

# Breaking Open the Word

The Sixth Sunday of Easter  
25<sup>th</sup> May, 2025



## Finding Hope in Unexpected Places

A weekly reflection and  
sermon, with study and  
prayer guides following the  
RCL Lectionary

Dennis Webster



## Revised Common Lectionary Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 16.9-15  
Psalm 67

Revelation 21.10, 22 - 22.5

John 14.23-29 or  
John 5.1-95

Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collect

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Introduction

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Reflection

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Discussion Questions

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Five Days of Meditation and Prayer

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O Lord,  
from whom all good things do come;  
Grant to us thy humble servants,  
that by thy holy inspiration  
we may think those things that be good,  
and by thy merciful guiding  
may perform the same;  
through our Lord Jesus Christ.

## INTRODUCTION

In his sermon titled "Hope in Unexpected Places," Dennis explores the transformative power of hope as depicted in the gospels and Revelation. He begins with the story from John 5 about a man who had waited for 38 years by a healing pool but received no assistance from those around him, showcasing how religious traditions can create barriers to healing and support.

Dennis emphasises that Jesus disrupts these norms, healing the man not through the ritual of the pool but by offering a question that brings forth hope. This act illustrates that grace transcends rules, allowing healing for those unable to help themselves.

The sermon shifts to highlight the fear that often prevents individuals from extending

compassion, particularly on the Sabbath, where adherence to the law can overshadow the call to love. In contrast, Dennis introduces Lydia from Acts 16, who represents a spirit of hospitality and hope, welcoming Paul and the early church into her home.

He concludes by referencing Revelation, where a vision of abundant healing and communal grace replaces fear and hierarchy.

Dennis calls on the congregation to live as people of hope, extending Christ's hospitality and compassion towards those often overlooked and aspiring to the eternal hope of God's kingdom, where healing flows freely and collectively. The message encourages action in love, mercy, and justice, reflecting the heart of Christ's ministry.

### Prayer Prompts

- Pray for the courage to recognise and respond to those in need around us.
- Ask God for guidance in applying the lessons of hope and grace in our daily lives.
- Request support in overcoming fears that prevent us from acting with compassion.
- Lift any personal prayer requests shared within the group.

God of Creation, breathe into us, made of clay,  
your gift of life so that we, made in your image  
may become your eyes, ears, hands and voice.

### Hope in Unexpected Places

Hope, as revealed in the gospels and Revelation, transcends law, tradition, and human expectations. It disrupts rules and breaks barriers.

#### I. Shall we gather by the waters?

John 5 recounts a man's 38-year wait by a healing pool, despite tradition that an angel stirs the waters and the first to enter is healed—the sick lie around the pool, competing for entry.

The man's words reveal his illness and isolation.

- No one helps him.
- Others rush ahead of him.

He is forgotten, invisible, a casualty of a religious system that says healing is for the fastest, the most fortunate, and the least broken.

Individuals are considered invalid, in-valid, or, as the King James puts it, impotent, unable to provide a creative and fruitful life.

Jesus enters the scene, not with a stirred-up pool, but with a question: "Do you want to be made well?" How would you answer that if you had been lying

there for nearly four decades? At the site of the five porticos representing the Torah, the Books of Moses, and the law, Jesus breaks the rules.

- He heals on the Sabbath.
- He bypasses the ritual.
- He ignores the temple hierarchy.
- Hope arrives unexpectedly.

Friends, how often do we devise complex frameworks and deeply ingrained beliefs that establish the standards for our deservingness of healing, prioritising our needs, or conforming to societal rules?

But the gospel proclaims that Jesus approaches those who are unable to assist themselves. He bestows healing when grace prevails, rather than adhering to the constraints of the law.

#### II. Fear, Law, and Compassion's Failure

What about the others at the pool? Why didn't anyone help the man?

Fear might be a reason. Assisting someone, especially on the Sabbath, could be

considered a violation of the law. It's better to keep your hands clean and your conscience undisturbed. It's better not to get involved.

The law becomes a barrier to love, replacing mercy with fear and self-preservation with compassion.

- Could our fears regarding the possibility of falling foul of the law impede us from embracing the path of righteousness?
- Do our fixation on staying faithful to rules that were written to encourage us, but end up leaving us blind to the suffering souls around us?

#### III. Lydia and the Hospitality of Hope (Acts 16:9–15)

However, Acts 16 shows a different picture.

Paul receives a vision: "Come to Macedonia and help us." He arrives in Philippi and meets Lydia.

She's not part of the Jewish establishment, not in Jerusalem, and by a river. Yet, she becomes the first convert in Europe and the first to open her home to the church.

