



BREAKING OPEN

Scripture Study



FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
May 3rd 2026

Intimacy in our Lord

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

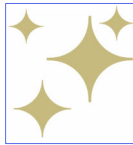
The Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 7.55-end

Psalms 31.1-5, 15-16*

1 Peter 2.11.25

John 14.1-14



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Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collects

O Almighty God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men; Grant unto thy people, that they may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

INTRODUCTION

As a young postulant, I encountered the Archbishop one evening on my way back to the residential college where I lived, who was present to say mass and dine with the students. He was an eccentric man in so many ways, his love for the people of the archdiocese and beyond was reciprocated. His championing of ecumenism was, and still is, inspiring many who knew him.

Having observed me about to climb the stairs to the main entrance, he greeted me with, “Ahh, the young man aspiring to be a divine! In all things, stay holy. Remain holy. Be holy.”

The words now, 42 years ago, still inspire, challenge and frighten me! Holiness is something that I have explored, wrestled, contemplated, ignored, and even run from. In the quest to be holy, it has been a pilgrimage that I oft pray that God will indeed ‘make straight the path.’ In reality, there have been some overwhelming moments, many days in the wilderness, and a thirst for the spiritual milk in which we taste and see that God is good.

It is a quest for intimacy with God. Writing for the C.S. Lewis Institute, New Zealand scholar and theologian, the late J. Oswald Sanders begins:

It is an incontrovertible fact that some Christians seem to experience a much closer intimacy with God than others. They appear to enjoy a reverent familiarity with Him that is foreign to us. Is it a matter of favouritism or caprice on the part of God? Or do such people qualify in some way for that desirable intimacy?

His 2006 essay concludes:

It would seem that admission to the inner circle of deepening intimacy with God is the outcome of deep desire. Only those who count such intimacy a prize worth sacrificing anything else for are likely to attain it. If other intimacies are more desirable to us, we will not gain entry to that circle.

The place on Jesus’ breast is still vacant, and open to any who are willing to pay the price of deepening intimacy. We are now, and we will be in the future, only as intimate with God as we really choose to be.

Let that thought sit with you.

The place on Jesus’ breast is still vacant, and open to any who are willing to pay the price of deepening intimacy.

Personally, maintaining a close relationship with God, rooted in trust and a sense of belonging, is essential. This bond is reaffirmed even during struggles and suffering. Through daily practices like prayer, community involvement, and kindness, we foster dignity and freedom for all.

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.

Intimacy in our Lord

Today we are drawn into something deeply personal: closeness with God. Not only reciting doctrines or keeping rules—good as those can be—but an invitation to relationship. A way of living with God that quietly reshapes us. When we trust, when we know where we belong, something at our core is made new.

The Psalmist's Trust

The psalmist begins:

"In you, O Lord, I seek refuge... into your hands I commit my spirit."

That is not a slogan. It is a posture. Imagine placing your life into loving hands. That is communion—complete trust—right here, right now.

Stephen's Vision

And then Stephen—standing at the edge of suffering—lifts his eyes, and heaven opens. Even in pain, light breaks through. He glimpses glory—and it endures.

Seeing God in Christ

Jesus says, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." In him, we meet the God who knows our lives and loves us. God is not distant—but present. Close enough to share our joys and our sorrows.

If you want to know what God is like, look at Christ: the one who teaches, and heals, and feeds, and forgives; the one who shares a table; the one who goes to the cross; the one who walks out of the tomb.

Walking Through Hardship

Life is not always gentle. Many of us know what it is to walk through hardship, to carry questions that press on the heart. In those moments, God can feel far away.

This is where the letter of Peter meets us—but we must hear it with care. We need to name something plainly: Scripture has sometimes been used to justify harm. That is not its purpose. We honour those who have been hurt. We read these words seeking dignity and belonging for all.

The centre of the reading is this:

"You were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

To belong to God is to know that your soul has a home—even when the world is harsh, even when you feel alone. God sees you. God holds you. God judges justly.

Safety and Faith

We must be clear: this passage must never be used to tell anyone to remain in harm's way. Closeness to God draws us toward truth, safety, and freedom.

If you are in a difficult or unsafe place—hear this clearly: you are not alone. Our community is here to listen and to support. Speak with someone you trust. Reach out. Seeking help is not a failure of faith—it is part of living truthfully before God.

