

# Life after Jesus

30 April 2023

## INTRODUCING TODAY'S THEME

I wonder what the church is.

Some people think the church **building** like this is the church.

Some people think of a label like the **Uniting Church**.

But here's a little game to help us see what the church really is ...

Here is the church and here is the steeple,  
open the doors and here are the people!

It's the **people** who are the church and we're the church whenever we meet together like we're doing today.

In one of our Bible readings today, the people of the church are called **living stones** ... which is a bit strange because stones aren't alive ... but the people of the church are alive and God is building us into a living, breathing, spiritual house where God can come and live. And that makes us a special kind of people. And everyone counts from those who are ninety years old to babies like Hyell.

## BIBLE READING

### **1 Peter 2:4-10**

As you come to Christ, the living Stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says:

'See, I lay a stone in Zion,  
a chosen and precious cornerstone,  
and the one who trusts in him  
will never be put to shame.'

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

'The stone the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone,'

and,

'A stone that causes people to stumble  
and a rock that makes them fall.'

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

### ***John 14:1-27***

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.'

Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?'

Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and you've seen him.'

Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.'

Jesus answered: 'Even after I've been among you such a long time, Philip, don't you understand? To see me is to see the Father. How can you ask, "Show us the Father"? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me? The words I speak to you aren't just words. Rather, the Father who lives in me, is doing his work through me. Believe me – I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the works you see me do.'

The person who trusts in me will not only do what I'm doing, but even greater things than these, because I, on my way to the Father, am giving you the same work to do that I've been doing. From now on, whatever you request along the lines of who I am and what I'm doing, I'll do it. That's how the Father will be seen for who he is in the Son. Whatever you request in this way, I'll do.'

'If you love me, show it by keeping my commands. I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper to be with you for ever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows what to look for. But you know him, for he lives with you and will even be in you.'

I will not leave you as orphans. I will come back to you. In just a little while, the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. Then you will really know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.'

The person who knows my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me. And the person who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.’ ...

‘I’m telling you all this while I’m still here with you. The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will make everything plain to you. He will remind you of everything I have told you. My parting gift to you is peace, my peace. I won’t leave feeling abandoned. Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Don’t be afraid.

## MESSAGE

As we ponder life here at Croydon without the Halls that have been the place of many ministries and connections over the years, some people have suggested that now is a good time to ask ourselves a few foundational questions ... questions like ‘Who are we?’ and ‘What is our mission in the world?’



**Following Christ,  
walking together  
as First and Second Peoples,  
seeking community, compassion  
and justice for all creation**

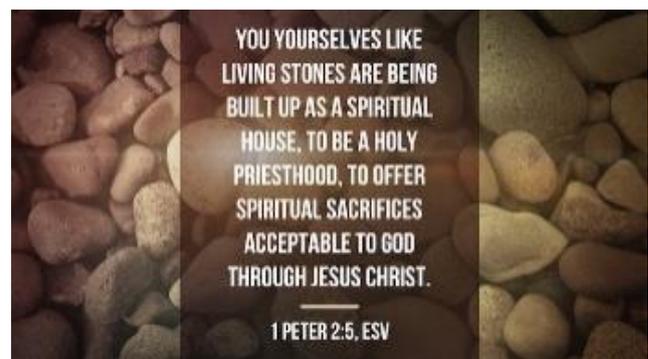
God in Christ is at mission in the world and sends the Church in the Spirit to:

1. share the Good News of Jesus Christ
2. nurture followers of Christ in life-giving communities of reconciliation
3. respond in compassion to human need
4. live justly and seek justice for all
5. care for creation
6. listen to each generation and culture so as to live out the Gospel in fresh ways
7. pursue God's mission in partnership

 United Church in Australia  
UNITED CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

This is the current mission statement of our Synod which also forms the basis of our vision here at Croydon. There are some good words here, but it may be helpful to listen to the pointers in our two readings this morning.

Unlike the bricks that we’ve been knocking down, the reading from Peter suggests that we Christians are all living stones being built into a spiritual house, a place where God dwells by the Spirit. So in God’s sight, we ourselves are the building.



