



## Easter 5 (A)

### Rock Solid When Everything Feels Up in the Air

[RCL]: Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14

It all feels so up in the air.

When have so many people, everywhere, felt so uncertain, had so many unanswered and unanswerable questions all at the same time? When have so many plans been upended, suspended? When have so many guidelines been provisional, temporary, subject to revision? How long will this last? When will we get to go out/gather/travel/work normally/work at all/hug/feel safe again? Grief, illness, this unseen virus with its terrible tentacles that reach into our homes, churches, schools, hospitals, economy all leave us feeling unmoored, untethered, adrift, even more than we often do as humans. We may feel suspended, floating (not in a good way), unable to get a foothold on something solid and dependable, concrete and unshakeable. It's all up in the air.

Here is the message of our lessons for today. Yes, the feeling of uncertainty is real. Yes, the feeling of being off course without our regular patterns and way-markers is real. Yes, the longing for something unmovable yet lifegiving, solid yet sustaining, concrete yet creative is real. And yes, God gives us a way that is steadfast when all feels like sinking sand, a truth that is certain when all feels slippery, a life that is assured when all is shifting. God gives us precisely what we need for this moment and for all time because God gives us a person and makes us into a people. All of our lessons today bear witness to this assurance, this place to get a foothold, this pledge of security no matter what.

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life,” says Jesus. With Jesus, we have sure footing. With Jesus, there is a way forward. We may not see the next step, but he does, and if we stay close, follow him, and depend on him, we can move forward undergirded by the unmovable, unshakeable, unshifting ground that supports us, the guide that won't leave us, the God who won't lose us.

Jesus assures us that if we know him, we know the one he calls Father, also. God is not capricious, aloof, or aloft beyond the troubles of this world. God is knowable because Jesus is knowable. What does this tell us about God? The God we know in Jesus Christ became flesh and dwelt among us, made a home among the poor, cared for the sick, lived humbly, fed the hungry, blessed children, washed the feet of his disciples, wept at the death of his friend, promised that death will not be victorious, met his disciples even when they

had isolated themselves in an upper room, went ahead to prepare a place for us, and will come and take us to himself, that where he is, we may be also. God is with us, even in our vulnerability, our uncertainty, our flailing and failing and fear. Reach out, here is God. Take a step forward on the way. Our footing is sure. The path holds. The way leads to life.

There is a phrase that Jesus uses here, over which some people trip: “No one comes to the Father except through me.” Don’t let that make you stumble. Do not imagine Jesus the Way as constructed of paving stones that can be pried up and used as projectiles against our neighbors. Jesus is describing his power, his ability to overcome both our inability and our pride as they relate to our faith. He is reminding his followers that none of us makes our own way to God. We aren’t earning a way to God by our faith or our practice or how strongly we believe in Jesus. We aren’t succeeding in something that people of other faiths are failing at. That’s not the point here. The point is that, though we are weak, Jesus is strong. Though we get distracted, Jesus stays focused. Though we stumble, Jesus holds onto us.

Jesus was talking to people whose families thought they might be crazy for following him. He was talking to people who were risking their livelihoods and lives to call him Savior. He was talking to people who were worried about the consequences of Jesus’ reputation rubbing off on them—Jesus’ reputation as someone who disturbed the status quo, who associated with the wrong people, who got lifted on a cross instead of climbing a ladder, whose healing of the man born blind proved that you can’t look at someone who is ill and reject them as a sinner, whose death proved that innocence isn’t a guarantee against suffering, whose resurrection proved that death isn’t the end of the story, whose ascension to God’s right hand means that there is nowhere now that scarred and frail human flesh cannot be taken, and live, even in the very presence of God, whose whole life proved that nothing is stronger than the God who is Love.

“I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Keep going. The footing is sure. The path is solid. You cannot get lost. God won’t let you go. Jesus offers assurance that following him is the way to know God, the way to an abundant life, the way to peace and joy, no matter our circumstances. Following Jesus is not crazy, a waste of time, or a dead-end road. Jesus is the way. Stay on the path and keep going. God gives us a way that is steadfast when all feels like sinking sand, a truth that is certain when all feels slippery, a life that is assured when all is shifting because God gives us a person, Jesus, to be the Way for us.

Keep going. Keep going and depend on the God who is our rock, a strong castle to keep us safe, our crag and our stronghold. This psalm was on the lips of Jesus and Stephen when they were letting go of their lives to hold firm to their faith: Into your hands, O God, I commend my spirit. When it all feels unstable, shifting, when we feel like we’ve come untethered, when it’s all up in the air, rely on the God who is our rock.

God gives us a person and makes us into a people. “Come to [Jesus], a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” On Jesus as our foundation stone, chosen and precious in God’s sight, God makes us into a people, a spiritual

house, a holy priesthood, a dwelling place for God, a place from which and in which God works and is worshipped, made of living stones.

This spiritual house is both solid and dynamic. It's tougher than concrete, yet life-giving. It's more lasting than granite, yet nimble. It's stronger than marble, yet supple, and more gorgeous than anything that can be carved from dead rock, even by the most talented human artist. This temple made of living stones—us, people of God, called and loved and gathered, and built up together by God, even when we are physically apart—is a wonder. In making us into a building God sustains through all time and space, spanning and including all generations of the faithful, God is not granting certainty at the price of stagnation. We are not just holding it all together—don't move a muscle, if we all just stay still, encase it in concrete, we'll be fine. No. This temple of living stones, built on Christ the sure foundation, is dependable but creative, just like the God in whose image we are made. Living and life-giving. Tough, tenacious, true, together.

Good words when it all feels up in the air. What's not up in the air is Jesus' love for us and Jesus' power to love us through any uncertainty. The reliability of Jesus, Jesus' love, Jesus' care for us forever is not provisional, temporary, unknowable. It cannot be canceled, doesn't need to be rescheduled. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Rock-solid. God is our rock, a strong castle to keep us safe, our crag and our stronghold. Jesus Christ is the unshakeable, firm foundation on which we are being built into a temple made of living stones.

*Amy Richter is a priest who currently serves as an Episcopal Volunteer in Mission, working on the Galatians 6:2 ("Bear one another's burdens") project, focusing on theological education, and serving as a visiting academic at the University of KwaZulu Natal in South Africa. She and her husband, Joseph Pagano, blog at [www.amyandjoegotoafrica.com](http://www.amyandjoegotoafrica.com). Their most recent co-edited book is Common Prayer, reflections on Episcopal worship by Episcopal writers, poets, theologians, and musicians. Amy's most recent book is a novel, Antimony, a thriller that combines mythology, biblical stories, and mystery.*