

*Guest Preacher—St. John the Evangelist, Keokea (Kula), Hawai'i*

[Acts 5:27-32](#) | [Psalm 150](#) | [Revelation 1:4-8](#) | [John 20:19-31](#)

## Now What?!

### Prayer

### Introduction

British classic rock band, *Deep Purple* has been at it for some time. With 22 studio albums and 100 million records sold since 1968, there's something deep about the group's legacy—more than just the name.

I confess that *Deep Purple's* work escaped me until now, despite their pedigree. Music's always been there for me, of course, having grown up as a cathedral chorister. Days then were shaped by the mantra, “music is life!” Then there were modern tunes on long Australian road trips with my parents. Later there were my own discoveries, unfettered *by*—and sometimes in opposition *to*—parental tastes!

Thus, I grew up with an eclectic mix: from the baroque and renaissance of Handel and Palestrina, to the romantic works of Debussy, to the 70s and 80s pop of *ABBA* and Michael Jackson. And, in high school, the discovery of 90s punk rock through bands like *No Doubt* and *The Offspring*.

Yet, for some reason, I never heard much classic rock like *Deep Purple* along the way.

All of this is to say that I'm grateful for the revelation of these classic English rockers. One of their records has started to help me understand one of the essential questions I have, a question that comes up each time the 2nd Sunday after Easter rolls around.

Confused? Let me explain: *Deep Purple's* 19th album, "Now What?!" was released in 2013. "Now What?!" symbolized a resurrection of sorts as it was the first album pressed for the band after a seven (7) year hiatus. This *resurrection* and the name itself are a gift. Together, these both in-fleshe and give voice to—this essential question, a question we may all share after the lights and music and alleluias of last week's Easter celebrations. "Now What?!"

Thankfully, the church's calendar and worship partner with the Holy Scriptures. These three, this morning, and in the days and weeks to come, will help us a little way along our journey.

## Liturgy and Worship

First, friends in Christ, we're fortunate to be in a liturgical church that—like the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Lutheran traditions—gifts us a 50-day Easter Season. That's right. 50 days! It's a bold statement of the church, to declare 50 days of the resurrection season. And that's putting aside, for a moment, that *every* Sunday is a celebration of Christ's death-defeating life. During these 50 days, we'll retain the gold vestments, keep our music fresh and joy-filled, and stick with those extra refrains of "alleluia, alleluia!" We'll also set aside our usual practice of reading the Hebrew Scriptures—the Christian "Old Testament"—for our first reading. Instead, we'll hear (as we did this morning) from the Acts of the Apostles. And we'll do this all throughout Eastertide. These Acts' readings—*in themselves*—help answer that "Now what?" question. More on that in a moment. But first, let's talk about that return to the upper room in John's Gospel.

## John

Just like those trying to escape discovery in the classic 1998 Robert De Niro Movie *Ronin*, in the wake of Jesus's brutal death, the disciples "go to what they know." Yes, Jesus's followers go back to the upper room; back to the place where—just days earlier—Jesus was a fully alive, teaching and

preaching in deed *and in* word, giving them a new commandment to “love one another ... as I have loved you.” As Jesus washed their feet, they realized the gravity of Christ’s life and teaching—the subversive, upside-down nature of the Kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed from the back of a donkey. As Jesus broke bread and poured out wine, he declared that water and wheat would never be the same, and that trampled grapes would be the new life-blood of a newly imagined people of God.

Now, here in John’s Gospel they are back in the upper room, and all that hope, all that promise, seems like it has been for nothing. Their master captured, tortured, and brutally killed; they fear they will be next. So they are there. The doors are locked. They are petrified. And they ask that essential question. The question that we may ask; each time we find ourselves post-Easter. “Now what?!”