On this Domestic Violence Sunday, we name what is too often hidden: harm that can be physical, emotional, or financial. We name it because the Gospel does not ask for silence. It calls us toward justice, safety, and restoration. In Christ, every person is given a dignity that cannot be taken away—held secure in the love of God.

Service and Friendship

This changes how we hear the language of service and obedience. Peter and Jesus both speak of "servants"—but they reshape the word. It is no longer about power or control. It becomes allegiance to love. It becomes mutual care.

And Jesus goes further still:

"I no longer call you servants... but friends."

He draws us close—into the Father's heart—and makes known what God intends. To be a disciple, then, is not to stand at a distance, or to live under fear. It is to live in relationship—in trust, in belonging, in love. And that reshapes everything.

Daily Life with God

So how do we live this? Not only in "holy" moments, but in the small, daily ways of life.

We pause to pray—not to perform, but to remain connected. "Pray without ceasing."

We sit quietly and let God's presence settle. "Be still, and know that I am God."

These simple acts open the heart. They help us find peace in our days.

We read a few lines of Scripture. We notice grace. We let gratitude grow. We sing, we write, we give thanks. Slowly, we are shaped—made more ready for compassion, patience, and generosity. Life with God becomes real in daily life.

Community Life

Life with God also becomes real in community. We share meals. We tell stories. We gather in prayer. We offer support. These simple acts create trust. They form a sense of home. They make space for love to take root and grow.

Life with God is shaped by seeing, trusting, and belonging. Stephen looks into heaven. The psalmist places his spirit into God's hands. The disciples meet the Father in Jesus. These are encounters that change us—not ritual alone, but meeting God in the midst of daily life.

Trust grows when we place our lives in God's hands—even in uncertainty. Belonging means knowing we are gathered in by the Shepherd who knows us by name. We are not defined by fear—but by love and truth.

Resurrection is not only something we believe. It is a relationship we live. In communion with God, our souls find shelter. From that closeness, truth, dignity, and freedom unfold for all God's children.

Living the Invitation

So let us accept the invitation: to see, to trust, to walk with God. Not only in quiet moments, but in the ordinary rhythm of life. Let us encourage one another as companions on the way. By helping, by praying, by acts of kindness, we become part of God's transforming work in our community.

As a simple step this week: reach out to someone—a neighbour, a colleague, a friend. Offer encouragement. Share a meal. Listen well. In these small ways, belonging and trust become visible.

Like the red benches outside our church. They do not whisper. They speak. They say:

“No to violence. No to silence. No to harm hidden behind closed doors.”

They stand as witness—that this place chooses truth, chooses safety, chooses dignity. And so must we.

May God bless us as we walk this path and face our challenges together.

Group Reflection on Closeness with God

Theme 1: Trusting God in Life's Uncertainties

Life brings moments of fear and unpredictability, yet closeness with God invites us to place our trust in Him.

Scripture: “In you, O Lord, I seek refuge... into your hands I commit my spirit.”

- How does trusting God with your life influence the way we face uncertainty or fear together?
- Share a time when relying on God changed how you approached a challenge.

Theme 2: Experiencing God's Presence in Suffering

Even in pain or hardship, God's presence can break through, offering comfort and perspective.

Scripture: “He saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.”

- When have we, as a group or individually, sensed God's presence in a hard or painful moment?
- How can we support each other in recognising God's nearness during trials?

Theme 3: Knowing God Through Jesus

In Christ, we encounter a God who is close, compassionate, and deeply involved in our lives.

Scripture: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

- Which aspects of Jesus' life help our group understand and trust the nature of God?
- How can we remind one another of these truths in daily life?

Theme 4: Belonging and Finding Our Home in God

Our souls find their true home in God, even when life feels harsh or unsafe.

Scripture: "You were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

- How does knowing our souls have a home in God comfort us in challenging times?
- How might we extend this sense of belonging to each other?

Theme 5: Growing Faith Through Daily Practices

Closeness with God deepens through moments of prayer, stillness, and gratitude in our everyday routines.

Scripture: "Be still, and know that I am God."

- What small daily practices keep us connected to God's presence?
- Could we share or create a communal rhythm of prayer, stillness, or gratitude?

Theme 6: Creating Communities of Care and Safety

Faith moves us to foster spaces where everyone is safe, seen, and valued.

Scripture: "No to violence. No to silence. No to harm hidden behind closed doors."

- In what ways can we help foster a community where everyone is safe, seen, and valued?
- What shared commitments could we make to live out these values?

