

**May 3, 2026—The Fifth Sunday of Easter**

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## **Would You Change?**

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Singer songwriter Tracy Chapman begins the opening song from her seventh studio album—“Where You Live” (2005)—with a question: “If you knew that you would die today, if you saw the face of God and love, would you change? Would you change?” The song, simply titled “Change,” wonders what it would take for someone to turn around, to go in a different direction, to see a new way forward. What kinds of experiences, what sorts of encounters, would cause you to see that you need to split off from the path you’ve been on and choose a different way? What would it take for you to change?

The gospel lesson we heard today is often chosen for funerals. Jesus is speaking to his disciples in the midst of the Last Supper, after he’s washed their feet and given them that new commandment to love one another. He says to them, “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.” He then offers those words that bring comfort and solace to those who grieve: “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places, if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.” Jesus promises to bring his disciples into the “roominess of God,” as theologian Robert Jenson puts it. That God would have enough space in God’s self to hold them for all eternity.

But the disciples aren’t getting it. Thomas, for one, is utterly befuddled. “Lord, we’ve got no idea where you are going, how can we know the way?” Jesus responds, “*I am* the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Sadly, those words have been used as a bludgeon in the past to declare that *Christianity* is the way and the truth and the life, the only path to God, missing the whole point entirely—never mind that Jesus himself was Jewish. But then Jesus adds something rather important that often gets missed by those who use this verse as a proof text. He says: “If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

Well, that now makes Philip come up short. He retorts, “Lord, just show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” To which Jesus simply says, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and still you do not know me?”

The disciples, it seems, had a different expectation about what God would be like. Perhaps they thought God would go after their enemies. They were part of a religious and cultural minority getting crushed by the Roman Empire, and John the Evangelist tells us that there were some who wanted to take Jesus by force and make him a king. (He simply withdrew from them before they could do so, going into the mountains by himself.) Or maybe the disciples thought God would make them powerful, bestowing on them status and wealth. Certainly there are many who follow the path of White Christian Nationalism who still hold onto the idea that God’s blessing brings prosperity and influence and patriotic zeal. Or, if we’re honest, we ourselves might—at least, from time to time—believe that following God should be a reason for us to get a few things in return for our faithfulness, from the mundane—like a great parking space—to the more emphatic—like a cure for a terminal diagnosis.

Yet Jesus has simply been among them as himself. And he’s shown them the face of God; he’s shown them love. He gently reminds them that if they cannot believe that he is in the Father and the Father is in him, perhaps they might believe it due to the works he has done.

Now John makes a big deal about the works of Jesus in his gospel. He’s explicit at listing out the signs when they occur. Starting with the wedding at Cana, where the happy couple didn’t calculate just how much wine the party-goers would consume. So Jesus goes ahead and turns some 120 to 180 gallons of water into about a thousand bottles of the best wine they’d ever tasted, and he does it when they’re usually bringing out the cases of Three

Buck Chuck. John writes, “Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.”

Next Jesus heals the royal official’s son who had a fever, and then he heals the lame man at the Pool of Beth-zatha. He feeds the multitude with a couple of fish sandwiches that a mom packed for her son, and they end up getting twelve baskets full of leftovers after everyone had eaten. (What is it with Jesus and abundance? A thousand bottles of wine? Twelve baskets full of bread and fish? It’s as if he’s trying to show us something.)

Following the feeding of the five thousand, we get two more, ones we read in full this past Lent. First, the healing of the man born blind, with an entire theological reflection on the connection between sin and illness (there isn’t any). Then we get to the raising of Lazarus from the dead. He had been dead four days—we hear this explicitly, including the worry about the accompanying stench from the corpse—and Jesus, after openly weeping for his friend, commands Lazarus to come out of the tomb. He does, and Jesus commands them to unbind him and let him go. That was the sixth of those signs.

All of which leads Jesus to say to Philip, “Have I been with you all this time, and still you do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.... Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, but if you do not, then believe because of the works themselves.” He’s saying to them, you’ve seen the face of God and love. You’ve seen that face in mine.

I am not sure if these words were enough on that day for Thomas and Philip and all the others to change their minds. They still had their expectations of what God could do for them. They wanted to craft their own image of God, and while those miracles were all well and good, most of them were for others. I suspect they wanted to get to the point where it was all about power and who’s in and who’s out, and imagining what violence God might do to their perceived enemies. What good is an all powerful God who’s not all powerful in the way you want? Who’s not out there hating the people you hate? Who’s not bestowing on you more goods for you to consume and building up your own ego?

But it was never about power for Jesus. This, of course, will become crystal clear in a few short hours. Because we’re at the Last Supper. We know it’s only a matter of time before Judas will hightail it out of there and then meet Jesus with the armed guards at Gethsemane. There’ll be that sham trial, the brutal flogging, the climb to Golgotha. They’ll watch as the Romans crucify him there between those two criminals. And the disciples will scatter in fear. Jesus said he and the Father were one and the same, but now he was hanging from a tree. Those disciples must have thought that Jesus clearly was wrong.

There’s a piece of graffiti that was scratched into a plaster wall in Rome that is dated around 200 AD. It depicts a human figure on a cross with the head of a mule. There’s a young man to the left of it, gazing up. The inscription reads, “Alexamenos worships his God.” That pretty much sums it up when it comes to the understanding of this world of ours. Gods are about power and might and control and vengeance. Saying God was crucified, not so much.

Yet that is exactly how theologian Jürgen Moltmann puts it in his book *The Crucified God*. He writes, “When the crucified Jesus is called ‘the image of the invisible God,’ the meaning is that THIS is God, and God is like THIS.” He continues, “God allows himself to be humiliated and crucified in the Son, in order to free the oppressors and the oppressed from oppression and to open up to them the situation of free, sympathetic humanity.” When we see the crucified God, we know that God suffers with us. That when we experience the absolute worst that this world can throw at us, we are not alone, whether we’re the ones receiving the absolute worst, or helping perpetuate it. God knows what it feels like to be forsaken and desolate and afraid, and God offers compassion to all.

It would take the last of those miraculous signs for the disciples to finally get it. Jesus had one more for them, the best of all. On that third day, at the first light of dawn, he burst from the tomb. Love overcome death and the grave. And perhaps those disciples could hear his words differently then.

If you have seen Jesus, you have seen the Father. Believe that he is in the Father and the Father is in him, but if you cannot, then believe because of all those works themselves,

especially the resurrection. And those who believe in him will also do those works that he did and, in fact, will do even greater works than him. They will become people of the resurrection. Easter people who can live the truth that sacrificial love is greater than anything else.

And that love is right here in front of us, inviting us to change our minds that it has to be all about power and might. To stop believing that there's nothing we can do about the dumpster fire in the world around us. Jesus tells his disciples—those who follow him on the way—that we can do even more than he did to change our world. We can do it if we do it together, if we can see the abundance in all of the gifts that we share. We can respond to injustice with solidarity, to hunger with good food, to loneliness with companionship. We just have to let go of all those preconceived ideas we've had about God, and see instead the face of compassion.

As we gaze on Jesus, can we see the face of God and love? And if we do, can we change?

Alleluia! Christ is risen!