



BREAKING
OPEN

Scripture Study

Why Follow When the World Burns?

November 23rd, 2025

Dennis Webster

A weekly reflection based on the preaching at St Peter's by the Lake, Paynesville, together with a study guide based on the readings, some liturgical resources RCL Lectionary, and a weekly devotion

Revised Common Lectionary Related

Pentecost 23C

Proper 28

Ordinary Sunday 33C

Malachi 4.1-2a

Psalms 98

2 Thessalonians 3.6-13

Luke 21.5-19



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Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collects

Lord, we beseech thee to keep
thy household the Church
in continual godliness:

that through thy protection
it may be free from all adversities,
and devoutly given to serve thee in good works,
to the glory of thy Name;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

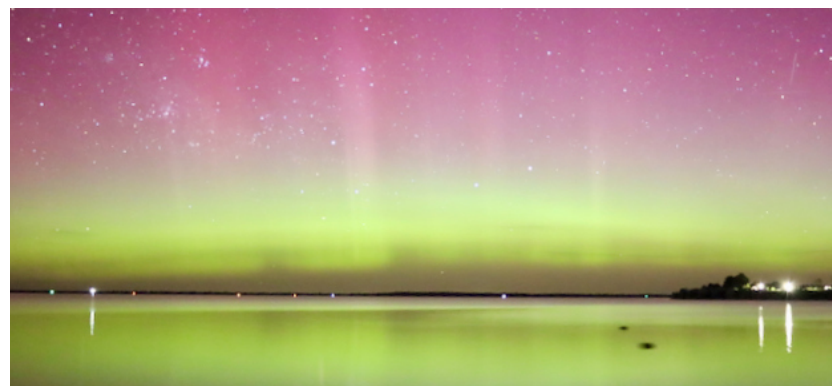


INTRODUCTION

In a world that often feels like it's burning, as we come to the end of the International Year of Hope, once again, we view through the lens of Job's unwavering faith. Drawing parallels between ancient scripture and modern-day struggles, including a poignant conversation with Hassan in war-torn Gaza, he explores the profound mystery of following Christ amid devastation. Through the interconnected stories of Job's defiant declaration "I know my Redeemer lives" and Hassan's steadfast belief that "Peace will reign," we can see how God's glory manifests not in displays of power, but in suffering love.

When confronted by the fiery prophecies of Malachi, the victorious praise of Psalm 98, and Jesus's sobering words about endurance, it is apparent that endings often signal God's new beginnings. The sermon crescendos with a compelling truth: we follow Jesus not because the path is safe, but because He has already walked it and awaits us.

In these turbulent times, the challenge is to embrace Job's steadfastness, Paul's dedication, and Christ's enduring promise that by our endurance, we will gain our souls. His urgent call beckons us to work quietly, love deeply, and hope fiercely, knowing that our Redeemer lives and stands with us still.



Aurora Australis over Lake Victoria
© Dennis Webster, 12 November, 2025

As we walk lightly on sacred ground,
teach us Lord to make known your kingdom,
and let this reflect in all that we do and say.

“Why Follow When the World Burns?”

(Job 19.23-27a; Malachi 4.1-2a;

Psalm 98;

2 Thessalonians 3.6-13;

Luke 21.5-19

A world that feels like it's burning

We've all had weeks like this one — where the headlines sound like the end of the world, and the Scriptures don't offer much comfort either.

Malachi says, “The day is coming, burning like an oven.”* Luke says, “*not one stone will be left upon another.*”

It's **scorched-earth language** — and it sounds terrifying.

Why on earth would anyone follow Jesus, knowing the cost? Why give your life to a faith that promises endurance instead of escape?

[pause]

But the strange thing about Scripture is this — Every time we think the story is ending, **God is preparing a new beginning.**

Faith amid fire

When we hear words like these — wars, earthquakes, betrayal — we think *apocalypse* means *disaster*. But in the Bible, *apokalypsis* means **to unveil** — **a revealing**, not a destroying.

In the shaking of the world, something is being **unveiled**.

Jesus isn't trying to frighten the disciples; He's preparing them for what's real — that love has a cost, and faith has a price, but neither ends in despair.

To follow Christ is to trust that even in the fire, **God refines rather than destroys.**

And that's why we keep walking. Because in the very places that seem broken beyond repair, **God is at work redeeming.**

Job's defiant hope

Then we hear Job. Poor Job — stripped of everything, friends turned cruel, heaven silent.

And out of that silence, he speaks words that have carried faith for thousands of years:

“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth.”

He doesn't say “*I understand.*” He says, “*I know.*” Not knowledge of the head, but trust of the heart.

Faith, not in explanation — but in relationship.

Job doesn't deny the darkness; he defies it. He says, “Even from the dust, I will see God.”

That's the heart of resurrection faith — hope before Easter, light before dawn.