Theme 7: Living as Friends of God

Jesus invites us into a friendship that transforms our relationships and our service to others.

Scripture: "I no longer call you servants... but friends."

- What does it mean for us, as a community, to live as friends of God?
- How can we encourage each other to express God's love in our relationships and service?

This all-week devotional will take a deeper dive into this weekend's sermon. Please note that some reflections may trigger emotional responses or rekindle past or present challenges. A list of helpful numbers is included on page 11.



Day 1: A Call to Closeness with God

Scripture:

"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." – James 4:8

Reflection:

- God invites us into a living relationship, not just rule-keeping or ritual. When we trust and know where we belong, our inner life is renewed.

Daily Prompt:

- Where in your life do you feel God inviting you closer?

Closing Prayer:

- Loving God, draw me near to You today. Help me sense Your presence and respond with trust and love. Amen.

Day 2: Refuge and Trust

Scripture:

"In you, O Lord, I seek refuge... into your hands I commit my spirit." – Psalm 31:1,5

Reflection:

- Trusting God is like placing your life into loving hands. Even Stephen, in the face of suffering, saw heaven open and glimpsed God's glory.

Daily Prompt:

- What would it look like for you to place your life fully in God's hands today?

Closing Prayer:

- Lord, I place my life into Your hands. Be my refuge in every circumstance and fill me with the peace of Your presence. Amen.

Day 3: Meeting God in Christ

Scripture:

"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." – John 14:9

Reflection:

- In Jesus, we meet the God who shares our joys and sorrows. He heals, forgives, and walks with us through death into new life.

Daily Prompt:

- How do you see the love of God revealed in the life of Jesus?

Closing Prayer:

Jesus, thank You for showing me the heart of the Father. Help me to see Your love in my daily life and share it with others. Amen.

Day 4: Scripture and Safety

Scripture:

"You were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." – 1 Peter 2:25

Reflection:

- God gives our soul a home and calls us to truth, safety, and freedom. Scripture is never meant to justify harm but to lead to life.

Daily Prompt:

How can you hear God's promise of safety and belonging in your own life?

Closing Prayer:

Shepherd of my soul, guide me to places of safety and peace. Let Your Word be a source of life, comfort, and truth. Amen.

Day 5: Domestic Violence Sunday

Scripture:

"The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble." – Psalm 9:9

Reflection:

- The Gospel calls for justice, restoration, and protection. Every person carries a dignity that cannot be taken away, and we are called to speak truth and seek safety for all

Daily Prompt:

How can you act in support of safety, dignity, and justice this week?

Closing Prayer:

- God of justice and mercy, open my eyes to those who need protection and care. Give me courage to speak truth and to act with compassion. Amen.

Day 6: Service, Obedience, and Friendship

Scripture:

"I no longer call you servants... but friends." – John 15:15

Reflection:

- True discipleship is rooted in love, trust, and mutual care. Service to God is not about fear but about friendship and belonging.

Daily Prompt:

- In what ways can you live out friendship with Jesus in your daily life?

Closing Prayer:

- Friend and Saviour, thank You for calling me Your friend. Help me to serve You with love and reflect Your heart in my actions. Amen.

Day 7: Seeing, Trusting, Belonging

Scripture:

"Be still, and know that I am God." – Psalm 46:10

Reflection:

- The psalmist, Stephen, and the disciples all encountered God in ways that brought deep trust and belonging. This is resurrection life—a relationship lived in love and safety.

Daily Prompt:

- Who is one person you can reach out to with kindness and encouragement as a living sign of God's love?

Closing Prayer:

- Eternal God, help me to trust You fully and to bring Your love to others. May my life reflect the hope and belonging I find in You. Amen.

Full List of Services:

<https://www.vic.gov.au/family-violence-statewide-support-services>

Safe Steps

Victoria's 24/7 family violence response centre for confidential crisis support, information and accommodation.

Phone: 1800 015 188

Email: safesteps@safesteps.org.au

Live Chat: [safesteps.org.au/live-chat](https://www.safesteps.org.au/live-chat)

The Orange Door

The Orange Door provides help and support for family violence, as well to as families in need of support with the wellbeing and development of children.

148 Main St, Bairnsdale VIC 1800 512 358 oga@orangedoor.vic.gov.au

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
N.T. Wright, Twelve months of Sundays Year A
Andrew Pratt, pastor and hymn writer (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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our respects are made to
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