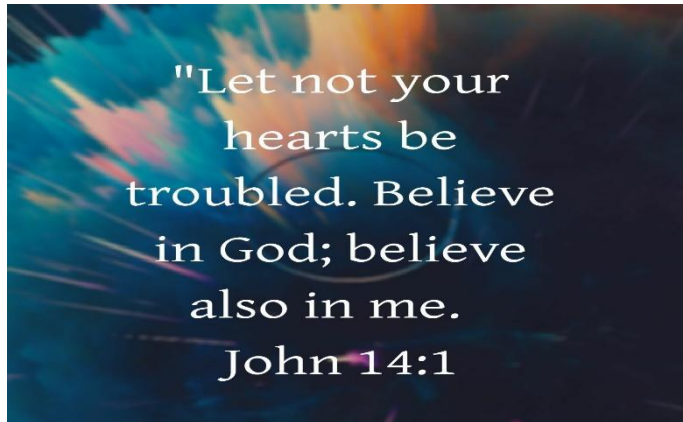


**SUNDAY, MAY 3, 2026**  
**FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER YEAR A**  
**JOHN 14:1-14**



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Rev. Rosemary Captain

*Organist – Sharon Banjavcic*

*Liturgy - Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay*

*Ushers -*

(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI LICENSE #11164431

\*Please stand if comfortably able.

Respond with words in bold print.

**SUMMARY OF SCRIPTURE TEXTS**  
From "Preaching Through the Christian Year"  
**Fred Craddock**

**Acts 7:55-60** This is the final scene in Acts when Stephen is stoned. It was at the end of a highly provocative sermon in which he rehearses Israel's history from Abraham forward.

**Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16** A lament in which the psalmist prays for deliverance from his enemies. It provides one of the most well-known last sayings of Jesus: "Into your hand I commit my spirit." Ps. 31:5 = Luke 23:46.

**1 Peter 2:2-10** Another selection from First Peter with a clear Christological focus on Christ as the rejected corner stone. This reflection is combined with moral exhortation.

**John 14:1-14** The well-known passage in which Jesus declares himself to be the way, truth, and life, and the only true access to God.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS:**

**THE BELL IS RUNG:**

**PRELUDE: "People Need the Lord" Phill McHugh & Greg Nelson**

**PENNIES FOR MISSION:**

**\*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP (INSPIRED BY PSALM 31)**

One: In You, Holy One, we seek sanctuary. In you, Sovereign God, we seek refuge.

**Many: Holy One, for your name's sake lead us and guide us.**

One: You are indeed our rock and our fortress. Our times are in your hands. Strengthen us in your righteousness.

**Many: Holy One, for your name's sake lead us and guide us.**

One: Shine upon us this day as we worship you. Saturate us in your steadfast love.

**Many: Holy One, for your name's sake lead us and guide us.**

**\*INVOCATION:**

Holy and Living God, build us into a spiritual house, a gathering of witnesses for the world and in the world to declare your goodness, to follow in your way, to do the work of your hands, voice, and heart Renew our spirits as we worship you and bask in your presence. Fill us with your Spirit that we collectively proclaim ourselves as your people, called to the fullness of your glorious and radiant being. Amen.

**\*OPENING HYMN: 349 "I Come With Joy"**

**\*UNISON PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**

**Redeemer of our lives, we come to you knowing that we participate in a world often crushed by tyranny and evil. Our hearts are troubled, overwhelmed, and dismayed. At times, we feel helpless and hopeless by the enormity of the problems presenting all around us. We believe the lie of the enemy that there is nothing that we can do or that someone else is the one to do it. May you, Holy and Righteous One, be glorified in the tumbling of walls cemented in evil and fortified by hate. For this, we pray for courage and resolve to do the works needed in this hour. For this, we pray for faith, trust, and hope to believe that the realm of the possible eclipses the narrow places of improbability. For this, we pray for the boldness to pray for what the world needs and more than our imaginations may hold. Amen.**

**\*WORDS OF GRACE:**

Chosen of God, receive the mercy of God, who calls you from despair into hope, from suffering into repair, from hopelessness into resolve. God has given you capacity for strength and compassion. The Holy One journeys with you. Grace is available for you. Know that your prayers are met and amplified by the Spirit, and Christ

will lead the way to life and love everlasting on earth as in heaven.

