

Fifth Sunday in Easter, Year A  
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St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee  
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I've been away from the seminary for enough years now that I don't really know any of the graduates, and many of the professors I studied with have since retired. Still, when the alumni magazine or emails come, I enjoy looking at the pictures of all the fresh faces in their mortar board hats and their newly minted clergy collars. Typically, the alumni association adds some kind of human interest caption, "Toby has been selected as the associate priest at some church in Maryland" or "Mary will be serving as a hospice chaplain in Portland." I don't know Toby or Mary, but I do recognize that look in their eyes. It's the look I see in all graduates and in everyone entering a massive, life-changing transition.

The eyes show both excitement and fear. What will happen to me? Am I prepared for what is coming? It's one thing to ply your trade in the comfort of a classroom or under the guidance of a trusted mentor. It's quite another to go out there on your own. It's exciting, and it's terrifying. Some of the eyes say, "What have I done?!"

These great Sundays after Easter focus on the words and actions of Jesus and the disciples after the Resurrection. You might think of it as graduation for the disciples. They have Jesus with them for a very short time, but he keeps saying cryptic things about the time being short and about the Father's house having many rooms. Jesus is trying to impart a lifetime of wisdom in a few, short speeches, and the disciples—and maybe us today—are a little mystified.

The Christian life is difficult to explain; it's a kinesthetic process—encountering the neighbor and serving others. It's a life of dedication to the poor and being a partner with those in need. That kind of knowledge is very hard to glean from an instruction manual. No wonder the disciples have so many questions. I imagine they were excited to begin their ministry, and I also imagine they were terrified. Pomp and Circumstance, here we come.

I'm guessing that the disciples were craving a simple list of "how tos" or some kind of map for the ministry they were going to be asked to do. I'm guessing that the wide eyed graduates all over the country are looking for the same kind of assurance. How are we supposed to orient our life and work if our teacher is not with us? How do we know we are doing it right?

In the manner of great teachers everywhere, Jesus tells the disciples to cleave your heart to God, and you'll be fine. Notice Jesus doesn't say you will be perfect. Or you won't mess up. Or things will be simple. That's not the lesson. But Jesus does give the disciples, does give us, guidance for this next uncertain part of our ministry. Keep your eyes fixed on God. Keep your eyes fixed on God. Keep your eyes fixed on God. That is your map. That is your how to list. That is your compass rose. "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

That's all well and good to say that God is the way, the truth, the life. But really, we wonder, what are the practical ramifications of using Jesus as the guiding light of our mission?

The struggle, I think, is the same one that the disciples felt when listening to these post-Easter speeches from Jesus. They were looking for practical how to steps, and Jesus keeps pointing to God. I think another way to think about the mission is that our faith is decidedly impractical. There's no step by step. Our faith is bread and wine and water. Our faith is relationships within the Body of Christ. Our faith is service to those in need. Our faith is something lived in the real and messy world; it's not simple rules to memorize. But give us the rules, the disciples say. We need the rules! And Jesus says, again, that's not how it works.

Maybe you are feeling the same kind of uncertainty about your calling that the disciples felt. Maybe you're wondering if you are following Jesus the way you're supposed to. Maybe you're worried that you're doing it wrong.

That's normal. That's human. You're in good company. All the disciples were worried as well, and they did fine. Most of them got statues of themselves all over the world. Being worried about how to live Christianity is as old as Christianity itself.

Courage is being worried and doing it anyway. And we are called to courage. It might be scary to try to make change in this world. And it might be scary to take on a new ministry or to let an old ministry die. Lots of things that we do in the Body of Christ can be scary. But being scared doesn't give us a pass on following Jesus. We can be scared, and we can still follow. 'Cause we are not alone. We have each other; we have God we have the bread and the wine and the water. So, by all means, be afraid sometimes. But serve God anyway. Imagine if every graduate in this country right now stopped because they were afraid of the unknown next steps. The country would grind to a halt, and we'd have an epidemic of people lying on couches with the blinds drawn watching Netflix. Choose bravery. We'll choose it together, and it won't be so hard.

Think about a place in your life where fear is keeping you from responding to God. Maybe it's obvious. Maybe it'll come to you in these next days and weeks. Pour the encouragement of Jesus into that place of fear and see if courage begins to grow. And we'll grow bravery and mission together, right in this church. And if you are blessed to find a place of bravery, I want you to tell me about it. I want to find out where God is calling this wonderful church.

I'll tell you what Jesus told the disciples When in doubt, remember God. When you're thirsty, come to the font. When you're hungry, come be fed. Don't go out alone; always go two by two. If you're scared, that's fine. Serve God anyway. Amen.



