

EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

TOMBS

EXPLORING NEXT SUNDAY'S THEME

Introducing the Gospel

The raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-45)

The fifth Sunday of Lent is commonly called Passion Sunday and begins the two week period known as Passiontide. The first week in Passiontide prepares the people of God for the events of Holy Week when Jesus will be arrested and crucified. We approach the death of Jesus in confidence of the resurrection. In John's Gospel the raising of Lazarus prefigures Jesus' own resurrection and provides the context for Jesus' teaching, 'I am the resurrection and the life.' The raising of Lazarus is the last of seven signs that shape the structure of John's Gospel and through which Jesus' glory is revealed (verse 4) and through which his followers came to believe in him (verse 45).

The image to stimulate reflection on John's account of the raising of Lazarus is *tombs*.

Core extract from the Gospel (John 11: 38, 43-44; for reflection throughout the week)

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb.
It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.
Jesus cried with a loud voice,
'Lazarus, come out!'
The dead man came out,
his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth,
and his face wrapped in a cloth.
Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

Gospel prayer (for use throughout the week)

Lord Jesus Christ,
you called Lazarus from the tomb
and restored him to new life.
Call us from the prisons that surround us,
that we may be free to live the new life in you;
now and always.
Amen.

READING NEXT SUNDAY'S GOSPEL

John 11: 1-45

The Death of Lazarus

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

Jesus the Resurrection and the Life

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

Jesus Weeps

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

Jesus Raises Lazarus to Life

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.' Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

ENGAGING WITH THE THEME

Dwelling with the text (John 11: 1-45)

Begin to explore John's account of the raising of Lazarus by employing the SIFT approach of Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking. You may find that one of these approaches comes easier to you than the others. But it is worth trying all four.

- What details in the passage catch your attention (Sensing)?
- What big ideas in the passage spark in your mind (Intuition)?
- What most touches your heart in the passage (Feeling)?
- What most stretches your mind and makes you think in the passage (Thinking)?

Thinking and talking

Identify topics within the passage that can get you thinking and talking. Here are some ideas to get you started.

- For what purpose did Mary anoint Jesus?
- How do you understand Jesus' answer, 'that the Son of God may be glorified'?
- How do you understand Jesus saying, 'I am the resurrection and the life'?
- How do you interpret the raising of Lazarus?
- What does this narrative say for us today?

Using your Bible

Explore the other reference to Mary of Bethany in John's Gospel.

- John 12: 1-7

Explore references to making known Jesus' glory in John's Gospel.

- John 1: 14
- John 2: 11

Explore the imagery of restored life in Ezekiel.

- Ezekiel 37: 1-14

Explore Psalms used at times of death and mourning.

- Psalm 22
- Psalm 39: 1-8
- Psalm 130

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT (YEAR A) Sunday 22 March 2026

Exploring online

Widen your exploration of Passiontide and of John's account of the raising of Lazarus by looking up some of the following themes and others of your own choosing.

- Passiontide
- Lazarus of Bethany
- Jacob Epstein's sculpture of Lazarus

Drawing on experience

The image to stimulate your reflection on the Gospel reading for Passion Sunday, John's account of the raising of Lazarus, is *tombs*. Draw on your experience of tombs and funerary monuments and memorials. For example:

- What do you learn from the monuments and memorials in or around your own church?
- What is your wider experience of tombs and memorials?
- What have you experienced of sculptures or artworks inspired by John's account of the raising of Lazarus?

What have you learned about tombs?

Creating and making

This section offers pointers to some creative activities that may be inspired by the theme of Passion Sunday or by the image of tombs.

- Make a collage of images of tombs and funerary monuments and memorials.
- Create a display of images inspired by the raising of Lazarus.
- Make a poster of inscriptions on tombs pointing to confidence in the resurrection.
- Create a reflection, poem, or prayer on the theme of Passion Sunday or on the image of tombs.

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**Liverpool
Cathedral**

EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

Each week we are inviting people in their homes to look forward to those Sunday services that follow the Revised Common Lectionary Gospel readings. We employ the SIFT approach (Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking) to encourage reflection on the Sunday Gospel. We are suggesting a variety of ways in which people of all ages, and households working together, may engage with the Gospel reading and celebrate that engagement with shared activities.

These materials have been developed by the Canon Theologian of Liverpool Cathedral working in collaboration with the staff team here at the Cathedral, and with sponsorship and support from the St Mary's Centre in Wales.



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