**\*GLORIA: Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near.**

**As it was from the start so it shall be forever,  
One God always here. (repeat two more times.)  
(end) One God always here. One God always here.**

### SCRIPTURE LESSON

**Acts 7:55-60** <sup>55</sup> But Stephen, enabled by the Holy Spirit, stared into heaven and saw God's majesty and Jesus standing at God's right side. <sup>56</sup> He exclaimed, "Look! I can see heaven on display and the Human One<sup>[a]</sup> standing at God's right side!" <sup>57</sup> At this, they shrieked and covered their ears. Together, they charged at him, <sup>58</sup> threw him out of the city, and began to stone him. The witnesses placed their coats in the care of a young man named Saul. <sup>59</sup> As they battered him with stones, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, accept my life!" <sup>60</sup> Falling to his knees, he shouted, "Lord, don't hold this sin against them!" Then he died.

### Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16 Pages 640-641

**1 Peter 2:2-10** <sup>2</sup> Instead, like a newborn baby, desire the pure milk of the word. Nourished by it, you will grow into salvation, <sup>3</sup> since you have tasted that the Lord is good.

<sup>4</sup> Now you are coming to him as to a living stone. Even though this stone was rejected by humans, from God's perspective it is chosen, valuable. <sup>5</sup> You yourselves are being built like living stones into a spiritual temple. You are being made into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup> Thus it is written in scripture, *Look! I am laying a cornerstone in Zion, chosen, valuable. The person who believes in him will never be shamed.* <sup>7</sup> So God honors you who believe. For those who refuse to believe, though, the stone the builders tossed aside has become the capstone. <sup>8</sup> This is a stone that makes people stumble and a rock that makes them fall. Because they refuse to believe in the word, they stumble. Indeed, this is the end to which they were appointed. <sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God's own possession. You have become this people so that you may speak of the wonderful acts of the one who called you out of darkness into his amazing light. <sup>10</sup> Once you weren't a people, but now you are God's people. Once

you hadn't received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

**\*GOSPEL READING: John 14:1-14**

**The way, the truth, and the life**

14 "Don't be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. <sup>2</sup> My Father's house has room to spare. If that weren't the case, would I have told you that I'm going to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too. <sup>4</sup> You know the way to the place I'm going."

<sup>5</sup> Thomas asked, "Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

<sup>6</sup> Jesus answered, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup> If you have really known me, you will also know the Father. From now on you know him and have seen him."

<sup>8</sup> Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father; that will be enough for us."

<sup>9</sup> Jesus replied, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been with you all this time? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? <sup>10</sup> Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I have spoken to you I don't speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me does his works. <sup>11</sup> Trust me when I say that I am in the

Father and the Father is in me, or at least believe on account of the works themselves. <sup>12</sup> I assure you that whoever believes in me will do the works that I do. They will do even greater works than these because I am going to the Father. <sup>13</sup> I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father can be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup> When you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.

**MESSAGE: "Images"**

My brother and I grew up in the "age of television". We were one of the first families in Mascoutah who had a television and that was only because my father knew how to make them. The small round screen; no cabinet; those glass tubes sticking up. And of course it was many, many, many years before there were remote controls. They weren't needed. There was only one station in St. Louis running so there were no channels to chose from. There was only one. My brother and I especially loved the cowboy shows. We both had cowboy hats and play guns and holsters.

Every summer the family took a 2 week vacation in the car. Windows rolled down. No air-conditioning. The radio was on but of course you never knew what you would hear. One warm afternoon when we were on the road, my brother and I were especially crabby, fighting over who got most of the back seat. All of a sudden we heard familiar music and a man announcing

the program on the radio. It was Hop-a-long Cassidy! My brother and I were shocked. There was a cowboy show on the radio. We sat quiet and still for 30 minutes listening to the show. Our parents loved it. After the show my brother and I were praising this new invention; stories on the radio. It allowed us to imagine what the bad guys looked like. We made up our own images in our brains.

Of course, it wasn't a new invention. It was just new to my brother and I. We could use our own imaginations and in Sunday School we could only imagine what Jesus and the disciples looked like. Our Gospel story today gives us many opportunities to picture images.

John 14:1-5 Jesus tells the disciples, "Don't be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. <sup>2</sup> My Father's house has room to spare. If that weren't the case, would I have told you that I'm going to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too. <sup>4</sup> You know the way to the place I'm going."