In the same passage there are also a number of other descriptions used that are mostly taken from the Old Testament where they describe God’s people, Israel. So we are to regard ourselves as a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a people called from darkness into God’s light, a people called to declare God’s praise.

We are the church ... God’s people ... this is who we are.

As God’s people, we are called to serve God and to be God’s people in the world. So while we are sad that the buildings we have enjoyed using for many years have

gone, those buildings are not the church. We may sometimes talk like that ... that our church is on the corner of Croydon Road and Tallent Street ... but the church is a people and not a building.

And we are not just any people, but the people of God.

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Further, we are people who have a purpose, according to Jesus, in the first part of his long teaching in John's Gospel given to the disciples to prepare them for the time when Jesus would no longer be physically present with them ... the time after Easter ... the time of the emerging Christian movement ... the time of the church ... our time!

The context of this teaching is the Last Supper that Jesus shared with the disciples before the events of Good Friday. When Jesus is torn away from them, the disciples will feel like orphans in the world ... adrift, bereft, aimless ... but Jesus will come back to them ... just not in the way they expect.



We know from the rest of the Gospel story that Jesus does indeed die and is then raised from the dead and appears to the disciples on a few occasions.

He then returns to heaven and is gone from their sight.

But he is not gone from their presence.

Before all this happens, though, Jesus has several important truths to share with them about their future ... but be warned these chapters in John are fairly dense ... it's hard to get your head around them ...

So to give us a little bit of thinking space we are going to sing a short Taize chant a few times during the message.

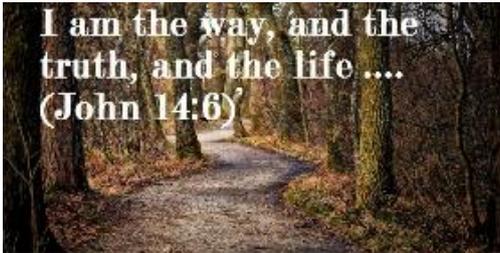
Feel free to join in each time, but please remain seated.

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*Bless the Lord, my soul,  
and bless God's holy name.  
Bless the Lord, my soul,  
who leads us into life.*

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In the first part of the teaching, a passage that is often read at funerals, Jesus speaks of returning to heaven and preparing a place there for his followers. How can the disciples find their way to this hopeful future?



The emphatic answer is that Jesus is the way. He is the way to know God the Father, the way to have life, abundant life, eternal life, and he is the truth.

This passage spoken to comfort the disciples is considered controversial today. And also arrogant in a multi-faith and pluralistic culture!

How dare Christians suggest that Jesus is unique and offers the only way to God! Surely Jesus is just one of many ways that point us towards God?



Yet the Scriptures we have received – both the Old and New Testaments – claim that God, the God of Israel, is the one and only Creator God who has acted decisively through history and especially in the person of Jesus.

That is the claim of Christian faith.

Is it arrogant? Perhaps this claim has sometimes been handled arrogantly by the Church, who have at times tried to scare or coerce people into faith.

By contrast, Jesus presents himself as a humble servant, who washes the feet of his friends, and then dies on the cross for their sake and ours.

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Second, Jesus claims to reveal God the Father.

So to see Jesus is to see the Father.

To hear Jesus speak is to hear words inspired by the Father.

To witness the works of Jesus – healing and restoring people to wholeness and to life – is to see God at work.



These are all big claims ... but in many ways this is the central message of John's Gospel. The invitation and challenge is to sit with the words and deeds of Jesus and to let these point us to what God is like.

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Next, the disciples have a new task. Jesus will shortly be returning to God the Father, so the disciples are now to carry on Jesus' ministry.

But how? The disciples – and ourselves – are called to pray and to ask God to enable them to continue doing the sorts of things Jesus was doing by invoking the name and character of Jesus. How these prayers will be answered is not explained.

It's also quite challenging because we don't generally heal the sick with just a touch, and we don't often raise the dead back to life and we don't as a habit stir up controversy wherever we go ...

But we do feed the hungry (think of ministries like Helping Hand and the Community meals every Tuesday at Croydon North) ...

We do show compassion and offer hospitality to those who are looking for community (think of ministries like Playgroup and Drop-In) ...

