

St James United Church



Message for May 3, 2026 Fifth Sunday of Easter

“An Easter Farewell” - Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft

1 Peter 2:2-10; and John 14:1-14

After a pause for our Memorial Hymn Sing last Sunday, we return to the lectionary readings set for the Easter season. I say that, yet one of the texts doesn't feel very Eastery at all, especially when we are so used to hearing it at funerals. I'm referring, of course, to John 14:1-14 as Jesus tells his disciples not to be troubled because his Father's house has many dwelling places. When I consider its setting before Jesus' arrest, let alone before his death, I am left wondering why this reading is in the Easter season at all.

But then I think of the context, not just the reading but where we are in this season of the church year, that we are hearing Jesus' preparing his disciples for his coming death as we're preparing to mark his ascension. That gives his words an Easter tone, and at first, even echoes how we traditionally think of Easter, Jesus defeating death and so making it possible for us to dwell in God's presence after we die. But is this really what he meant, and would this promise be reassuring to his disciples? It wouldn't be for me. Not if it would mean we would still parted, and only reunited at my death. If that is what he meant, my heart would still be quite troubled. The KJV gives us this sense, rendering dwelling as mansions. But it is more about our shared relationship with God, and not just in the future but right now. That's what we affirmed in Micah's baptism, his sharing in God's life through Christ. Jesus says he's going to the Father to bring us into the same relationship with God that he has, a way into abundant life, a growing intimacy and loving connection with God. That promise relieves the troubles of my heart.

It ties into Peter's words too, as he proclaims that God's temple is made of living stones. God is present in the world but works through us as church, as community. Jesus wasn't raised just for us, but rather to reconcile the world to God, to restore the loving relationship, the sacred connection, that is strained by humanity's disobedience. We like to think that it is a once and done reconciliation, but Peter points to our role in it, that we have a calling to reveal that reconciliation, to make present that restoration in how we live in the world. That is what we commissioned Micah to be part of.

Hence a Jewish Peter using language traditionally reserved for his people – you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own in order to proclaim how we’ve been called out of darkness and into light. What is that darkness? It isn’t death so much as the ways that bring death that we see so much these days. The chosenness that Peter says we share with the Jewish people, is to be a light, a witness of a new way of living, one that seeks the flourishing of all, revealing a truth that we tend to deny: we aren’t divided from God or each other, but connected in God’s love. To be that light can bring suffering as we face animosity from those who profit from the way of death, division and falsehood. As Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof* says as they faced a pogrom: “I know. I know. We are your chosen people. But once in a while, can you choose someone else?” This moral role can be a spiritual burden. And so, too often gets set aside, again as we see in the world today. But that doesn’t mean we aren’t called to it. If anything, it means we need to be even more willing to risk our well-being for the sake of others as we follow the way that Jesus modelled.

As we do Jesus promises that God will be with us, dwelling within us with their strength and love, their courage and hope, their persistence as we bear their light, dwelling with us not just as individuals but more so as a collective, as we turn to each other as church and affirm one another in his way, encourage each other to reveal the truth that we all share in God’s love, and so experience the depth of God’s renewing life here and now. God is present for this through the Spirit, gifted to Micah in his baptism as for each of us, and affirmed as we share in communion. May we trust this promise. Jesus may have departed in body, but he comes to and through us in the Spirit, bringing new life. I guess our gospel passage is an Easter reading after all. Amen.