

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

A new era

How does each sermon connect to this theme?

The sermons in the month of May bring us into a new era - the time of the Holy Spirit, the church, and apostolic activity. This new era is filled with gifts, but also mission, calling, and responsibility.

Sunday, May 3: Peter confronts the religious leaders with new boldness in proclaiming that **Christ alone saves**. We are called to be bold, grounded in the resurrection and salvation of Christ, and in prayer.

Sunday, May 10: Paul reminds the congregation in Philippi of **the upward call** of Christ. This call is a gift and responsibility, encouraging us to let go of that which is behind, and reach out to the divine calling that we have received from God.

Thursday, May 14: On this day we celebrate Jesus' ascension. Jesus came from the Father, was **sent into the world**, and returned to the Father. Through His identity and mission, He gives us a new identity and mission. Paradoxically, through His leaving, He gives us new presence.

Sunday, May 17: The Holy Spirit empowers us not only to follow Christ, but to **live as a witness**, so that the presence, power, and character of Jesus Christ are clearly seen by those around us.

Sunday, May 24: On this Sunday, we celebrate Pentecost with our Chief Apostle. The sermon is founded on 1 Corinthians 12:13, where Paul describes a new kind of community - **the body of Christ** - where members are united, stand in solidarity, and develop together prompted by the Holy Spirit. (No study guide since there is a webcast.)

Sunday, May 31: The Israelites had the Aaronite blessing spoken over them. In this new era, the **trinitarian blessing** is both a gift of God's grace, love, and communion, and also a call to extend those gifts to others, especially in the fellowship of our congregations.

May this month bring a burst of fresh life and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as we look forward to the feast of Pentecost.



John S. Schnabel

MAY 2026

May 3

A new era:
Christ alone saves

May 10

A new era:
The upward call

May 14

ASCENSION DAY
A new era:
Sent into the world

May 17

A new era:
Living as a witness

May 24

PENTECOST SUNDAY
A new era:
The Body of Christ
CA webcast - no study guide

May 31

TRINITY SUNDAY
A new era:
The trinitarian blessing

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR MAY 3

Where are we in the Bible?

In Acts 4, the boldness of the early Christian community becomes unmistakably clear. After healing a lame man and preaching about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Peter and John are arrested by the religious authorities, including members of the Sadducees, who are disturbed by their teaching (4:1-4). The next day they are brought before the ruling council (4:5-7).

Rather than retreat in fear, Peter speaks with remarkable courage, declaring that the lame man was healed by the power of Jesus Christ, whom the leaders had crucified but whom God raised from the dead. He boldly proclaims that salvation is found in Christ alone (4:8-12). Peter, standing before hostile officials and “filled with the Holy Spirit,” fulfills Jesus’ earlier reassuring promises in Luke 12:11-12 and 21:12-15. Peter is a changed man because of (1) Christ’s resurrection, (2) his encounters with the Risen Lord, and (3) the effects of the gift of the Holy Spirit that assure him of Christ’s presence in his heart and ministry.

The council is astonished because Peter and John are ordinary, uneducated men, yet they speak with confidence and authority. Unable to deny the miracle, the leaders command them to stop speaking in Jesus’ name (4:13-18). However, Peter and John respond that they must obey God rather than human authorities (4:19-22). After their release, they return to the congregation, which prays not for safety but for greater boldness. God answers by filling them with the Holy Spirit, and they continue to speak the word of God with courage (4:23-31).

Summary:

Together, Acts 4 shows that true Christian boldness - grounded in the resurrection and salvation of Jesus Christ - empowers believers to remain faithful to God’s mission even in the face of opposition. Because the resurrection is true and Christ alone saves - His name bearing full authority and saving power - believers are called to boldly profess the gospel in both word and deed, even in a pluralistic world. Boldness in prayer enables us to stand firm amid opposition, trusting in Christ as the only way to God and devoting ourselves fully to Him.

A NEW ERA: Christ alone saves

Acts 4:12

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture

Acts 4

Catechism

3.4.5, 3.4.9.9

Discussion Questions

Peter and John speak boldly in the face of opposition. What stands out to you most about their courage, and what made it possible?

