

Gospel and Sermon Transcript -5th Sunday Easter - May 3, 2026

Introduction:

We weren't sure how you were feeling about overhead light where there are other mood lights. Stand up. I should have said it. I know. There we go. Okay. So we have

light, and we have sound.

Fifth Sunday of Easter. 50 days that we look at life and at our scriptures, actually, through the lens of the resurrection. I had a text analysis teacher that we knew

who, when he would read a history novel, he would read the end first,

and then he could navigate the rest and know how it was going to turn

out. And his view was that maybe we need a bit of that in life. We know a bit about the end.

We can deal with more than we know. I think

that might work for today's gospel as well, which has all kinds of twists and turns and

odd things about what we will reflect today from. That kind of reminded me that I need to

pick up my bowl. I just made that part up. I was going to the restrooms here, and got to

worship, and I thought, "I could use one of those." I think I will check.

How many is this now? Am I getting green lights? So, I'm assuming

people are coming in. I'm not sure. I'm not technically seeing this. So

as I were reading the prescribed passage this week, this is supposed to be worn around the

neck as a robe of right action. And so obviously, I need to do a little service.

So I'll try to project my voice to accommodate that and then we'll get going with some stuff.

01:24

The Holy Gospel according to St. John the 14th chapter. Glory to you, O Lord.

01:33

Jesus said to the disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God.

01:40

Believe also in me. In my father's house there are many dwelling places. If it

01:48

were not so. What have I told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I

01:55

go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself so

02:00

that where I am you may be there also. And you know the way to the place where

02:07

I'm going." Thomas said to Jesus, "Lord we do not know the way where you are going.

02:17

how can we know the way? And Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life.

02:26

No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father

02:33

also. From now on, you do know Him and you've seen Him."

02:41

says to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied." And Jesus said

02:48

to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me

02:55

and you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and

03:02

the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own, but the

03:08

The Father who dwells in me does His works.

03:13

Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.

03:18

But if you do not, then believe because of the works themselves.

03:23

Very truly I tell you, the One who believes in me will also do the works that I do and

03:30

in fact will do greater works than these because I am going to the Father.

03:36

I will do whatever you ask in my name so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

03:44

If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

03:51

The Gospel of our Lord.

03:55

Won't you be seated.

The Sermon

04:27

So, do you know the difference between a religious literalist and a kleptomaniac?

04:37

Some of you are laughing already because you know.

04:40

A religious literalist takes everything literally.

04:45

A kleptomaniac takes everything literally.

04:50

Everything.

04:53

I'll be here all week.

04:54

Be sure to tip your server.

04:55

Thank you.

04:57

We get the wrong end of the stick. That's where I'm going with all of this, especially as we get into John's Gospel.

05:03

And there are so many false starts, twists, turns, misunderstandings that we have a lot in common with Nicodemus for one,

05:15

anybody in the religious community for another, and Jesus' closest followers.

05:21

There are verses in this Gospel reading that I think we have misappropriated, misunderstood,

05:28

misused for all kinds of reasons. But I want to go after that last verse first.

05:38

Maybe it's a byproduct of my odd religious upbringing that there were people in my orbit

05:46

who believed that if you just said the words in Jesus name at the end of a

05:50

prayer, whatever you prayed for, you got.

05:57

I don't think it works that way. So going to cartoon world first, you've heard the

06:05

one about the grizzly bear chasing down the rabbit. The rabbit prays, "Oh Lord,

06:11

deliver me from this evil!" and the grizzly bear prays for these gifts which

06:15

I'm about to receive. Whose prayer do we believe? Whose prayer do we answer?
But

06:24

going from cartoon to cartoon-ish true story, we were visiting some folk who had

06:32

their TV on and a tele-evangelist was on and that's always sour grapes for me

06:37

because you know they have nice hair and fancy suits and perfect teeth and the

06:41

whole thing? Well this televangelist says, "I believe the Lord wants me to have a

06:51

motorcycle." Sour grapes Bart gets up off the couch and starts walking out of the

06:55

room to the kitchen to go get something to drink and mutters under his breath.

06:59

Well maybe the Lord should also throw in a helmet and some protective leathers

07:02

while he's at it. In Jesus name a motorcycle will appear in your driveway.

