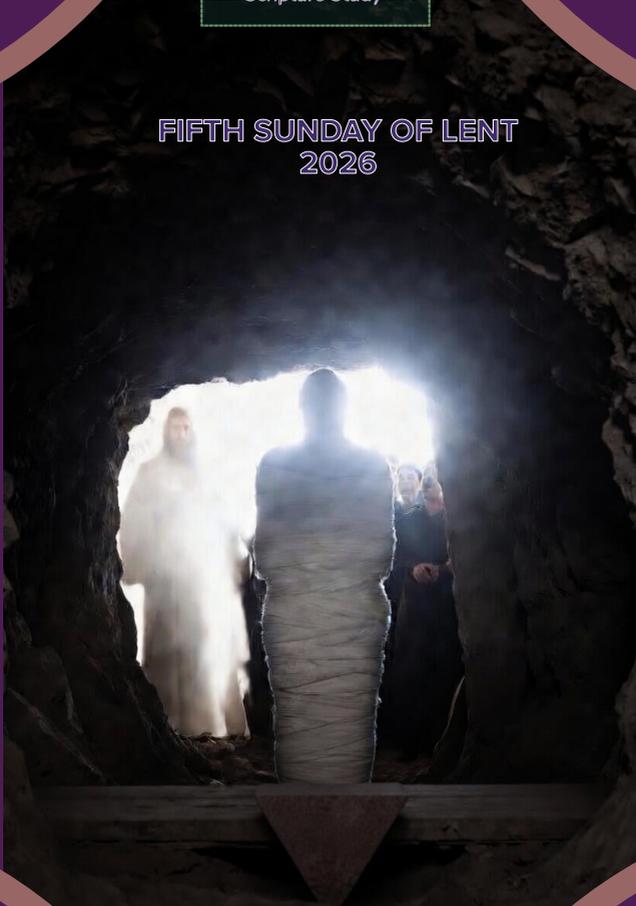




# BREAKING OPEN

Scripture Study

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT  
2026



**“Where there is sorrow,  
there is holy ground.”**

**Dennis Webster**

A weekly reflection based on the teachings 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

The Fifth Sunday of Lent

Ezekiel 37.1-14

Psalm 130

Romans 8.6-11

John 11.1-45



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Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collects

**W**e beseech thee,  
Almighty God,  
mercifully to look upon thy  
people:

that by thy great goodness  
they may be governed  
and preserved evermore,  
both in body and soul:  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

# INTRODUCTION

The Lazarus story in John 11 shows resurrection as more than a miracle; it involves personal transformation and community effort. It highlights that true restoration—spiritual and social—requires Christ’s call and community response. The main point is that resurrection depends on divine action and communal participation, emphasizing that new life requires both individual and shared effort.

Consider the sequence of events: first, Jesus calls Lazarus by name, commanding, “Lazarus, come out.” Following this, the community is instructed to remove Lazarus’s grave clothes—“Unbind him.” This order is significant to understand the relationship between the individual and the community.

1. Jesus calls Lazarus by name. “Lazarus, come out.”
2. The community removes the grave cloths “Unbind him.”

Life begins with Christ’s call, not with social recognition. However, that new life can only become visible and liveable within a community. What follows is a dialogue between sacred summons and communal response.

Grave clothes represent everything that ties people to death: fear, shame, false identities, oppressive systems, and habits shaped by mortality. Lazarus cannot shed these bindings on his own; he needs the community's support. Lazarus cannot remove them alone. He needs help.

The community is not an enemy, but is called to liberate. The tragedy is when the community refuses the command to unbind.

The story is about restoring life, not just Lazarus emerging from the tomb. Its purpose is for Lazarus to rejoin his family and community, emphasizing that resurrection in Scripture is always relational. Ezekiel 37 shows dry bones as a people; John 11 depicts Lazarus returning to his household and village. Resurrection restores community, not isolated individuals. It never produces an isolated individual, but restores communities. It produces a restored community.