Acts 4:12 declares that salvation is found in Christ alone. How can we hold firmly to this truth while still showing respect and love to others with different beliefs?

The congregation's prayer was rooted in God's character, Scripture, Christ's example, and mission. Which of these elements is most meaningful or lacking in our prayers today?

What is one specific way you can be a bolder and more faithful witness for Christ this week—in word or in action?

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR MAY 10

A NEW ERA: The upward call

Where are we in the Bible?

Apostle Paul writes to the believers in Philippi while in prison. This was one of the first Christian congregations in Europe, established during his missionary journeys (Acts 16), and his tone throughout the letter is warm, personal, and encouraging.

In chapter 3, however, Paul becomes more direct, warning against placing confidence in religious achievements or outward identity. He reflects on his own past status and makes clear that none of it compares to knowing Christ. Instead, righteousness comes through faith. This leads to his image of the Christian life as a race—letting go of what is behind and pressing forward toward the goal, with hearts set not on earthly things, but on our heavenly calling.

Summary:

The upward call comes from God and is an invitation into eternal life - shaping our present life and pointing to our future hope of full fellowship with Him. We press toward this goal with perseverance, fixing our eyes on Jesus and allowing His nature to transform us, running the race with faithfulness and endurance, grounded in the hope of the resurrection. As we remain focused on this goal, we release past burdens and resist present distractions, committing ourselves to complete the race with confidence, knowing that pursuing Christ is never in vain.

Philippians 3:13-14

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ.

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture
Philippians 3:12-16

Catechism
3.1.8

Discussion Questions

Paul describes the Christian life as a race toward an "upward call." What stands out to you about this image, and why is it a helpful way to understand discipleship?

Paul emphasizes letting go of the past. Why can past experiences—both positive and negative—become obstacles to spiritual growth?

What distractions—whether external (busyness, stress) or internal (fear, doubt, apathy)—are affecting your focus on Christ?

The sermon mentions that not everything urgent is truly important. How can we better discern what is eternally important in our daily lives?

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR MAY 14

A NEW ERA: Sent into the world

Where are we in the Bible?

In the second half of John 16, Jesus repeats much of what He has already said before: He is going away; the disciples will not see Him for a brief period; when they see Him again, they will experience great joy (16:16-22). The resurrection appearances will resolve the initial problem of the pain experienced at Jesus' death. But with the resurrection, Jesus has not returned to life as before: He is leaving the world and returning to the Father (16:28): He will no longer be present with the disciples as He had been.

And while the disciples finally claim to understand what Jesus is saying (16:29-31), Jesus warns them again that the coming days will bring challenges to faith: the disciples will be scattered, experience hostility, and need peace and courage (16:32-33). In speaking directly to His disciples, Jesus also addresses all future disciples, and all those reading the Gospel, who struggle in Jesus' absence to persevere in following Him. What Jesus promised to those sharing that last meal with Him, He promises to all who continue to draw their life from Him.

Summary:

In the midst of confusion, absence, and trial, Jesus assures His disciples, and all who follow Him, that because He comes from the Father, fulfills His mission, and returns, they can live with confidence in their identity, faithfulness in their mission, and in His enduring presence through the Spirit. As the One who came forth from the Father, was sent into the world, and returns to the Father, Jesus becomes both our foundation and example, calling us as children of God to bear witness to Him, serve faithfully, and resolutely renounce evil.

ASCENSION DAY

John 16:28

I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.

Bible Reading

Mark 16:14-19

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture

John 20:1-23

Catechism

12.1.8.8

Discussion Questions

The sermon highlights that our identity is rooted in Christ—we are loved, chosen, and have an eternal future. Why is it important to ground our identity in Him rather than in ourselves or the world?

Jesus was sent on a mission and now sends His disciples. What does it practically mean for believers today to be "sent into the world"?

Do you live with an awareness of Jesus' ongoing presence through the Holy Spirit? How might that awareness change your daily decisions or attitudes?

The sermon speaks about unity with Christ and with one another. Why is unity such an important witness to the world?

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR MAY 17

Where are we in the Bible?