At which time Thomas didn't know what Jesus was talking about. Thomas had never seen this place Jesus was talking about and he could not picture it in his mind asked, "Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

<sup>6</sup> Jesus answered, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup> If you have really known me, you will also know the Father. From now on you know him and have seen him." Philip couldn't imagine a place either or how will they know the Father if they had never seen him.

<sup>8</sup> Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father; that will be enough for us."

This conversation with the disciples took place after what we call "the Lord's Supper" and after Judas had left the dinner to go and betray Jesus. This was really the last chance Jesus had to have a serious talk with the remaining 11. The world of the disciples was going to collapse in chaos around them. At such a time, there was only one thing to do – stubbornly to hold on to trust in God. As the Psalmist had said it, "I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" Psalm 27:13 "But my eyes are turned towards you, O God, my Lord; in you I seek refuge" Psalm 141:8.

There comes a time when we have to believe where we cannot prove and to accept where we cannot understand. If, in the darkest hour, we believe that somehow there is a purpose in life and that that purpose is love, even the unbearable becomes bearable and even in the darkness there is a glimmer of light.

Jesus adds something to that. He says not only "Believe in God." He says also "Believe in me." If the

psalmist could believe in the ultimate goodness of God, how much more can we? For Jesus is the proof that God is willing to give us everything he has to give. As Paul put it: He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? (Romans 8:32). If we believe that in Jesus we see the picture of God, then, in the face of that amazing love, it becomes not easy but at least possible to accept even what we cannot understand, and in the storms of life to retain a faith that is serene.

Jesus went on to say: "There are many abiding places in my Father's house." By his Father's house, Jesus used the word *heaven*. In that time the disciples would be familiar with the word *heaven*. But what did Jesus mean when he said there were many abiding places in heaven? What image would come to the minds of the disciples?

At that time some Jews held that in heaven there were different grades of blessedness which would be given according to people's goodness and their fidelity on earth. They imagined in the world to come there are many mansions prepared for men; good for good; evil for evil. That picture likens heaven to a vast palace in which there are many rooms, with each individual assigned a room such as that person's life had merited. Is that the way you imagine heaven? There were other images given to these statements of Jesus at the time.

And it may well be that the meaning of Jesus' words could be very simple and very lovely. "There are many abiding places in my Father's house" may simply mean that in heaven there is room for all. An earthly house becomes overcrowded; an earthly inn must sometimes turn away the weary traveler because its accommodation is full; no vacancy. It is not so with our Father's house, for heaven is as wide as the heart of God and there is room for all. Jesus is saying to his friends. "Don't be afraid. In this world, people may shut their doors upon you. But in heaven you will never be shut out."

That's the way I picture heaven. How about you? Amen.

#### **PASTORAL PRAYER:**

God of many rooms prepared for those who place their trust in you before their journey's done, we are grateful for your love and care for us. No other being can be so generous to show us mercy when we have failed, and joy when we achieved. Thank you.

Today we offer our prayers for many of our brothers and sisters. For those in positions of power, we pray that they are benevolent leaders who listen to needs of their people.

We remember all the workers who make our roadways safe and the police officers who enforce the rules of the roads.

We pray for all teachers, especially those who teach drivers' ed. May they have nerve of steel as they ride with new drivers.

We remember all those who are in pain from physical or mental issues. May they know your loving presence with them.

We pray for all people and places where God is called by different names. God's message is the same no matter where and what God is called – love one another.

We pray all these things in the name of your Son, Jesus . .

**OUR LORD'S PRAYER:**

**PRAYER RESPONSE: Three-fold Amen**

**Amen. Amen, A-men.**

**INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:**

Generous ones, you bear the image of the Generous God, who has provided for all needs and gives good gifts. Accept the invitation to share, sacrificially and from abundance, resources needed in this community and by our neighbors throughout the world for the glory of God.

**OFFERTORY: "His Eye Is on the Sparrow" Charles H. Gabriel**

**\*DOXOLOGY:**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;**

**Praise God, all creatures here below;**

**Praise God above you heavenly host;**

**Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.**

**\*PRAYER OF DEDICATION AND THANKSGIVING:**

Generous God, may the gifts that we bring reflect the image we bear. Be glorified through our generosity and the meeting of needs among and beyond us. Amen.

