

# Sunday Sermon May 3, 2026

## **Sermon, Easter 5A Rev. Coleen Tully**

Last July, when I booked tickets for *Kimberly Akimbo* at Barbara Mann, Maundy Thursday was NOT on my radar. Bill was very kind when I told him I had double booked myself and wouldn't be here for the service.

When we got to Barbara Mann that night, my friends and I were surrounded by a group of about 20 kids from Cypress Lake Middle School. We couldn't have asked for better seats. Those kids were mesmerized by the performance, which was fantastic. Their whoops, applause, and laughter created an almost magical space where we all felt drawn into the story together.

Near the end of the musical, the main character confronts her parents in a deeply emotional scene. She tells them they had become so focused on grieving the daughter they wished she was, so consumed by all the ways her illness kept her from being who they had hoped for, that they never truly saw the person standing right in front of them. Because they kept looking at what she was not, they missed who she was. They missed her gifts, her spirit, her life. And she had been there all along, waiting to be known and loved.

During this scene, one of the young women from Cypress Lake Middle School began crying, and then sobbing. Hard. The scene had clearly touched something deep within her, and her sobs were heart-wrenching. And the kids she was with? Surrounded her, and hugged her and murmured loving, comforting things to her and held her. It was beautiful.

I told my friends it was the most perfect example of a Maundy Thursday foot washing I have witnessed in a long time. I share this because it turns out I have not completely missed Maundy Thursday after all.

Despite this being the 5th Sunday of Easter, our Lectionary has dragged us back to Maundy Thursday for today's Gospel. Jesus has just finished the last supper with his disciples. He has washed their feet, given them a new commandment, predicted Peter's denial, foretold Judas's betrayal, and told his friends that he is about to leave them. "Where I am going," he tells them, "you cannot follow now."

In light of all this, the first line of this passage seems out of kilter with the rest of the reading. "Do not let your hearts be troubled." I think He knows this will be incredibly challenging for them and so he begins with words intended to bring comfort – but it falls a bit short of the mark, don't you think?

The disciples' hearts are troubled, very troubled. The words he has said sting, and fill the bewildered disciples with fear. The anxious disciples respond to their fear by looking for certainty, and so, they ask questions. What is Jesus talking about? How will they survive if he leaves them? Where will they go? What will happen to their cherished plans? Why is the ground shifting under their feet? Why is everything changing?

What they want, what I think we all want, or at least what it seems would be easier to have, would be the religion of the GPS, the five point plan, the twelve steps, the ten commandments laid out as: do A, B, and C, and you will unerringly arrive at destination D. You know, destination D? Sitting in Heaven next to Jesus and God and the Saints.

I say it as a bit of a joke, but many of us, and definitely I, have been at our wits end, desperate for hope that things will get better, for a reason to believe that this tragedy is not all there is. Whatever the tragedy; maybe it was when a doctor said it was cancer or the cancer had returned. Or when a loved one died. Or when your beloved has left, or after a miscarriage, or when the Twin Towers fell, or when the flood waters kept rising, or for whatever reason, it felt like the ground was being pulled out from under us ... it is those moments where we just wanted reassurance that all that we had learned about God is TRUE.

So, Thomas asks Jesus for a roadmap: "How can we know the way? We don't even know where you are going." And, Philip asks for proof: "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."

Jesus's response? No roadmap. No master plan. No PowerPoint presentation. He gives them? Himself.

"I am the way, the truth, and the life." "If you know me, you know God also." Just himself. The messy, intimate, evolving, and often confusing business of relationship with him.

"Have I been with you all this time and yet still you don't know me?" Man, I'm glad Jesus said this to people like Thomas and Philip and the rest of the disciples, because these were people who had literally been with him all along, who had watched his every move, heard every word and they still didn't get it.

He's always moving on, heading over to people on the outside, who haven't found their way in yet. He's always leaving the ninety nine in the fold and going out in some sordid search just so he can find that one that is lost.

When he says, "I am the way, the truth and the life," he means, I am not confined to your certainties nor reducible to your rules or any set in stone beliefs about me. It's just me.

I am the way. And I do not fit neatly into any box. "You want to know the way?" He says.

"A sower went out to sow and scattered good seed everywhere – every-where! A man found weeds growing in his wheat-field and said, 'Leave'm be! Dandelions make good wine!' A man had a son who stayed at home and kept all the rules and another one who was a loser and got busted. Guess what? He loved them both! I'm the good shepherd, the one who lays down his life for his sheep and who has sheep that aren't even part of this fold who belong to me too! That's the way I am. That's the truth I am. That's the life I am."

If Jesus himself is the way, then the way must look like him. And perhaps that is why Jesus speaks of many dwelling places. "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."

I think if this verse was an answer on the Jeopardy Show, the correct response would be, "What is the most popular scripture reading at a Celebration of Life or Funeral?"

My Mom had an experience after a major stroke where she had been pronounced dead. She said she felt utter and complete joy all around her and people were so happy it was like nothing she had ever experienced before. One of the things she told me that happened was someone asked her, "In whose name are you here?" and she said, "Well, I guess I am here in Jesus's name." And then one group got even more excited and said, "Oh, she's one of us!"

Some years later my Dad and I were talking about that and he related it to the many dwelling places described in this Gospel. He told me he believed there is room for more than just us Christians in God's heart. That conversation was a comfort to me, because I agree with him.

“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places,” Jesus tells his disciples. God is roomy. God is generous. God is hospitable. God’s offer of belonging extends far beyond the confines of our mortal minds.

When we read “No one comes to the Father except through me”, we must be cautious not to imagine Jesus constructed a path of paving stones that can be pried up and used as projectiles against our neighbors. When all of God’s children are invited to God’s table then God will make a home with us. And our hearts will not be troubled. Amen.