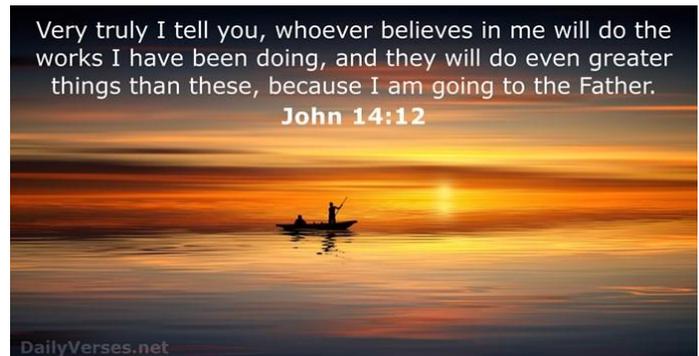
And we do – however imperfectly – love others.

Jesus is clear that our calling – our mission – is to continue his ministry in the world ... to live and witness in words and deeds to the life and love of Jesus that in turn points people to the love and life of God.

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While this call to continue Jesus' ministry may seem like a daunting task, the disciples – and ourselves – will not be left to struggle alone in the world. Jesus will ask God the Father to send the Holy Spirit to them – and to us.

The Greek term used in this passage is *paraklatos* which is a little tricky to translate. It was originally a legal term used to describe a lawyer or someone who advocated or mediated on your behalf.

Hence the word Advocate in some translations.

In Christian use, though, it came to have a meaning more like a Counsellor or Helper or Comforter, someone who comes alongside to help us in our time of need.

But according to Jesus, the Spirit does more than just help us ... the Spirit also brings the presence of Jesus to us and reminds us of what Jesus taught. The Spirit will live with us and in us. The Spirit will guide and sustain us in our journey of faith. Jesus will have more to say about the Spirit in the next couple of chapters.



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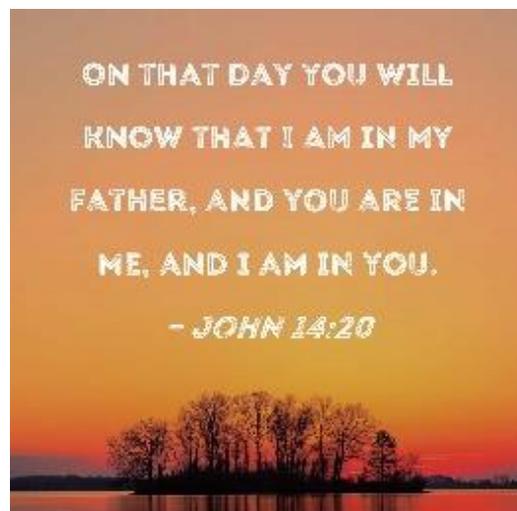
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Finally, Jesus has some intriguing words to say about how we relate to and connect with God. Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus has claimed to be **one** with the Father ... such that Jesus is **in** the Father and the Father is **in** Jesus ... how Jesus is the Word of God who was with God from before creation and who is in some ways God.

But now Jesus promises that just as he is in God, he will also be in us – through the Spirit – and we in turn will be in Jesus.

So in some mysterious way, Jesus will bring us into the very life of God.

Confused? That's okay. This claim will reappear in the next chapter of John and point the way to how we know God and how we stay connected to God.



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We've explored a lot of ground this morning in a short space of time.

It's been dense and a bit mind-stretching.

We've heard some surprising answers to some BIG questions ...

It's probably good for me to stop at this point and just allow you to sit with these questions for a moment ... and to ask God which is most important for us to hear this morning.

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*Who are we?*

*We are the people of God, living stones being built into a living temple  
called to serve God and to be God's people in the world*

*How do we relate to God?*

*Through Jesus, who not only shows us what God is like, but also who  
connects us with God*

*What are we called to do?*

*To continue Jesus' ministry in the world, pointing people to the life and  
love of God*

*How will God help us?*

*By sending the Holy Spirit, God's Helper or Sustainer, who will be  
present among and within us. Also by filling us with the peace of the  
risen Jesus and guiding our steps.*

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