

Bible Study notes Easter 5

Preparation

We will be reading the lectionary readings set for Sunday (10th May).

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

If you are planning to talk about these readings later with others, or you want to look back over your reflections in the future, please **note anything that strikes you** as you go along – so you may need a pen and paper – you will need a Bible. I suggest you set a time limit for your study.

Read the readings with as much confidence as you can muster! Allow the readings to do most of the work. Allow the Bible to speak to you. Allow God to touch you through the words.

Today's Bible Study (Join us on Zoom at 3pm)

This week we will look at

- **Acts 7:55-60**
- **Psalm 31:1-5;15-16**
- **John 14:1-14**

As previously, you can follow the pattern below, even if you are not joining in the Zoom meeting.

Pray first: (just a simple prayer or the *Our Father* if you find that easiest)

Read a reading (one at a time. Don't feel you have to read them all!)

PAUSE

As you pause, note if anything touched you in the reading – any insights you gained. If anything has struck you, you may want to return to it and reflect more on that part of the reading.

You might want to write something down.

It may help to reflect on these questions:

- What struck you in this passage?
- What did you understand best?
- how did what you understood best, or what struck you in the reading, challenge you?

After your reflection, you may want to move on to another reading but you don't have to do them all! Some of my reflections are below if you are interested. When finished, pray the final prayer:

Final Prayer:

Risen Christ, help me to continue keep my eyes upon you this Eastertime. Give me courage to look to you, as my way, even if others cause me pain as a result.

Bless, protect and guide me, and all who are entrusted to my care this week. **Amen.**

Acts 7:55-60

Whenever I read about my namesake I wonder about my own faith and whether I would be willing to be another Stephen. I am not in a situation to be tested on that, at the moment, and I'm glad of that. The story of Stephen challenges me to be willing to share my faith in a radical way. I was struck this time by Stephen's radical forgiveness. Where had he learned that you should forgive even when you are at the point of being stoned to death? The answer came, "from the cross!" It seems that you should forgive the people, even if they are taking your life. You should forgive people like Saul who is looks after the coats to enable your persecutors to throw stones.

I find it hard to understand that kind of forgiveness, but I do understand that people can be cruel. It is rare to grow up in a world which has so many prejudices against people who are different, and not to have experienced hurt and rejection at some point in life. Even in my small way, travelling around the country and having a different accent was a challenge for me as a child. But for Stephen it wasn't his accent, it was his newfound faith that caused others to turn against him and that faith is a challenge.

Psalm 31:1-5;15-16

The psalmist cries out to God for refuge – for a safe place – for deliverance – for comfort. What strikes me most is this honest cry for help. The psalms rarely try to make things sound better than they are, and in this psalm, the emphasis is on the mistreatment of the speaker. It seems that only God will give relief. God alone is faithful and God's love alone is that steadfast love that can save us from the hand of our enemies. It is not lost on me that the words, "into your hands I commit my Spirit are in this psalm, and echoed in the Acts reading, with Stephen saying "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And uttered on the cross by Jesus. The psalms speak to people in their suffering and give comfort. I find this psalm both reassuring and challenging – the challenge to trust in God's love and mercy and to let go of trying to control things around me.

John 14:1-14

Like Psalm 23 last week, this reading from John's Gospel, or a part of it, is often used for funeral services. That makes it familiar to me, but reading it in the context of the other readings set for this Sunday, I am seeing it differently. Thomas, who is asking Jesus questions, and Philip who isn't satisfied with what he is seeing, both seem to be unable to see Jesus for who he is. The end of this reading, "If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it" (verse 14) brought me back to Stephen and the stoning. Surely Stephen would have been better off asking for Jesus to rescue him from the stoning, rather than asking Jesus to forgive the sins of the stone throwers. Did Stephen get his priorities wrong? The two disciples who are, perhaps, a bit more practical than Stephen want things to be clearer. They want to see the Father and they want to understand what this "way" is. "Show us the way!"

But the way is nothing other than Jesus himself. By fixing our eyes on him remarkable things are possible. People who are being stoned can cry out their forgiveness for their persecutors, people who die are raised to life. I am challenged again to fix my eyes on Jesus.