The command “unbind him” is not optional. It is an imperative from Christ. Rowan Williams notes that Christian identity appears in being called by Christ. Lazarus is not identified by his tomb, but by the voice calling him and the community that helps him respond.

Rowan often says that Christian identity is discovered in being addressed by Christ. (Williams, RD, Being Christian: Baptism, Bible, Eucharist, Prayer. SPCK 2014)

We become ourselves when Christ calls us by name.  
In that sense, Lazarus is a powerful image:  
He is not defined by the tomb.  
He is defined by the voice that calls him out of it.  
And the community’s vocation is to help him live into that calling.

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.

“Where there is sorrow,  
there is holy ground.”

Oscar Wilde, De Profundis

The story begins beside a tomb.

A stone seals the entrance.  
Mourners stand nearby.  
And Jesus weeps.

Before the miracle and the loud cry that calls Lazarus from death, the Gospel tells us: Jesus wept.  
The Son of God stands among the grieving. He does not stand apart, explaining suffering from a distance. He steps into the depths with us.

That phrase — the depths — echoes another voice from today’s readings. Psalm 130 begins in resonance:  
In the ancient world, the depths were more than sorrow. They were the abyss, where life vanishes, and hope is swallowed. To cry from the depths is to pray from the edge of death.

This longing is at the heart of Psalm 130 and De Profundis. The cry from the depths is not only a cry of pain, but a cry for freedom.

Psalm 130 moves in a remarkable arc. It begins in darkness:  
Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

But the psalm does not remain in darkness. It slowly lifts its gaze.  
The psalmist does not climb out alone. The way upward is through waiting, through hope, through trust that God hears.

Wilde found something similar in prison. Suffering stripped away the illusions he once trusted. What remained, slowly and painfully, was a hunger for truth, for a freedom deeper than reputation or success. He wrote:

“The supreme vice is shallowness. Whatever is realised is right.”  
For Wilde, depth meant living without masks. It was not an easy freedom. It was found through honesty about suffering and about the self.

Here, the story of Lazarus enters.

Lazarus does not climb out of the tomb by his own effort.  
He comes out because he hears his name spoken.

Freedom begins with being called.  
But then comes the second step:  
Unbind him.

Freedom is not only the first step out of the tomb. It is the gentle loosening of what clings—fear, shame, old names, habits shaped by sorrow. Unbinding happens quietly. Someone sits beside another in grief and listens. We pray for burdens to lift. We offer a word of encouragement or forgiveness, or we stand with those who struggle to believe freedom is possible. These small acts loosen the wrappings, layer by layer.

Psalm 130 says:  
Cry from the depths.

John 11 says:  
Hear the voice that calls you out.

And the Gospel adds something wonderfully communal:  
Walk into freedom together.

That yearning for freedom is already part of resurrection’s movement. In Christian language, it is the Spirit stirring within us, leading us toward the life God intends for us.

Or, as Augustine once put it:  
You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.

Augustine, Confessions Ch 1

The yearning is not a failure of faith. It is often the beginning.

Perhaps that is why Psalm 130 endures. It lets us speak honestly from the depths, yet still hold hope. With the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him, power to redeem.

The depths are not the end of the story.  
They are often the place where the story begins again.

Ezekiel knows that place too. He stands in a valley filled with bones — bones so dry that hope itself appears to have turned to dust. The people say, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost.”  
And in Bethany, the same reality stands before Jesus: Lazarus has been dead for four days.

Scripture does not soften the scene. This is not weakness. This is not an illness. This is death.

And yet the story does not stay in the depths.

Jesus walks to the tomb. It is a cave cut in stone. A stone lies across the entrance, the boundary between the living and the dead.

Then Jesus says something unexpected:

“Take away the stone.”

Martha hesitates.

“Lord, already there is a stench.”

Four days.

The finality of death.