Then, miraculously, Jesus appears. It seems like a dream. In an instant, they are back, back to before. When the normality of their itinerant life filled them with hope and expectation. And those words—“peace be with you”—those everyday greeting words, seem like they emerge in a haze. And then the joy. And the confusion. And the joy again, as Jesus says once more:

“peace be with you.” But yet, more confusion, as curious words are offered, with a particular blessing given on the breath: “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

## Acts

I mentioned earlier, that the readings from the Acts of the Apostles—in place of proclamation from the Hebrew Scriptures—is, in itself, one *kind* of answer to the question, “Now What?!”

Acts answers this question, often not in the form of philosophy or theology, but in history and in narrative. It should be noted that today we enter into the story over five (5) chapters in—which is kind of like streaming the second (2nd) season of your favorite TV show without going back and watching the first (1st)!

Nevertheless, an astute reader of the Scriptures would have already learned of the rising tensions between Christ’s apostles and the Temple authorities. Had we been reading this all together, we’d have learned about the imprisoned apostles, the freed-by-an-angel-apostles, and the strange and wondrous acts going on all around. Today, we learn of a dialogue that seems to answer the question, “Now What?!” with the answer: “stand up for what you believe! Stand against oppression and injustice!”

After all, Jesus had been killed to keep the masses at bay. To keep the rabble quiet. To keep the status quo in place. To keep the powerful of religion and politics in their place.

Now is the time to take a stand, to teach in Christ's name, and to obey the loving, life-giving, liberating God who frees all people from the captivity of propaganda-filled norm.

### **Revelation and the Psalm**

The “Now What?!” of this Second (2nd) Sunday of Easter also seems to be answered in some way by the reading from the Revelation to John the Divine. Here, John faces the dilemma of every modern Episcopal Church bishop or priest: how to minister to a diverse range of congregations, a diverse range of people facing very different circumstances and challenges?!

After all, John the Divine is writing to seven (7) different churches in Asia. Some lived among devout Jews, those who still believed that the Jesus sect was a strange and out-of-line cannibalistic deviation—all that drinking and eating of Christ's blood and body. Ugh. Other churches in Asia lived in areas where Greco-Roman gods and goddesses still dominated, and where idols were made of violent conflict and permissive slaveholding.

So, John the Divine answers the “Now What?!” by preaching in the language of Zeus. For Greeks, for Romans, in those days, it was *Zeus* or perhaps *Jupiter* “who is and who was and who is to come” *not* the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; not Jesus the Christ “the firstborn of the dead” the “king of kings” and “Lord of lords.” Thus, the wise and prudent John the Divine speaks in their language.

John reinterprets and points to what they know. And the safety of the familiar invites the people into a new place of new understanding. *Christ* is Lord of all. So, as our Psalm today declares, so does John the Divine. “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.” Let “alleluia” be our song as we learn what it is to be a “kingdom and priests serving God” forever and ever.

## **Conclusion**

So, how can the beautiful melodic guitar phrases of British rock band *Deep Purple* help us in the “Now What?!” of our post-Easter life? One way, I chose to break the status quo this week was to listen to the very classic rock that I was writing about as I prayed over and wrote this sermon! As a result, you may judge the initial offering of my sermon to be less impactful than the stellar beat and anthem-like harmony of *Deep Purple*.

Nevertheless, I'm trusting (and I hope you'll trust too) that that gift of God's Holy Spirit in the locked upper room lives on in today's preaching and proclaiming of God's Word.

Yes, we may still have that lingering question, "Now What?!" That may still ring in our ears as we try to process the empty tomb and the flurry of brutal, life-impacting events in the days before. But that's what these 50 Great Days of Easter are all about!

Yes, we have a gift to live into in these days and weeks to come! Yet, there's lots of space for the haze and the confusion of the disciples in the upper room too. There's breadth for the wisdom and passion of the apostles in Acts. There's freedom to learn to adapt to the changes and complex dynamics of the 21st-century world—just like John the Divine preaching and teaching to seven (7) different churches long ago.

There's joy in this journey. There's hope in this mystery. There's love in this living. And there's a whole lot of boundary-pushing, rule-bending, truth-telling, justice-seeking to be done too. So listening to some *Deep Purple* might not just hurt at all [ ... The Lord be with you ... ]