



Sixth Sunday of Easter

MAY 10, 2026

The risen Christ does not leave his friends orphaned, but gives the Spirit so that love becomes faithful witness in a searching and wounded world.

FIRST READING

Acts 17:22-31

PSALM

Psalm 66:7-18

SECOND READING

1 Peter 3:13-22

GOSPEL

John 14:15-21

Before You Hear the Readings

Sixth Easter draws us into the strange interval between resurrection joy and the coming feast of Pentecost. Jesus is alive, yet not possessed; present, yet not always visible in the ways disciples expect. The readings ask how the baptized live faithfully when Christ is not physically before our eyes and when the world around us is full of longing, fear, argument, and pain.

The invitation is neither anxious striving nor private consolation. It is Spirit-shaped love: keeping Christ's commandments, speaking hope with gentleness, praying honestly from trouble, and recognizing that God is already nearer to every human search than we usually imagine.

The Lectionary Thread

Acts begins in Athens, among altars, poems, philosophical curiosity, and religious uncertainty. Paul does not mock the Athenians for searching; he begins with their longing. Yet he also proclaims that the God they seek is not an object to be managed, decorated, or contained. The living God gives breath to all people, is near to all people, and has made himself known decisively in the resurrection of Jesus. Easter faith becomes public speech in a plural, spiritually restless city.

Psalm 66 gives that public speech the shape of prayer. The psalmist praises the God who has preserved life, but not by pretending that life has been easy. Fire, water, burdens, and testing are all named before the congregation is brought into “a spacious place.” Praise here is testimony: Come and hear what God has done. The risen life is not escape from trial but deliverance through it.

First Peter then speaks to a community learning how to bear witness under pressure. The baptized are not promised a painless path; they are told not to be ruled by fear. Their defense of hope must be made with gentleness and respect, because the manner of witness belongs to the message itself. Baptism joins them to Christ’s death and resurrection, giving them a conscience grounded not in social approval but in God’s saving act.

The Gospel gathers all of this into Jesus’ farewell promise. Love for Christ is not mere sentiment; it takes form in keeping his commandments. Yet disciples are not left to manufacture faithfulness by willpower. The Father gives another Advocate, the Spirit of truth, who abides with and in them. The God Paul says is not far from each of us becomes, in John’s Gospel, the intimate indwelling of Father, Son, and Spirit among those who love Jesus.

The Readings Broken Open

FIRST READING

Paul’s speech at the Areopagus is one of the New Testament’s great missionary moments. Athens was a city dense with memory, philosophy, art, and worship. Paul stands not in a synagogue, where he might begin with Israel’s Scriptures, but in a civic and intellectual space where his hearers know altars and poets better than Moses and the prophets. His address is therefore

deeply contextual without being vague. He listens before he speaks, observes before he proclaims.

His opening is generous but not flattering. The Athenians are “extremely spiritual,” yet their altar to an unknown god reveals both reverence and incompleteness. Paul names the God they do not yet know as Creator, giver, Lord of heaven and earth, and source of all breath. This God is not housed in temples as if dependent on human maintenance. The point is not anti-liturgical; Paul is not condemning sacred space as such. He is refusing any religion that makes God small enough to be possessed.

Paul also grounds human unity in God’s creative purpose. All peoples share one origin and one life-giving source. Boundaries, times, and cultures become the arena in which humanity searches for God. His language is tender: people “fumble about” for God, yet God is not far away. This has deep significance for Anglican mission and parish witness. We do not bring God to a godless world as though the Spirit were absent before we arrived. We bear witness to the One already sustaining every breath.

The speech turns, finally, to repentance and resurrection. Paul does not leave his hearers with a generalized spirituality. The unknown God is known through the risen Jesus, the appointed judge who will set the world right in righteousness. Judgment here is not a threat added to the gospel; it is the promise that creation is morally accountable to the God who made it and that Easter is God’s assurance that death, idolatry, and injustice do not have the last word.

PSALM

Psalm 66 is praise with scar tissue. It calls all peoples to bless God, but the praise arises from remembered danger. The psalmist knows what it is to be tested, trapped, burdened, and overwhelmed. Fire and water are not metaphors for minor inconvenience; they are images of real affliction. Yet the prayer insists that God has preserved life and brought the people into a spacious place.

As prayer, the psalm gives the gathered assembly permission to praise without denying pain. In Eastertide, this matters. Resurrection does not erase Good Friday from memory. The alleluias of the season are sung by people who still carry grief, illness, fatigue, and unanswered questions.

The psalm teaches worshipers to tell the truth in God's presence: we went through deep waters, and yet we are here.

The movement from communal praise to personal testimony is also important. "Come and hear" is not a slogan but a spiritual posture. The psalmist does not offer an abstract doctrine of providence; the psalmist bears witness. In parish worship, this is part of what the Psalter does week by week. It trains the baptized to let prayer become testimony, and testimony become praise, not because everything has been easy, but because God has held us fast.

EPISTLE

First Peter addresses Christians who are socially vulnerable. They are not necessarily facing empire-wide persecution in the later, formal sense, but they know slander, suspicion, and the cost of being out of step with their neighbors. The letter does not romanticize suffering. It distinguishes suffering for doing good from suffering caused by wrongdoing, and it urges believers not to repay hostility with arrogance or fear.

The famous call to give an account of the hope within us is often treated as a mandate for argument. In context, it is more demanding and more beautiful than that. The baptized are to be ready to speak, but with gentleness and respect. Christian witness is not merely the content of what is said; it is also the conscience, humility, courage, and mercy with which it is offered. A parish formed by this passage will care not only whether it can explain the faith, but whether its manner of speaking resembles Christ.