Jerusalem was not a safe place for the followers of Jesus. It was the city where their Lord had been rejected, condemned, and crucified. Yet in that very place of danger, Jesus commanded His disciples to remain. He instructed them not to leave, but to wait for the promise of the Father - the Holy Spirit - whom they would soon receive (1:4-6).

Before He ascended into heaven, Jesus spent time teaching them about the kingdom (1:2-3). As they listened, the disciples asked, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Like many faithful Jews, they expected the long-awaited messianic kingdom to be established. Jesus did not object to their belief that Israel would one day be restored under the Messiah. Instead, He redirected their focus. The issue was not whether the kingdom would come, but when. He told them that the timing of God's plan belonged to the Father alone (1:7).

Rather than giving them a timetable, Jesus gave them a mission. They would receive power from the Holy Spirit and be sent out as His witnesses. Their calling would extend beyond Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth (1:8). In this moment, Jesus shifted their immediate vision from a restored nation to a global mission.

Summary:

May we continue not merely as followers of Christ, but as His living witnesses. May the Holy Spirit shape our words, our reactions, our hope, and our confidence, so that in every moment, the presence, power, and character of our Risen Lord Jesus Christ are clearly seen by the world. Empowered by the Holy Spirit—whose divine power transforms fearful disciples into bold witnesses—we continue the calling given to all generations, bearing testimony to Christ through both our words and our deeds, rooted in our personal encounter with Him.

The discussion guide for Pentecost will be sent out after the Chief Apostle's webcast.

A NEW ERA: Living as a witness

Acts 1:8

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture

Acts 1:1-14

Luke 24:44-53

Catechism

4.5.2, 7.1

Discussion Questions

Where might God be asking you to "wait" right now instead of acting on your own timeline?

The disciples were focused on the timing of God's kingdom, but Jesus redirected them to mission. How does this challenge the way we think about God's work in our lives today?

Do your prayers tend to focus more on changing your circumstances or on asking for strength to remain faithful within them? Why?

Being a witness extends "to the ends of the earth." What might that look like in our everyday contexts—family, work, church, or community?

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR MAY 31

Where are we in the Bible?

It has been said that conflict reveals the measure of a person. This is particularly the case for Paul as he writes his second letter to the Corinthians. Corinth was one of the most strategically located cities in the Greco-Roman empire. Situated on a plateau overlooking the Isthmus of Corinth, its location allowed for the control of north-south trade and east-west shipping. The city was a bustling center of trade and industry in the first century.

When Paul established the congregation there, it was likely a group of house churches made up of people from varying social classes. This diversity led to division, and to disagreements over a myriad of topics: “favorite” apostles, resurrection, issues of sin, marriage, and relationships, and even the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Throughout both of his letters, Paul prompts the members to overcome their disagreements and modify their behaviors in an effort to accommodate one another. 2 Corinthians makes it clear, however, that the divisions have not been reconciled, and some in the church have even turned against Paul, causing him to defend his apostolic authority.

Amid all of this division, Paul appropriately ends his letter by pointing to the perfect model of unity - the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Rather than concluding with admonition, Paul pronounces a trinitarian blessing over the congregation: a promise of divine grace, love, and communion.

Summary:

The benediction is much more than a wish. Paul intended it to be both a blessing and a responsibility for his readers, and the same intent holds today for those who hear and accept it. These words constitute a true blessing filled with divine power and purpose: “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ” as the beginning, “the love of God” as the bond, and “the communion of the Holy Spirit” as the culmination. As a trinitarian promise addressed personally yet meant to overflow into the lives of others, this blessing calls and equips us to live as true Christians.

A NEW ERA: The trinitarian blessing

TRINITY SUNDAY

2 Corinthians 13:14

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture

2 Corinthians 13

Catechism

12.1.10

NAC USA Liturgy

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Discussion Questions

Paul ends a letter marked by conflict with a blessing centered on grace, love, and communion. Why do you think he chooses this approach instead of further correction?

How does understanding grace as a “new beginning” change the way we view ourselves and others?

Do you feel connected in true fellowship (communion) with other believers? If not, what might be hindering that?

Paul points to the Trinity as the model of unity. What would it look like for your life to more closely reflect that kind of harmony and relationship?