- Where the man at the pool received no help, Lydia offered it.
- Where fear ruled the Sabbath, Lydia welcomed

strangers.

Grace, essential to hospitality, creates room in hearts and homes.

In Lydia, the church becomes what the pool couldn't be: a place where no one is alone, where hospitality replaces hierarchy, and where hope is received, not rationed.

#### IV. The River of Life and the End of Fear (Revelation 21–22)

In Revelation, John sees the holy city, the new Jerusalem.

John is shown the river of the water of life flowing from God's throne.

On either side is the tree of life, whose fruit nourishes all people monthly and whose leaves heal the nations.

All things have been recreated anew.

There's no more fear, no more temple, no more need to be first.

There's only one ultimate hope: a place where healing is abundant and God dwells among his people.

Where the pool in Jerusalem was stirred for one, the river in Revelation flows for all.

Where Sabbath laws once created fear, the eternal light of the Lamb casts out all shadows.

## Conclusion:

### Living as People of Hope

#### We live between these stories.

We know the pain of waiting, feeling overlooked, and wondering if healing will come.

Likewise, we know the fear of doing it wrong, stepping out, and breaking the rules.

But Jesus has come.

He says:

- You don't need to wait for the water to stir—I am the living water.
- You don't need to race ahead of others—I see you.
- You don't need to fear the law—I fulfil it with mercy.
- We're challenged to lead people to Christ's living waters.
- We should notice those around us that we often overlook.
- We should respond not out of duty, but because we're people of justice, mercy, and hope, as good neighbours.

Dear friends, receive the hospitality of Christ, like Lydia received the gospel.

Extend the hospitality of Christ by seeing those others miss.

And long for the city of God, where hope flows like a river, and healing is not earned but given.

And accept that we are challenged:

- To lead people to the living waters in the light of Christ.
- To see people around us that we can so easily overlook.
- To respond, not out of a pre-defined duty, but because, as a good neighbour, we are people of justice, mercy, and most importantly, hope.

In turn, let us:

- Receive the hospitality of Christ, like Lydia received the gospel.
- Extend the hospitality of Christ by seeing those others miss.
- And long for the city of God, where hope flows like a river, and healing is not earned but given.

Benediction

Go now in the grace of the One who heals on the Sabbath,

who welcomes the outsider,

and who prepares for us a city where the light never fades.

*Go in hope.*

*Go in freedom.*

*Go in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*Go now in the grace of the healer,*

*who welcomes the outsider*

*and prepares a city*

*where the light never fades.*

*Go in hope, freedom,*

*and Jesus' name. Amen.*

## Discussion Questions

**How does the story of the man at the pool in John reflect our challenges when seeking help or healing?**

- The sermon discusses the man's long wait at the healing pool, during which he felt invisible and forgotten by others.
- Can you think of a time when you felt overlooked or alone?
- How did that experience shape your understanding of help and healing?

**In what ways do our fears and adherence to rules prevent us from showing compassion to others, as discussed in the sermon?**

- The sermon mentions that fear can lead us to avoid helping others, especially regarding specific rules or traditions.
- Reflect on a situation where you hesitated to help someone due to fear of making a mistake.
- How might you approach that differently in the future?

**What can we learn from Lydia's hospitality in Acts 16 about creating welcoming spaces for others?**

- The sermon highlights Lydia as someone who welcomed others, contrasting her actions with those at the pool who did not help.
- How can you extend hospitality in your life, whether at school, home, or community? Can you think of someone who might need that kindness?

**How does the 'river of life' imagery in Revelation 21-22 compare to the healing pool the man waited by, and what does that mean for us today?**

- The sermon describes the river of life as a source of healing for all, contrasting it with the limited opportunity at the pool.
- What does it mean to you to have abundant and available hope to everyone? How can you share that hope with those around you?

**How can we embody the message of hope and compassion from the sermon in our everyday interactions with peers?**

- The sermon encourages us to lead others to Christ's living waters and respond to those we often overlook.
- How can you actively look for opportunities to show kindness and support to those who might feel left out or ignored?





## Walking Gently on Sacred Land

### 5-Day Devotional

This five-day devotional will explore the sermon from this weekend in greater depth. Each day will explore key themes of hope, healing, and the unexpected ways God reaches out to us.



### Day 1

### John 5:1-9

In this passage, we encounter a man who has waited for healing for nearly four decades. His story represents the struggle many of us face—feeling overlooked and distant from hope. The shame and isolation he experiences highlight the barriers that often obstruct our paths to healing. Yet, when Jesus asks him, “Do you want to be made well?”, it calls into question our readiness to embrace healing and transformation.

