

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER YEAR A

1. Seeking to get in touch with the unknowable, the mystery of life itself, the ultimate reality is a common human experience. Speak of what you know from ancient civilizations and other cultures, and even attempts from people in our own culture who seek to find the meaning of life in various ways or even believe in “an unknown God”.
2. The people of Athens (Acts 17.22-31) were no different. Paul discovered in Athens an altar “To an unknown God” and philosophers who were interested in anything new. They scoffed at Paul’s well-constructed, intellectual argument about the truth of knowing God through the resurrected Jesus. Paul left, disappointed.
3. The mystery we call God is known to us through the initiative of God himself, through his coming to us in the human form of Jesus. Being human and divine, Jesus’ life shows us what it is to live the divine life. Intellectual arguments did not persuade the Athenians to believe and they will not convince people today either. The experience of knowing God through Jesus leads us to abundant life.
4. Faith is not about reason and argument but about a relationship to God. Knowing Jesus, obeying his commandments to love God and our neighbours as ourselves, and following his example, we will enter into a relationship with God through the Spirit and we will live the life of resurrection So we will know God (John 14.21). Jesus promised that through the gift of the Spirit we will come closer to the almighty and merciful God who increasingly will be revealed to us.
5. Get to know Jesus: read the gospels, pray, be fed by him in the sacrament, relate to him in the faith community, and minister with him in loving service to others and you will know that “His Spirit is with us” and you will know God. This is good news to share with people in our daily life who are yet to know God.

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER YEAR A

1. Has there been a time in your life when you felt totally confused and lacking in direction and hope? As preacher, you might tell something of your own experience after the death of a loved one, or a traumatic experience of loss. You might invite the congregation to reflect on similar times in their own lives.
2. These were the feelings of the two disciples on Easter afternoon, having experienced the death of Jesus, the news of his appearance in the garden and the empty tomb had left them bewildered. Cleopas and another, probably his wife, were returning to Emmaus, to their home. They were sad and grieving for Jesus, disappointed that their dreams had vanished, confused about what had happened, lacking direction for the future, and without hope.
3. Jesus walked with them, drawn to them by their sorrow, disappointment and hopelessness. He listened to them and then carefully explained the Scriptures to them. So compelling was his explanation of the current event in the light of the Scriptures that ‘their hearts burnt within them’ and they wanted to hear more. Jesus did not force himself upon them; he gave them the chance to let him go from them.
4. At the table, he makes himself known in the breaking of the bread. And as he does, they know that he is a real presence with him, even if they cannot see him in person.
This is a story which can give us great comfort. Jesus walks with us as we are in situations of despair and confusion. He listens to us and helps us understand. He gives us the option of being with him no further. He will stay with us when invited in. He will make himself known in the breaking of the bread.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER YEAR A

1. Good Shepherd Sunday. The imagery of the Middle Eastern shepherd of biblical times is loved by Christians. Psalm 23 is many people's favourite and the Good Shepherd is found in many stained glass windows. Discuss the feelings the image evokes in us. (love, protection, guidance)
2. Jesus used an image familiar to his disciples. (John 10.1-10) They would have known Psalm 23, also Ezekiel 34 and Isaiah 40.11. Jesus now makes this image his own. As the shepherd lay at the gate of the sheepfold to protect his flock he became a 'virtual gate or door', so Jesus is the gate through which people come to God and abundant life
3. The shepherd gathers his sheep into a fold. The imagery in today's readings focuses on the flock – the community, not just the individual sheep. The first reading (Acts 2.42-47) shows us the very first community of Christ learning together, breaking bread, praying, and caring for the needy.
4. 1 Peter 2.1-10 takes us much deeper into the kind of Christian community we are to be. We are people who are growing into our salvation. We are an Easter people, a people who have had a fresh start, who with Jesus have the chance of new life and rising again. We need to get rid of those things which might hold us back from growth e.g. malice, guile, insincerity, slander... We have been called to become a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (all collective nouns like flock,), 'in order that [we] may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called [us] out of the darkness into his marvelous light' (APBA)
5. What are the things which hold our community of Christ back from growing into our salvation so that we may better proclaim the mighty acts of God? Perhaps you can name some of them and invite people to consider the nature of their community.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER YEAR A

1. How do people know God? Not know about God, but experience God so that they have intimate knowledge of him? Some people say they know God's majesty through creation; some through the voice which speaks in their conscience. Others would say that God is unknowable - "Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible hid from our eyes". (AHB 80)
2. Some of us may be like Philip (John 14.1-14). Philip was struggling with Jesus' words which are some of his deepest statements about his nature. "Lord show us the father," Philip asked. Perhaps Jesus was frustrated that Philip had been with him so long yet still did not know him as the Son of God. Like Father, like Son. Jesus said, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me". Philip did not understand that in Jesus he had seen the Father. We know God through knowing Jesus.
3. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. 'Way' is not a set of instructions like "the way to the PO – take the first turn right etc" but a way of behaviour, a relationship with Jesus based on truth which is truly life-giving. (Remember the Samaritan woman). Jesus is the way to God. If we believe in his total self-giving love then we can come to know God. If we turn to Christ and strive to become like him in loving, healing, reconciling, self-giving and forgiving then we too come close to the Father and know the Father. Jesus' way is the way to the Father.
4. The early church came to understand this after the resurrection. Acts 7.55-60 gives us the example of Stephen who by faith is able to forgive his enemies even in the face of injustice and violence leading to his death.
5. In our comfortable world, we may not be called to be martyrs, but we are called to be people of The Way, a title often given to Christians in New Testament times. We are the body of Christ; we are called to lives of selfgiving, lives of truth and honesty, lives which will bring life to others.