

**Opening Prayer:**

Faithful God, be my refuge in all my living and in my dying. Help me when I stumble. Grow me into your fullness of life with all of your people, for your purposes and glory. Amen.

• **Focus Points:**

1. God invites us to be as living stones together with Christ, to become and be God's people.
2. Throughout human history, our own need to trust, learn, and grow have challenged us to let go and simply be God's children.
3. No matter what, God is faithfully loving and present.

• **Acts 7:55-60**

1. Stephen was one of 7 who were chosen as keepers of the food distribution for the growing number of disciples.
2. He was a man of great wisdom and full of Spirit.
3. In fact, it was Stephen's smarts and wisdom that led to his death.
4. Stephen told the people that they were no different from their ancestors who persecuted the prophets of their time.
5. Stephen's message of the Holy Spirit's presence all around was more than most who followed Jewish law wanted to hear, and they stoned him to death.
6. Stephen is remembered as the first Christian martyr.

• **1 Peter 2:2-10**

1. The readers of 1 Peter are thought to have been Gentiles who became followers of Jesus Christ. These new disciples were from all over the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas and were under the rule and oppression of the Roman Empire/culture.
2. These letters were intended to inspire them in their daily living and growing in the ways of belonging to God and not the

Roman Empire. And are full of themes about God's mercy and inclusion.

3. When they trust in Christ they are participants in the building of God's great house with Jesus as the cornerstone.

- **John 14:1-14**

1. This familiar Gospel lesson showcasing the many rooms of God's house is part of Jesus' farewell discourse before his betrayal and execution.
2. It speaks of reassurance to his disciples then and today.
3. The main theme of this passage is one of belief in the Son of God and what the first disciples have learned and been told about him and their faith.
4. This passage is often used in funeral and memorial services as a way to promote the unity and inclusiveness of God's house and heaven as a place vast enough to house everyone who believes in God, the Creator, Jesus, the Redeemer and the Holy Spirit as our Sustainer.

### **Questions to Consider:**

- Why might Stephen have been considered a threat by the Roman government of the time?
- How do performing words of compassion create conflict within our own time and place?
- What prophets of God today do we silence when their words and ways of proclaiming truth hit too close to home? (ex: voices that insist "Black lives matter," or advocates that "Love is love")
- When have you been limited by your own self-doubt or cynicism for the institutional church?

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### **Next Week:**

### **A vision of God's Love**

#### **Scripture Texts:**

John 14:15-21  
Acts 17:22-31

Psalm 66:8-20  
1 Peter 3:13-22