

**Collect, Readings and Sermon**  
**Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2026**  
**Fifth Sunday of Easter**

**Collect**

Almighty God,  
who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ  
have overcome death and opened to us  
the gate of everlasting life:  
grant that, as by your grace going before us  
you put into our minds good desires,  
so by your continual help  
we may bring them to good effect;  
through Jesus Christ our risen Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**Acts 7:55-60**

But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!' But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he died.

**John 14:1-14**

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.'

Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I

am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

### **Post Communion**

Eternal God,  
whose Son Jesus Christ  
is the way, the truth, and the life:  
grant us to walk in his way,  
to rejoice in his truth,  
and to share his risen life;  
who is alive and reigns, now and for ever.

## Sermon

Before I was ordained priest, I had a conversation with the Bishop who ordained me, the then Bishop of Guildford, Andrew Watson. Theologically, Bishop Andrew and I certainly came from different places, but I had a tremendous respect for him. During this conversation, we discussed our theological perspectives, and in particular the matter of whether our faith is more about questions, or more about answers. Bishop Andrew was encouraging me to consider the importance of both – and I can understand why. As someone comfortable with questions, I can recognise the tendency for open-endedness, and while I find this life-giving, I know that others prefer some kind of clarity. I appreciated the gentle way in which Bishop Andrew shared his own perspective.

Nevertheless, I find days like today, when we have a reading in which not just one but two of the disciples raise questions, somewhat reassuring. If both Thomas and Philip kept on pestering Jesus with questions, perhaps it is ok for me to do so, too.

I just love the way that this morning's gospel plays out. It opens with beautiful words from Jesus, seeking to reassure his disciples of his ongoing presence, and their ongoing place close to him. How often do we, too, need to hear those words, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." Life can feel so full of anxieties and concerns, and here is Jesus reassuring us that we do not need to live in constant anguish. It is a little like those beautiful words from Matthew's gospel when Jesus reminds says: 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.'

This morning Jesus continues by explaining: "In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." As we live in these post-Easter weeks, we are reminded of how the Christian story plays out. We have the Easter joy of Jesus's resurrection, but soon we will celebrate the ascension, when Jesus is taken up to be with the Father. While we rejoice in the good news of the resurrection, we know, just like Mary Magdalene on Easter morning, that we cannot hold on to the physical Jesus. Knowing how hard it is to let go, Jesus provides

words of reassurance, reminding us that there will always be a place for each one of us, with him and the father.

I think one of the things that I find especially helpful in this passage is the juxtaposition between Jesus's beautiful poetic words, and Thomas's blunt question. Jesus has painted a wonderful picture of a mansion with many rooms, where there is a place for everyone. And when he then says that we know the way to that place, Thomas is quite clear: 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?'

This exchange takes me back to the conversation that I had with Bishop Andrew before my ordination. I love the poetry in Jesus's words. It paints a picture and allows my imagination to run wild. There is something in the tone that I find warm and reassuring. It settles my anxieties. And yet for Thomas, it simply isn't clear enough. He doesn't reject the fine words; he just wants to understand more clearly what they mean.

And then the answer. 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.' I wonder whether this provided Thomas with the clarity that he required, or whether the exchange left him as perplexed as ever.

There is something for me about the way in which Jesus speaks that invites us to live into the questions. Not to pretend that we don't have any. Not even to pretend that the responses we are given always feel adequate. But nevertheless to dare to believe that it is in asking and wrestling with the questions that our faith is lived out.

I wonder whether this is exactly what Jesus is pointing to in those words, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." Instead of pointing towards a book of rules and instructions which provide certainty, they point towards an ongoing relationship which allows for an interaction and discovery. While there may be times that I long for a clear and straightforward answer, my experience of life is that anything approaching truth and life emerge from ongoing relationships, asking questions, seeking a path rather than necessarily a clear answer.

When Thomas asks: 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' it feels very much as though he is speaking for me, and perhaps for most people within the Church at this time. I have been ordained for over ten years now, and worked both in parish ministry and a Bishop's office, mainly within the Church of England. It feels to me like the question Thomas asks has been the question being asked for most of that ten years, because as congregations have got smaller and fewer young people have engaged with church, we have been trying to find the right path.

And you will be familiar with some of the possible answers to the question that have emerged. We have some wonderful Messy Churches which connect with children and families, and might be part of the answer to the way forward. In some places, the style of worship has changed. That has been successful in attracting different people in some places – and less so in others. During the pandemic, one of the answers that we discovered to connecting with people was making use of the internet, through livestreaming services. Some of us continue to do that, as part of how we might find the way forward. And some places make good use of various forms of social media to connect with new and different people.

Whenever I have been involved in training about church growth, the one constant message has been the recognition that there is no silver bullet. That there isn't one answer that, if only we could find it, would lead to unending church growth.

And yet ... Jesus does provide us with the only answer that makes any sense at all. In all of our wrestlings and struggles, whether personally, or as church communities, one thing remains true. That Jesus is the way, and the truth and the life. That as we seek to find the path to which we are called, our starting point must always be our relationship with God. Each of us will connect with God in different ways. I have just spent a fortnight in the most spectacular scenery of the Highlands of Scotland, and can assure you that I find it a very good way of connecting. Back home, I find different ways of praying, alone and with others, can be very helpful in nurturing that ongoing relationship.

You will have your own ways of growing in relationship with God. And as we seek the path to which we are being called, perhaps our starting point should always be to nurture that ongoing relationship, recognising that the closer we are to Jesus, the more likely we are to find the path that leads to truth and life.

Amen