Job's Redeemer is alive — and that changes everything. And in this certainty, in this understanding, in his vindication, he can stand in the very presence of God, even from the dust and ashes that surround him.

During the week, I had the opportunity to talk live with a young man in Gaza, Hassan. He showed me around what is left of his house. He climbed to the roof of the building around him and scanned the area. Rubble. Intense destruction. Another in the feed asked if he thought the shooting would begin again. In a resigned voice, he said, “Yes.”

During the course of the conversation, gunshots were heard. He immediately panned to where the sound came from. Only silence followed. Asked if he was afraid, he said he was concerned for his children's future, but “Allah is merciful. Peace will reign.”

The thought crossed my mind, I wonder where Job's house is located? Indeed, it was located outside Israel, to the south, possibly on the border between Saudi Arabia and Jordan.¹

Job, a man outside Israel, the people with whom God struggles, accepted the reality of God's peace despite the travesty he endured, like the scorched prophecy of Malachi. He recognised God's presence and unwavering support. This certainty allowed him to affirm, “I know that my Lord lives.”

Hassan's words are burned into my understanding. "Allah is merciful. Peace will reign."

The Divine Mystery — *Mysterium Divinium* and *Mysteries Fide*

We call it *the divine mystery*: that **God's glory is revealed not in power, but in suffering love.**

We know this better as we proclaim the Mystery of Faith each time we gather. The words may vary, but in essence, it is a straightforward Trinitarian understanding that echoes what Jesus reveals to us about the nature of the Divine.

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

We are redeemed through the central message of the cross: Yesterday, today, and always. Even in lighting the Paschal or Easter candle, we repeat the words year by year, building upon, proclaiming now, and preparing for the future.

"Christ, yesterday and today, the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega. All time belongs to him and all the ages; to him be glory and power through every age forever. Amen.

The Cross is the centre of that mystery — what looks like defeat becomes victory. What looks like death becomes life.

And so, in this week's readings:

- Malachi's fire becomes healing.
- Psalm 98 turns judgment into joy.
- Paul tells the Thessalonians to keep working faithfully.
- And Jesus ends not with fear, but with promise:

"By your endurance you will gain your souls."

The mystery is not that God spares us from pain, but that **God is with us in it, and life has the last word.**

Why do we still follow

So, why follow Jesus when the world is on fire?

Because we've learned — through Job, through the Cross, through our own lives — that **God's love is stronger than death and more enduring than despair.**

Because what looks like an ending is often God's new beginning.

Because **our Redeemer lives**, and He stands with us still.

We don't follow because the path is safe. We follow because Christ has already walked it and waits for us at the end.

Standing firm in hope

So, brothers and sisters, be steadfast like Job. Keep the faith like Paul. Stay calm in the shaking. Work quietly, love deeply, hope fiercely.

For the same God who raised Jesus from the dead will also raise us.

And so we can say:

I know that my Redeemer lives. And because He lives, I too shall stand.

Closing prayer

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, Redeemer and Friend,
when the world shakes,
keep us steady in your love.
When all seems lost,
remind us that you live
— and that by your grace,
we too shall stand. Amen.

¹ Job's homeland of Uz was almost certainly located east or southeast of Israel, in the borderlands of ancient Edom — roughly modern southern Jordan and north-western Saudi Arabia — symbolically at the edge of the known world, where the questions of human suffering and divine justice echo across the desert

Discussion Questions

We are reminded that 'apocalypse' actually means 'to unveil' rather than destroy. How does this change your perspective on difficult times in life?

- In the sermon, we learn that 'apokalypsis' means to unveil - a revealing, not a destroying. The pastor explains that in the shaking of the world, something is being unveiled.
- What is currently being 'unveiled' in your own life through challenging circumstances?

Looking at Job's statement, 'I know that my Redeemer lives,' how does his certainty in the midst of complete loss speak to having faith during difficult times?

- The sermon highlights that Job doesn't say 'I understand' but rather 'I know' - showing trust of the heart rather than knowledge of the head.
- When have you experienced a time when you had to trust God without understanding the full picture?

In Luke 21:5-19, Jesus warns of coming trials but ends with a promise about endurance. Why do you think Jesus chose to include both the warning and the promise?

- The sermon points out that Jesus isn't trying to frighten the disciples but prepare them for reality - that love has a cost and faith has a price, but neither ends in despair.
- How has endurance in your faith journey led to spiritual growth?

The sermon draws parallels between Hassan in Gaza and Job's situation. How do their responses to tragedy demonstrate faith in action?

- Both Hassan ('Allah is merciful. Peace will reign') and Job ('I know that my Redeemer lives') express hope despite being surrounded by destruction.
- What can we learn from people who maintain their faith in God while experiencing severe hardship?

We follow Jesus not because the path is safe, but because Christ has already walked it. How does this perspective change the way we view Christian discipleship?