**HOLY COMMUNION:**

**COMMUNION MUSIC: "Living Bread" Duet:**

**Nancy Eisenhauer and Lew Thomasino**

**Congregation to sing the chorus**

This table is not my table, the table of St. John, or the table of the UCC. This is the Lord's Table, and as He turned no way away, neither do we. Everyone is welcome.

Come to this sacred table not because you must, but because you may.

Come not because you are fulfilled, but because in your emptiness you stand in need of God's mercy and assurance.

Come not to express an opinion, but to seek a presence and to pray for the Spirit.

Come to this table, then, my brothers and sisters, as you are. Partake and share. It is spread for all of us so that we might again know God has come to us, shared our common lot, and invited us to join the people of God's new age.

May the God of every way be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift your hearts to the One who is the Truth for God's own people.

**We offer them to the One who warms them with love.**

Sing praises to God, who is our Life.

**Glad songs are offered to the One who provides shelter for us.**

You made a way through chaos, Constructing God, the Word echoing on mountaintops and whispering in valleys; the Spirit teaching songs to the stars, and breathing life into those created in your image as your precious children. You longed to cradle us in your lap, breastfeeding us with grace and hope, but we slipped out of your grasp,

covering our ears as you called us to come back home to you.

Prophets came to remind us that you would not put us to shame, psalmists sang to us of your longing to cut the net of sin and death and set us free, but , together, we rushed into the open arms of temptation.

Then you sent Jesus, so that in knowing and believing in him, we would know and believe in you.

With those who have nothing and with those who give everything away, we lift our voices to you:

**Holy, holy, holy are you, God who pulls us to safety.**

**All creation kneels down to worship you.**

**Hosanna in the highest!**

**Blessed is the One who shows us the Truth.**

**Hosanna in the highest!**

You shape a safe place for us, Imaginative God, and send your Child, Jesus, to show us the Way. Born a tiny baby as we are, he shows us how to grow into your people. The cornerstone of your kingdom, he uses us to build a spiritual home for all. Committing his spirit to you, he entered the emptiness of death, so we might stand on the solid grounds of the resurrected life. Even as we celebrate the Life which was his,

as we claim the Truth that all are one with you,  
we take refuge in that mystery called faith:

**Christ died, trusting in God's promises;  
God raised him from the dead, promising the same for  
us;**

**Christ will come, fulfilling all the promises of God.**

Once, we were nobodies, alone and hopeless,  
but by your mercy, Living God, we are now a family,  
gathered in your love around this Table,  
where the Spirit sanctifies the bread and cup.  
You lean over to serve us the bread, enveloping us in  
your grace so we might go to be your people. You offer  
to us the cup of hope, which can heal our troubled  
hearts and strengthen us to serve our world.  
And when the Way leads us home to you,  
when your Life gathers us with our siblings  
around the Table which is prepared by your Truth,  
we will sing glad songs of praise to you forever,  
Amen.

### **SHARING THE ELEMENTS**

**\*UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

**Thank you, gracious God, for life in the  
Spirit of Jesus: for the witness we cannot forget and the  
mission of justice you have made our own. Give us the  
gifts of Holy Communion: oneness of heart, love for**

**neighbors, forgiveness of enemies, the will to serve you  
every day, and life that never ends. In Jesus name we  
pray. Amen.**

**\*CLOSING HYMN: 400**

**“Christ is Made the Sure Foundation”**

**\*BENEDICTION:**

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in the power of  
God in you and through you.  
Do the work of loving God, neighbor, and self.  
Do the work of holding the complexity of life in tension  
with compassion and care.  
Do the work of believing a future with hope is possible.  
Do the work of nurturing that hope into a vision and  
vision into reality.  
Do the work of glorifying God by following the way of  
Christ and praying with our lives.  
Do the works. Amen.

**BENEDICTION RESPONSE: 571**

**“O God of Love, O God of Peace”**

**Make wars throughout the world to cease.  
The wrath of human wrong restrain;  
Give peace, O God, give peace again!**

**THE BELL IS RUNG:**

**POSTLUDE: "Be Thou Exalted" Chester Nordman**

**PRAYER LIST:**

Bruce Wagner, Becky Ballard, Roger Ballard, Mary Lou and Urban Baum, Ronald Bopp, Geralyn Gamon, Russ Hartmann, Lynne Knecht, Marilyn Paul, Pam and Syd Safriet, Yvonne Weber, Jackie Canterbury, our Beloved Country.