

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER - May 10, 2020

Acts 7:55-60 (NRSV)

⁵⁵ But filled with the Holy Spirit, he (Stephen) gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ “Look,” he said, “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” ⁵⁷ But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. ⁵⁸ Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰ Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he died.

The Bible always presents Jesus as sitting at the right hand of the Father, in order to emphasize the fact that He has completed the work of making possible our salvation.

Hebrews 10: 12 – “But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God.”

But here in verses 55 and 56 Jesus is presented as standing at the right hand of God.

Jesus is giving Stephen a standing ovation.

What a great way to end your life – to have Jesus give you a standing ovation!

As he was dying Stephen said two things that very much sound like two of the seven last words of Jesus.

“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

Cf. Luke 23: 46 – “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” – Cf. Psalm 31: 5

“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” (something he cried out in a loud voice)

Cf. Luke 23: 34 – “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

And then look at the next verse – Acts 8: 1 – “That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria.”

What good thing might result from the way in which the church is now being scattered?

1 Peter 2:2-10 (NRSV)

² Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Peter urges his readers to long for pure, spiritual milk.

The author to the Hebrews criticizes his readers for still needing milk.

Hebrews 5: 12 – “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food.”

There is nothing wrong with an infant needing milk and not being able to eat solid food.

But if an older person has not grown beyond the needs of an infant, something is wrong.

Where would you place yourself in your growth as a follower of Jesus?

Infant – toddler – child – preadolescent – teenager – young adult – adult – senior

Where are you at one level? Where are you at another level?

John 14:1-14 (NRSV)

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.” (v. 1) How is your heart today particularly troubled?

“I go and prepare a place for you.” (v. 3) If Jesus has been spending this long preparing a place for us, it must be a pretty amazing place.

“I am the way, the truth, and the life.” (v.6) Jesus is not just saying He can show us the way. Rather He is saying that He is the way.

“No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (v. 6) Do you believe that all religions are equally valid and valuable, or do you believe that it does matter whether people know, love, believe in, and put their trust in Jesus?

“I will do whatever you ask in My name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in My name you ask Me for anything, I will do it.” (vs. 13-14)

If that statement is not enough to get us to pray, I do not know what would be enough.

Things happen – and things do not happen – when we pray.

Genesis 18 – God was willing to let the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah rest on Abraham’s prayers.

Exodus 17 – the turnout of the battle between Israel and the Amalekites was dependent upon Moses’ prayers.

Ezekiel 22: 30 – God told the prophet that He would be more than willing to show mercy to His people if He were to find even one intercessor to stand in the gap and plead on their behalf.

God releases His grace and His power when we pray.

In prayer we go before God and ask Him to release into the life of someone else something that we ourselves would never be able to supply.

Luke 11 – Jesus told a story of a man who had a friend who came to visit him at midnight.

Verse 12 – “The one who believes in Me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works, because I am going to the Father.”

Jesus is saying, “Asking in My name will link me to you. By means of prayer, My power will be available to you.”