But the stone is rolled away.

And then Jesus cries with a loud voice:

“Lazarus, come out.”

Life begins when God speaks into death.

This is the pattern woven through Scripture. In the beginning, God breathes life into dust. In Ezekiel, breath enters dry bones. At Bethany, the Word made flesh calls life from a tomb.

- Breath.
- Voice.
- Life.

And Lazarus comes out.

But the Gospel carefully tells us something important about how he comes out.

The dead man emerges alive, but still bound in the cloths of death.

His hands and feet are bound. His face is covered.

Resurrection has begun. Freedom is not yet complete.

And so Jesus turns to the people standing nearby and gives another command:

“Unbind him, and let him go.”

It is one of the most striking moments in the story. Jesus raises Lazarus — but the community must remove the grave clothes.

The miracle begins with Christ. Freedom unfolds among those gathered near him.

This raises a human question. What does it mean to come out of the places where

death has held us? What happens when the community helps remove what still binds—or when it does not?

What are the grave clothes that still cling to you? Fear, shame, old wounds, patterns hard to break. Where do you need gentle hands to help loosen what binds? Where might you be called to help unbind another? In these questions, we find empathy for ourselves and for all who stand at the edge of new life, longing for the touch of a caring community.

The Gospel does not reduce the story to a single question. It opens a wide horizon. Grave clothes can mean many things: fear, shame, old habits, names shaped by despair or exclusion.

Lazarus cannot remove them alone. The community must help.

Unbinding is about gathering around Christ as He breaks death’s grip and leads us into true life. I envision a church that is welcoming, forgiving, and ready to share sorrow—where honest questions meet kindness, and struggles are met with patience. We celebrate small steps toward freedom and hold stories with compassion. Healing and liberation are shared, rooted in grace—hope we embrace daily.

This does not happen all at once. Resurrection unfolds in stages.

- First, the stone is removed.
- Then, Christ calls the dead by name.
- Then those who live help remove what still binds.

Perhaps that is why the story still speaks so powerfully.

Many of us know what it is to hear Christ’s call and still feel the weight of grave clothes.

Life has begun.

But freedom is still being learned, step by step.

The raising of Lazarus points beyond itself. After this, the authorities begin to plan the death of Jesus. Life for Lazarus will lead to death for Christ.

At Bethany, Jesus cries with a loud voice and calls a man out of the tomb. Soon, he will cry again from the cross and give up his spirit.

Between those two cries is the heart of the Gospel. The one who calls the dead to life is the one who enters death for us.

And the voice that called Lazarus still rings through the depths of the world.

- Through valleys of dry bones.
- Through tombs sealed with stone.
- Through places where hope seems buried.

Still, Christ calls:

Come out.

And then he turns to the gathered community and says:

Unbind him.

Because resurrection is not only a miracle we witness.

**It is a life we learn to walk in together.**

It is hope that transforms us. It is a new beginning beyond sorrow, where the story of freedom begins again.

May you find the courage to step into the light of new beginnings. May you trust that God is at work, even in the depths, leading you toward freedom. As we walk together, may steadfast love guide your path and fill you with hope and peace. Amen.

## Discussion Questions

Lent 5 — Breath, Voice, Life  
Opening Group Questions (for discussion)

- | Where do you hear the “depths” in Psalm 130 reflected in the story of Lazarus?
  - What experiences today might feel like standing at the edge of those depths?
- | Why do you think John tells us that “Jesus wept” before the miracle happens?
  - What does this reveal about the way God meets us in suffering?
- | Jesus calls Lazarus by name and says, “Come out.”
  - What might it mean for Christ to call someone personally out of death or despair?
- | Lazarus comes out still bound in grave clothes.
  - Why do you think the Gospel emphasises that resurrection begins before those wrappings are removed?
- | Jesus tells the community, “Unbind him, and let him go.”
  - What might it look like for the Church today to help people walk in the freedom Christ gives?