07:11

Now does God favor Ducati, Honda, Harley's? I don't know.

07:22

From the cartoon to the cartoonish to the cruel there are people who will use

07:29

religion to justify all manner of war and hate. Some will even use prayers

07:37

directly from, I didn't realize this was a holy cannon until a couple weeks ago,

07:42

the movie Pulp Fiction. Am I gonna get in trouble for that? I don't know. But any time we invoke the name of

07:53

God for something that God is really not interested in, we're not praying in

08:00

Jesus' name. And the whole point of my harangue so far is this. We don't pray in

08:10

the name of Jesus to change God's mind. We pray this way to change our minds, to

08:20

change our hearts to align us with who Jesus is, what Jesus teaches, what Jesus is about.

08:35

You can return to those early words of Jesus to a community that knew Jesus was going to

08:44

die soon. He was going to be arrested. Someone had already betrayed him. And there was lots

08:49

of infighting. And to this community, Jesus says, "All y'all, do not let your heart,

09:01

your heart singular, be troubled. Don't let your collective will falter. Stay strong.

09:13

on. The eminent preacher and commentator and teacher of preachers, Dr. Fred Craddock,

09:25

identifies three things that God is up to when Jesus says, "Do not let your heart

09:32

be troubled. Do not lose heart." And if I may use this little fun bit of grammar, it

09:41

begins all y'all don't lose heart because God has a place this abiding place is

09:51

the relationship that we have with God that God initiates nurtures and

09:57

protects that relationship is here and now and it's also beyond here and now

10:10

Secondly, all y'all don't lose heart because God makes the way and shows us

10:21

the way to God, even when we get lost in double meanings or hyper literalism. And

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now for the second corrective to John's Gospel. Again, maybe you haven't

10:35

experience this or maybe you have but there are some who will use Jesus' words

10:41

"I am the way, the truth, and the life" to exclude to say there's only one certain

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way of understanding Jesus or understanding God that's valid and if

10:55

you don't do it our way you're out. Two things need to be said. One is Jesus is

11:02

not railing against his opponents here. He's not ripping on anybody. He's speaking to his

11:08

closest followers when he says, "When you've lost your way, turn this way. I'm it. I'm

11:16

the way. The truth of life. I'll get you there." Another way to add to this corrective, remember

11:29

that analogy that Jesus uses about the gate, gates swinging open and allowing us

11:38

in and allowing us freedom at the same time, I think that's consistent with

11:47

Jesus speaking assurance to his followers and I think to us that it is so

11:53

easy for us to get the wrong end of the stick, to get lost, to feel lost, to feel

11:57

hopeless and Jesus invites us to remember the relationship that God has

12:06

with us the one that Jesus opens the way to and all y'all don't lose heart

12:17

because this relationship that God vouch safes and faithfully maintains actually

12:24

empowers us to carry on the work of Jesus. To do these things that are even

12:32

greater, Jesus says, and the ones he did.

12:41

Sometimes, yes, the miraculous happens. But I think the miraculous often takes

12:47

the form of estranged communities finding ways to get back together. Or maybe it is

12:59

a group, a small group of people with not a lot of resources who still manage to find

13:04

ways to take the good news of God's love out into the world. Those are great things. Things

13:17

maybe even a bit more miraculous than say a miracle of changing the course of

13:28

nature somehow. I'll let you decide that one. That's just my opinion. But living

13:36

and praying in the name of Jesus, I think in times of war we can prayerfully

13:46

remember Jesus the night he was arrested when Peter unsheathes a sword ready to

13:52

fight and Jesus says put away your weapon. Maybe we can in the face of

14:00

injustice and unjust systems remember Jesus table tossing indignation at such

14:08

things. And maybe when we struggle and when hope is a fleeting thing, we can

14:19

remember prayerfully in Jesus name what Jesus did. He fed people. He taught

14:28

people. He healed people. He forgave people. He included people. So I think if

14:35

If we want to pray in Jesus name, we can remember what he's about, what he does, what he teaches.

14:45

And by praying in Jesus name, may we live prayerfully also in Jesus name.

14:56

P.S. I'm afraid of motorcycles so I am hoping that there's not one for me.

15:03

Amen.