The man’s initial response reveals his deep-seated despair and belief in his unworthiness. However, Jesus disrupts this narrative of despair by offering hope without conditions. This reminds us that God’s grace is not reserved for the swift or the fortunate, but is available for all who seek it. As we reflect on this passage, let us consider how we can open our hearts to the healing Jesus offers.

- What barriers do I put in place that prevent me from accepting God’s healing?
- In what ways do I feel overlooked in my journey towards wholeness?
- How can I be more open to the unexpected ways God is reaching out to me?
- Pray for the courage to confront the barriers in your heart.
- Ask God to reveal areas in your life that need His healing touch.

### Day 2

### Luke 10:25-37

This scripture presents the parable of the Good Samaritan, emphasising that genuine compassion transcends societal norms and expectations. Here, we explore the theme of fear and how it can hinder us from extending grace and assistance, just as the

bystanders at the healing pool failed to help the suffering man. Fear of breaking the law or social convention often leads to neglecting those in need within our communities.

Jesus challenges us to reconsider our responses to those who are hurting. Are we willing to step outside our comfort zones and offer help when it is inconvenient? The Samaritan's compassion reminds us that love should be our guiding principle, surpassing the barriers that law and fear create.

- How do I respond when I see someone in need?
- What fears hold me back from offering help to others?
- Am I willing to challenge societal norms for the sake of love?
- Pray for a heart of compassion that sees beyond rules and regulations.
- Ask God to show you how to be a Good Samaritan daily.

The story of Lydia offers a compelling contrast to the man at the healing pool. Lydia, a Gentile woman, exemplifies the power of hospitality and the willingness to embrace the unfamiliar. Her response to Paul's message demonstrates how hope and grace create community. Unlike the isolated man at the pool, Lydia opens her home to share the gospel, breaking down barriers and building bridges for others.

This narrative invites us to reflect on how our communities may be transformed through acts of hospitality. Just as Lydia became a beacon of hope for the early church, we too are called to welcome others and create spaces where all feel valued and included. Our homes can serve as vessels of grace, facilitating the experience of hope that Christ offers.

- How can I cultivate a spirit of hospitality in my home or community?
- In what ways can I practice welcoming others who are different from me?
- What does being a vessel of hope for others mean to me?
- Pray for opportunities to extend love and hospitality to those around you.
- Ask God to help you see the value in every person you encounter.

## Day 4

## Revelation 21:1-4

In Revelation, we find the imagery of a new heaven and earth, marked by the absence of fear and pain. This vision of the holy city encapsulates the fulfilment of God's promise to dwell among His people. The imagery of the river of life flowing from God's throne signifies that God's hope and healing are not limited; they are abundantly available to all.

As we reflect on this passage, we recognise the importance of hope in our lives today. In a world of uncertainty, we are assured of our eternal hope in Christ, where fear is forever vanquished and healing is poured out abundantly. This promise invites us to live courageously, knowing we are part of something greater and that our struggles will one day fade away.

- What does the promise of a new heaven and earth mean to me?
- How can I embody the hope of Revelation in my daily life?
- In what ways can I share this hope with those around me?
- Pray for a deeper understanding of God's promises for your life.
- Ask God to help you spread hope in your community today.

## Day 5

## John 7:37-39

As we conclude this devotional, we reflect on Jesus' invitation to all who are thirsty to come and drink of the living water. His message encourages us not to wait for perfect conditions but to draw near to Him freely. Just as the man at the healing pool had to confront his own struggles, we, too, must acknowledge our need for Jesus in our lives.

This final reflection reminds us of the urgency of sharing the living water with those around us. Our responses to God's grace call us to action, not out of obligation, but out of love and compassion for those who are similarly desperate. May we live as people of hope, inviting others into the same relationship that brings us life.

- How can I make space for Jesus in my daily routine?
- What does sharing the living water with those in need mean to me?
- How can I encourage others struggling with their fears and doubts?
- Pray for renewed energy to share God's hope with those around you.
- Ask God to fill you with His living water every day

# End notes and further reading

Sacra Pagina:  
Paul's Press)

The Gospel of Luke (St  
The Gospel of Matthew  
The Gospel of John

The following authors as featured at  
The Worship Cloud

[www.theworshipcloud.com](http://www.theworshipcloud.com)

N. T. Wright,  
Jane Williams,  
P James Woodward,  
Paula Gooder  
Mark Pryce,  
David Perry

Rev Dr Andrew McGowan: Andrew's  
Version: <https://substack.com/@abmcg>



Brabarlung Totem

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