

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

The Fifth Sunday of Easter (A)

Acts 7.55-60

Psalm 31.1-5, 15-16

1 Peter 2.2-10

John 14.1-14

From Easter through Pentecost the Old Testament lesson is replaced by a lesson from the Acts of the Apostles. The readings from Acts focus on the birth of the Church in Jerusalem (reporting, *e.g.*, the sermons of Peter and Stephen). The Gospel readings are generally from John.

Acts 7.55-60

1. The stoning of Stephen follows on his long speech (beginning at 7.2), in which is found the first complete example of “salvation history” expounded after the death and resurrection of Jesus.
 - a. Salvation history traces God’s providential plan from the creation of the world to the redemption of the world in Jesus.
2. In his speech, Stephen traces how God worked in the history of Israel to bring about salvation.
 - a. Now, at the end of the speech, Stephen has a vision of Jesus in heaven, and this provokes the council to attack and kill him.
3. Stephen is referred to in Church history as the “protomartyr,” the first martyr.
4. Stephen’s vision echoes Jesus’ prophecy at Luke 22.69.
 - a. He is stoned to death, “outside the city,” echoing the prophet-murder tradition repeated by Jesus at Luke 4.29; 13.13; and 20.15.
5. Notably, at the moment when the mission from Jerusalem first begins, Saul/Paul is present.
 - a. At Acts 1.8 Jesus had predicted that His disciples would be His witnesses in Jerusalem (Peter and Stephen), Samaria (Philip) and “to the end of the earth” (Paul). The shift from Jerusalem now begins.

Psalm 31.1-5, 15-16

1. An individual lament, which in v. 5 is echoed in Stephen’s death and in Luke’s account of Jesus’ death (Luke 23.46). The verses selected (from a total of 25) for this reading are from the parts of the psalm which form a prayer for protection.

1 Peter 2.2-10

1. Peter echoes 1.3 and 23 in his theme of new birth, of newborn infants. Those addressed are recent converts.
2. In developing his theme of the new stone laid in Zion, Peter outlines instruction and exhortation about life in the new household of God.
 - a. Christians becomes members of a new household in Christ, formed of the Holy Spirit. Peter quotes from Isaiah 28.16 (in the *Septuagint* text tradition).

3. Christians live as a household of priests. The corporate Body is one of sacrifice to God.
4. In calling the Christian community a “chosen race” (v. 9), Peter is applying the title of the house of Israel to those who have accepted Christ.
 - a. Peter also refers to the Christian community as a “holy nation” (*cf.* Exod. 19.6).
 - i. Christians are now God’s “own people”. In the Greek original this is literally “God’s possession,” *i.e.*, bought with the blood of Jesus.

John 14.1-14

1. This lesson is taken from Jesus’ long discourse at the Last Supper (the third discourse, 13.31-14.31), with the selected verses here framed by vv. 1 and 11 to believe in God and in Jesus.
2. Jesus emphasizes that He is the Way. He makes it clear that there is not some esoteric pathway to follow, but that the Way to the Father is by Himself, the Son.
 - a. In the Greek original He uses the definite article, which in English would read something like “the one and only Way”.
 - i. In rendering this in Greek, John is referring to the Hebrew or Aramaic that Jesus would have used to address the disciples.
 - ii. In Hebrew and Aramaic the definite article is equally definitive/exclusionary.
3. Jesus makes it clear that those who have seen Him have seen the Father. God has revealed Himself to us! The great God Almighty is revealed in the death of the Son on the cross.
 - a. Jesus is “exclusive” in His language.
 - i. He refers to Himself as the way, and the truth, and the life.
 - ii. He states that “no one comes to the Father except through me” (or “by me”)(v. 6).
 1. As we know Jesus, we know God.