The epistle roots this way of life in Jesus' own suffering and triumph. Christ, the righteous one, suffers for the unrighteous in order to bring us to God. The difficult reference to spirits in prison and the days of Noah opens onto a wide vision of Christ's victory: his saving work reaches into depths beyond ordinary sight. No place of bondage, judgment, or death lies outside the range of his proclamation.

Baptism is then named as the sacramental sign of this rescue. It is not a washing off of dirt, but an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection. In the Anglican theological imagination, this resonates deeply with the Baptismal Covenant. To renounce evil, continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, seek Christ in all persons, and strive for justice and peace

is not moral self-improvement. It is the risen life of Christ taking form in a people who have passed through the waters.

GOSPEL

John 14 takes place on the night before Jesus dies. The words are tender because the situation is painful. Jesus is preparing his friends for a form of absence they do not yet understand. He will be taken from them; they will not be able to hold him as before. Yet he promises, with profound pastoral gentleness, that he will not leave them orphaned.

The Gospel's central claim is that love, obedience, and divine presence belong together. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" can sound conditional or severe if heard apart from the whole passage. But Jesus is not bargaining for affection. He is describing the shape of communion with him. Love for Jesus becomes embodied in a way of life: trust, mercy, truthfulness, forgiveness, mutual service. His commandments are not chains laid upon abandoned disciples; they are the path walked with the Advocate beside and within them.

The Advocate, the Spirit of truth, is promised as abiding presence. In John's Gospel, the Spirit does not replace Jesus as a consolation prize. The Spirit makes the life of Jesus present to disciples in a new and intimate way. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit draw believers into communion: "you in me, and I in you." This is not an abstract doctrine first of all; it is the good news that the life of God is shared with ordinary, frightened, beloved people.

The difficulty remains that "the world" does not receive or recognize this Spirit. John's language can sound stark, but it names a real spiritual tension. There are ways of seeing that cannot perceive love as power, truth as mercy, or obedience as freedom. Easter faith learns to live in that tension without contempt. The Gospel sends worshipers out to keep Christ's commandments in the power of the Spirit, trusting that hidden communion with God can become visible in acts of love.

Hearing It Fresh

If you are coming to these readings without much background, listen first for the tenderness underneath them. Jesus is speaking to frightened friends on the night before his death, and he promises them that his absence will not be abandonment: "I will not leave you orphaned." The

Holy Spirit, the Advocate, will be with them and in them, making Christ's love present in their ordinary obedience. Love, in John's Gospel, is not mainly a feeling we try to manufacture; it is a life shaped by trust, mercy, and fidelity because God has first drawn near to us.

The other readings widen that promise into the world. Paul stands among people who do not yet know the God of Israel and speaks with respect, curiosity, and courage. The psalm remembers a God who brings people through fire and water into spaciousness. First Peter speaks to believers who may suffer for doing good, reminding them that Christ himself has gone through suffering into life. Together, the readings say: you are not alone, you do not have to be afraid of honest questions, and faithful love can become a witness even in a wounded and searching world.

Going Deeper

John 14 places the gift of the Spirit within the farewell discourse, where Jesus prepares the disciples for his death, resurrection, and ascension. The "Advocate" translates the Greek *Paraklētos*, a word that can suggest counselor, comforter, helper, intercessor, or one called alongside. No single English word carries the whole weight. The Spirit does not replace Jesus as a distant substitute; the Spirit mediates the risen Christ's continuing presence, drawing believers into the communion of Father and Son. "Because I live, you also will live" is not merely consolation for later. It names a new mode of life already beginning in those who abide in him.

The line "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" can sound conditional or anxious, as though Christ's love must be earned by moral performance. In the Johannine pattern, however, obedience is the fruit of abiding love, not the price of admission. The commandment Jesus has just given is to love one another as he has loved them. Christian ethics here is deeply personal but not private: the community's life becomes visible evidence of the invisible God. Love takes form as truthfulness, patience, forgiveness, costly solidarity, and public courage.

Acts 17 offers an important companion to John's promise. Paul's speech in Athens is neither a retreat into sectarian certainty nor a surrender to the culture around him. He begins where his hearers are, noticing their altars, quoting their poets, and naming their longing; yet he also proclaims repentance, judgment, and resurrection. The "unknown God" is not simply affirmed as already understood, but revealed as the Creator who is nearer than breath and who has acted

decisively in the risen Jesus. Christian witness, then, can be both hospitable and uncompromising, humble in approach and bold in hope.

First Peter complicates any easy triumphalism. The baptized life may involve suffering, misunderstanding, and the need to give “a reason for the hope” within us with gentleness and reverence. The difficult reference to Christ preaching to the spirits in prison has been read in many ways, including as part of the Church’s reflection on Christ’s descent to the dead and the cosmic reach of redemption. At minimum, the passage insists that no realm of loss, judgment, or death lies outside the scope of Christ’s victory. The Spirit promised in John is therefore not a private comfort alone, but the power by which the Church bears cruciform witness in a world God still loves.

For Young Listeners

Jesus knew his friends would feel sad and afraid when they could not see him the same way anymore, so he promised, “I will not leave you alone.” He said God would send the Holy Spirit to be with them and help them love as Jesus loves. That means when we choose kindness, tell the truth, forgive, pray, and help someone who is hurting, we are not doing it by ourselves. God is close to us, giving us courage and helping our lives show the love of Jesus.