This five-day devotional aims to provide deeper insight into this weekend's sermon. Together, we will explore themes responding to our own calling by Christ as his own, and how we relate to others in the authenticity of their calling.



## Day 1 – Out of the Depths Psalm 130

“Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.”

Psalm 130 begins where many prayers begin — not in clarity or confidence, but in the depths. The psalmist cries out from a place where hope feels fragile and uncertain. Yet even there, the prayer moves toward waiting: “My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning.”

Faith does not deny the depths. It learns to wait for the dawn within them.

- What “depths” do you notice in your own life or in the world around you?
- What does it mean to wait for God when answers do not come quickly?
- Where have you seen signs of “morning” after a long night?
- For those who feel overwhelmed by grief, anxiety, or despair.
- For patience and hope while waiting for God’s light to appear.

## Day 2 – The Breath of God Ezekiel 37:1–14

“I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live.”

Ezekiel stands in a valley filled with dry bones — a landscape of utter hopelessness. Yet God asks a strange question: “Can these bones live?” When the prophet speaks God’s word, breath enters the bones and they rise.

Life begins when God breathes where we see only dust.

- Where do you see “dry bones” — places where hope seems lost?
- Why might God ask the prophet whether the bones can live?
- How does the promise of God’s Spirit change the way we see despair?
- For places in our communities that seem lifeless or forgotten.
- For the renewing breath of the Holy Spirit.

### Day 3 – The Mind of the Spirit Romans 8:6–1

“The Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you.”

Paul reminds the church that resurrection is not only a future promise. The Spirit who raised Jesus is already at work within the lives of believers.

This means resurrection life begins now — quietly shaping how we think, hope, and live.

- What difference does it make to know that the Spirit of resurrection lives in us?
- How does the Spirit reshape the way we see life and death?
- Where might God be bringing new life in ways we have not yet noticed?
  
- For openness to the life-giving work of the Spirit.
- For courage to live as people shaped by resurrection hope.

### Day 4 – Come Out John 11:38–44

“Lazarus, come out.”

Jesus stands before the tomb and calls Lazarus by name. The dead man emerges — alive, yet still wrapped in the cloths of death.

Resurrection begins with the voice of Christ calling us out of the places where death has held us.

- What does it mean that Jesus calls Lazarus by name?
- Where might Christ be calling you to step out of darkness or fear?
- Why do you think Lazarus comes out still wrapped in grave clothes?
  
- For ears open to the voice of Christ.
- For courage to step into the life he calls us toward.

### Day 5 – Unbind Him John 11:44

“Unbind him, and let him go.”

Jesus raises Lazarus, but the community must remove the grave clothes. Resurrection life unfolds within community.

The Church becomes a place where the wrappings of death — shame, fear, isolation — can be gently loosened so that people may walk freely in the life Christ gives.

- What might the “grave clothes” represent in our lives today?
- How can Christian communities help people walk in freedom?
- Where might Christ be asking you to help “unbind” someone else?
  
- For the Church to be a community of healing and restoration.
- For grace to help others walk in the freedom Christ gives.



# End notes and further reading

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Harrington, Daniel J Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Matthew  
Moloney, Francis J, SBD, Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of John  
Johnson, Luke Timothy: Sacra Pagina: The Gospel on Luke  
Collins, Raymond F., Sacra Pagina: First Corinthians  
Andrew McGowan [substack.com/@abmcg](mailto:substack.com/@abmcg)  
N.T. Wright, Twelve months of Sundays Year A  
Andrew Pratt, pastor and hymn writer ([theworshipcloud.com](http://theworshipcloud.com))

Let your faith and relationships  
be shaped by love and patience  
for God's love is  
revealed in lives, not letters.



## Brabarlung Totem

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Prepared by Rev'd Dennis Webster, Rector of the Anglican Parish of Paynesville,  
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Published every weekend, usually on Saturday, AEST.

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