Century and for the writer, about a thousand years before Stephen:

(Read Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16 aloud – perhaps pausing between verses to give space for reflection):

¹ In you, O Lord, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame;

in your righteousness deliver me.

² Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily.

Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.

³ You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name's sake lead me and guide me,

⁴ take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge.

⁵ Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.

¹⁵ My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.

¹⁶ Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.⁴

Hymn:

415 STF – The church of Christ in every age OR

409 STF – Let us build a house

Prayers of intercession

[Wherever ... is indicated, names of countries, situations, individuals or organisations may be included].

God of the way, we bring our prayers today for all who are seeking to find a way through life:

- We pray for all who lead and govern within our local, national and global communities...
- We pray for all who struggle with mental health challenges, especially those who are suicidal...
- We pray for all who are seeking freedom from addiction of any form...

God of the way, give guidance to these your saints that they may be filled with your spirit and emboldened by your presence.

God of all truth, as we reflect on the life of Stephen we bring our prayers today for all who bear witness to your truth in a hostile environment:

- We pray for lands where Christians are persecuted...
- We pray for all who are seeking to do what is right, whilst living under oppressive regimes...

⁴ Reflection written by Jill Baker

- We pray for all who are imprisoned unjustly and whose voices are silenced...

God of all truth, give courage to these your saints that they may be filled with your spirit and emboldened by your presence.

God of all life, we pray for the world you have made, and for those whose lives are limited in different ways:

- We pray for all who are sick, living with pain or discomfort...
- We pray for all who experience discrimination and prejudice...
- We pray for all who feel unloved or feel incapable of giving love...

God of all life, give courage to these your saints that they may be filled with your spirit and emboldened by your presence.

God of all grace, we pray for those for whom we find it hard to pray:

- We pray for any who have hurt us, in body, mind or spirit (*a silent pause may be left*)
- We pray for those whose views and actions we find it hard to accept (*a silent pause may be left*)
- We pray for those who find us difficult (*a silent pause may be left*)

God of all grace, give healing and forgiveness to us and all those in our minds, that we may all be filled with your spirit and overflow with your grace.

God of all hope, we pray today for those who are dying or are affected by death:

- We pray for all who have received a terminal diagnosis, at home or being cared for elsewhere (*a silent pause may be left*)
- We pray for all whose work brings them into contact with the dying, in hospices, in palliative care, in funeral directors, in the church (*a silent pause may be left*)
- We pray for all who mourn, from recent or past bereavement (*a silent pause may be left*)

God of all hope, give comfort and peace to anxious minds, that all may know that you hold all people in your love, that you go before us into death and that you never let go.

Thanks be to God,

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

Resurrection God,

All around us today are the signs of new life, the daily resurrections that remind us that we are an Easter people.

Bless these gifts, and each of us here gathered,

That we might bring new life and build Easter-communities wherever we go this week.

Amen.⁶

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Jill Baker

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Hymn:

502 STF – I know that my Redeemer lives, and ever prays for me OR
470 STF – Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided

Blessing

Lord of life,
Giver of hope,
Bringer of light,
Healer of rifts,
May we see you with us on the journey this day, this week, and beyond.
Go in peace, my friends, and may the Lord go with you.
Amen.⁷

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker