

**A Sermon for The Fifth Sunday after Easter
May 18, 2025**



New Life Episcopal Church, Uniontown, OH

**Morning Prayer Rite Two
Preacher – Pete Iole**

Click Here for today's Readings:

[Fifth Sunday of Easter – The Episcopal Church](#)

Preamble: Come Holy Spirit come, come as the wind that blows, come as the fire that burns, come to guide the meditations of my mind, the feelings of my heart and the words from my lips as I attempt to understand God's holy word and deliver that message for the honor and glory of Jesus Christ. Amen.

God said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end". We commonly think of distinct starting and stopping points such as the beginning and end of life. Because Alpha and Omega represent the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet a linear trend is easy to visualize. What if it represents more than that? Every ending is also a new beginning, and every beginning has an end so rather than thinking in linear terms perhaps we should think circularly where the ending joins the beginning. Then, if that circle encompasses God's love, and everyone in that circle is loved without exception, with a path to heaven, then who are we to draw distinctions and establish exclusions. Our first reading from Acts points this out when Peter is challenged for bringing the word to the Gentiles. He explains his vision and a voice exclaiming that "What God has made clean, you must not call profane". God gave them the same spirit when they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

As Christians, we should believe the word of God is available to all peoples, regardless of race or color or ethnic origin. We should also recognize Christ's commandment to love one another. There were no exceptions or exclusions provided, Both Luke and Mathew tell us in their gospels to love our enemies. This is a somewhat radical concept that includes compassion, empathy and a willingness to seek reconciliation, even when difficult. Where would we be if Jesus and the apostles had limited their ministry to only the Jews? What would have become of the Woman at the well? As it is, the good news spread across Europe, Africa, Asia, and beyond. In the Episcopal Church we like to say all are welcome. Do we really mean it? Do we practice it?

This past week the Episcopal Church made the national news again when Episcopal Migration Ministries declined to resettle white Afrikaners from South Africa. Some of you may know that I once held a position as Executive Director of a refugee resettlement agency which impacts my perspective on this issue. The rationale given by our Presiding Bishop in his letter of 12 May was that this was contrary to our church's steadfast commitment to racial justice and reconciliation and our historic ties with the Anglican Church of Southern Africa. The crux of the issue revolved around the apparently unusual manner these refugees were selected, with preference given over many others. I hope it had nothing to do with the domestic optics of our church accepting to resettle white skinned refugees while black and brown skinned people still wait in queue. I can neither speak to the government's motivation for selecting this small group for fast-tracked resettlement nor complain about the eventual outcome for Episcopal Migration Ministries. The Presiding Bishop stated that we must not be guided by political vagaries but that the kingdom of God is revealed in the struggles of those on the margins. I suppose he somehow determined that the Afrikaners did not fit these terms or at least not to a level that should pre-empt a similarly deserving population. Ultimately, the Bishop decided to discontinue accepting federal grant money and end involvement with federally funded refugee resettlement. Personally, I applaud this effort to further separate church and state however I also recognize that the outcome reduces the ability to serve anyone determined to have legitimate refugee status.

We should, each of us, strive to love one another, just as Jesus loved us, without reservation or restriction or modifier of any type. This, however, does not prevent us from holding people accountable for their actions. We all carry biases, which might include a preference for people that look, or sound, or act most like us. This makes seeing and helping those struggling on the margins more difficult but still our never-ending Christian duty.

Here is a link to the Presiding Bishop's letter referenced today.

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/publicaffairs/letter-from-presiding-bishop-sean-rowe-on-episcopal-migration-ministries/>