

**Sermon Title: “Where Stones Fall, Seeds Rise” (Text: Acts 7:55–60)**

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**Fifth Sunday of Easter (5/3/2026)**

Dear Church,

There is something deeply unsettling about the passage we just listened to in Acts 7:55-60. It does not soften the violence. It does not hide the brutality. Stephen is not merely rejected—he is overpowered, dragged, and executed by a mob. The stones fall quickly, relentlessly. And yet, in the midst of this chaos, Luke invites us to see something else—something hidden beneath the violence.

Where stones fall, seeds rise.

To understand this moment, we must not look away from the reality of suffering. Elaine Scarry, in *The Body in Pain*, reminds us that intense physical suffering can shatter language itself. Pain resists expression; it silences the one who suffers. Torture, especially, is not just about inflicting pain—it is about destroying the voice, erasing the witness, undoing the humanity of the victim.

And when we read Stephen’s death carefully, we begin to see that what happens to him bears a disturbing resemblance to what we would now recognize as torture. The mob does not simply disagree with Stephen—they stop their ears. They shout over him. They rush him. They drag him outside the city. His voice must be silenced. His testimony must be obliterated.

This is what violence does. It refuses to listen. It cannot tolerate truth. It seeks to erase the one who speaks it.

And yet—Stephen speaks.

Even as the stones begin to fall, even as his body is breaking, his voice is not silenced. In fact, it becomes clearer, sharper, more Christ-like.

Luke, the careful storyteller, wants us to notice something extraordinary: Stephen does not just die—he dies like Christ.

Three times Stephen speaks, and each time, his words echo Jesus.

First, he declares the vision: *“I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”* This mirrors Jesus before the council, who spoke of the Son of Man seated at God’s right hand. What Jesus proclaimed in anticipation, Stephen now sees in revelation.

Second, as the stones strike him, Stephen cries out: *“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”* These are the words of Jesus from the cross—“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” Stephen entrusts his life not to the mercy of the mob, but to the faithfulness of God.

And finally—perhaps most astonishing of all—Stephen kneels and says: *“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”* These words remind us of the words that Jesus spoke on the cross: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”

These are not the words of a defeated man. These are not the words of a victim trapped in the cycle of violence. These are the words of someone who has been transformed by Christ.

And here is where the gospel breaks open for us.

Stephen does not mirror the violence done to him. He does not return hatred for hatred. He does not curse those who curse him. Instead, he embodies a radically different way—a way that interrupts the logic of violence itself.

Violence says: repay, retaliate, repeat.

Stephen says: Forgive.

Violence says: silence the other.

Stephen says, "Entrust my spirit to God.

Violence says: destroy.

Stephen becomes a seed.

This is the paradox at the heart of the Christian faith: what looks like defeat becomes the ground of new life.

Where stones fall, seeds rise.

But let us not romanticize this too quickly. Stephen's death is real. It is painful. It is unjust. The early Christian community is entering a new and dangerous phase. This is not an isolated incident—it is the beginning of widespread persecution.

Luke tells us that a young man named Saul is there, watching, approving, holding the coats of those who throw the stones.

Saul—the zealous Pharisee. Saul—the persecutor of the church. Saul—the one who will soon ravage the Christian community.

And yet, even here, even in this dark moment, a seed is being planted.

We often think of conversion as a sudden event—a flash of light on the road to Damascus. And indeed, Saul's encounter with Christ is dramatic. But what if that moment did not begin on the road?

What if it began here?

What if the image of Stephen—his face like an angel, his courage, his prayer of forgiveness—what if that image lodged itself somewhere deep within Saul’s memory?

What if Stephen’s witness began to unsettle him long before he could name it?

We cannot prove this, but the narrative invites us to wonder.

Because later, Paul writes about grace. He will write about love that overcomes sin. He will speak of a power made perfect in weakness. He will endure suffering himself, not as a victim, but as a witness.

Where did he learn this?

Perhaps, from Stephen.

Where stones fall, seeds rise.

This is the mystery of God’s work in the world. What appears to be the end is often the beginning. What looks like loss becomes the soil for new life.

And this has profound implications for us today.

Because we, too, live in a world where voices are silenced, where truth is shouted down, where communities are divided, where fear and hostility rise when differences deepen.

We may not face literal stones—but we know what it is to be dismissed, ignored, misrepresented, or attacked for what we believe.

And in those moments, we are tempted to respond like the mob—to close our ears, to raise our voices, to overpower rather than to listen.

But Stephen shows us another way: A way of discipleship that is not rooted in our own strength, but in God’s steadfast faithfulness.

Notice this: Stephen does not manufacture courage. He does not summon inner strength through sheer willpower. The text tells us that he is “*full of the Holy Spirit.*” He gazes into heaven. He sees Christ.

His faithfulness flows from God’s faithfulness.

And this is good news for us. Because we do not always feel strong. Our faith wavers. Our courage falters. Our patience wears thin.

But the gospel does not depend on our strength. It depends on God’s.

God’s steadfast faithfulness makes our faithfulness possible.

Stephen does not cling to life at all costs. He entrusts his life to God. He does not cling to anger. He releases it in forgiveness. He does not cling to control. He bears witness.

And that is what discipleship ultimately is: bearing witness. Not winning arguments. Not overpowering others. But telling what we have seen of Christ, and showing who we are because of Christ.

Stephen tells what he sees: the risen Christ standing at God’s right hand.

Stephen shows who he is: one who forgives, one who trusts, one who loves even in the face of hatred.

And his witness matters more than he could ever have imagined. Because somewhere in that crowd stands Saul. Watching and listening—perhaps unwillingly and being changed—perhaps unknowingly.

And one day, that same Saul will become Paul—the apostle who carries the gospel across the known world. This is how God works: quietly, mysteriously, and beyond our control and beyond our foresight.

Our words, our actions, our witness—they may seem small. They may seem ineffective. They may even seem crushed under the weight of opposition. But we do not know what seeds are being planted. We do not know what hearts are being stirred. We do not know what future God is bringing to life through our present faithfulness. Where stones fall, seeds rise. So the question for us today is this: What is our witness? In a world of noise, do we listen? In a world of anger, do we forgive? In a world of fear, do we trust? In a world that often silences truth, do we bear witness with grace?

Because the mission of Christ is still unfolding, the seeds are still being planted. And God is still bringing life out of places that look like death. Perhaps your witness feels small. Perhaps it feels unnoticed. Perhaps it even feels costly. But take heart. Stephen's story reminds us that no act of faithfulness is wasted. No word of truth is lost. No gesture of love is insignificant. Because God is always at work—especially in the places where we least expect it. Even under a rain of stones. Even in moments of suffering. Even in the shadow of death. Where stones fall, seeds rise. And by the grace of God, those seeds will grow.

Amen.