The sermon concludes that God's love is stronger than death and more enduring than despair, and what looks like an ending is often God's new beginning.

What steps can you take to follow Christ more faithfully, even when the path seems difficult or unclear?

This five-day devotional will call from the dust reflecting the sermon from this weekend. We will explore themes of hope, endurance, and the mystery of faith as presented in the homily. Join us each day as we uncover the profound truths that guide us through times of trial and transformation.



Weekly Practice: Begin and end each day this week with this quote from the Benedictus, Zechariah's song at the birth of his son, John the Baptist:

"By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Day 1 Scripture: Job 19:23-27a

The story of Job challenges us to understand faith not as a series of guarantees but as a relationship of trust. Job, despite his suffering, declares with certainty, "I know that my Redeemer lives." This statement is not one of rational understanding but of deep-rooted faith. It speaks to a conviction that surpasses circumstances, showing us that genuine faith thrives amid adversity.

In our daily lives, we, like Job, face moments when the world seems against us. Yet, it is precisely in these moments that we are called to affirm our trust in God's ever-present love and redemption. Even when we stand in the dust and ashes, we declare, "I will see God."

- What are the "ashes" in your life where you need to reaffirm your faith?
- How does Job's declaration inspire your understanding of faith?
- Reflect on a time when trusting God felt difficult, but ultimately led to personal growth.
- Pray for the strength to trust in God's presence, especially in times of darkness.
- Ask God to reveal His peace and promise even in the chaos around you.

Day 2

Scripture: Malachi 4:1-2a

The prophet Malachi speaks of a day that burns like an oven, a time of refining fire. Yet, this fire is not meant to destroy but to purify and bring

healing. Understanding God's presence in times of trial transforms our perspective of suffering; it becomes a means for growth and redemption.

In the fire, God is at work, unveiling His purpose. This unveiling reveals not a world ending but a new beginning, where faithful endurance leads to restoration and peace. As we walk through life's refining moments, we can trust in God's ultimate plan for renewal.

- How can you view challenges as opportunities for growth rather than obstacles?
- What areas of your life need refining by God's purifying fire?
- In what ways do you see God's new beginnings emerging from your struggles?
- Pray for God's guidance to see the refining work He is doing in your life.
- Seek the courage to endure trials with faith and hope, trusting in God's promises.

Day 3 Scripture: Luke 21:5-19

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus speaks of upheavals and disasters, yet assures His disciples that these are not signs of the end but of preparation for what is to come. Jesus calls us to a steadfast faith, one that finds assurance not in the absence of trials but in the presence of God amid them.

The promise Jesus offers is not that we will escape difficulties, but that through endurance and trust, our souls will be preserved. Following Christ means embracing the journey of faith with resilience, even when the path seems uncertain.

- What fears prevent you from embracing the path of faith with full trust?
- How can you cultivate endurance in times of challenge?
- Where do you find assurance of God's presence in your daily life?
- Pray for the endurance to face life's challenges with courage and hope.
- Ask for the strength to remain steadfast in faith when the world seems to be falling apart.

Day 4 Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Paul's letter to the Thessalonians emphasises the importance of faithful work and perseverance. In a world where it might feel easier to give up, Paul encourages the believers to continue steadfastly, contributing to the community and keeping faith alive through action.

This steadfast commitment exemplifies how our work, when rooted in faith, becomes a testament to God's enduring presence. By faithfully labouring for the Lord, we participate in His unfolding plan of redemption and transformation.

- What work has God called you to that requires perseverance?
- In what ways can you contribute to your community of faith through steadfast effort?
- Reflect on how your actions can be an expression of your faith and hope in God's promises.
- Pray for the determination to faithfully fulfil God's call in your life.
- Seek God's guidance in using your work as a witness to His enduring love and faithfulness.

Day 5 Scripture: Psalm 98

Psalm 98 invites us to rejoice in the Lord's marvellous deeds, turning judgment into joy. This joyful expression is not born out of ignorance of the world's troubles but arises from a recognition of God's continual acts of deliverance and blessings.

As we celebrate God's enduring faithfulness, we are reminded that our songs of praise can transform despair into hope and fear into courage. By focusing on God's goodness, we align our hearts with His divine purpose, finding strength and joy in His eternal promises.

- In what ways can you celebrate God's work in your life today?
- How does rejoicing in God change your perspective on current challenges?
- Reflect on how praising God strengthens your faith and hope.
- Pray with gratitude for the blessings and deliverance God has provided.
- Ask for a heart that always finds joy in God's presence, regardless of circumstances.

End notes and further reading

Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke (St Paul's Press) (Johnson)

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

David Adams, Glimpses of Glory, Year C

The following authors as featured at The Worship Cloud

www.theworshipcloud.com

N. T. Wright,
Jane Williams,
P James Woodward,

Paula Gooder
Mark Pryce,
David Perry

Brabarlung Totem

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