

Fifth Sunday of Lent
March 22, 2026

Sometimes, as beautiful as they are, the scripture readings seem so far removed from our real life, don't they? Like today: The prophet Ezekiel offers this cryptic message from God telling the people they will rise from the grave and come home, which would be great, but they're not dead, at least not yet. St. Paul wrote this mystical letter to the Church of Rome that they no longer live in the flesh but are alive in the Spirit, a foreign language, almost "fighting words," to the Roman culture. John writes a detailed account of a Lazarus - dead for four days, wrapped up and stinking, coming out of the tomb at the command of Jesus. And here we are, on March 22, 2026, asking, "So...what does this all have to do with my life?"

But maybe we are starting from the wrong place. Maybe we need to start, not with what God's story has to do with ours, but with what our stories have to do with God's.

Because if you've ever felt the darkness of shame surrounding you because you really screwed up, and then hear those words: "I forgive you" – *This* is God's story.

Or if your or the life of someone you know was forever changed because of an illness or accident, or if you lost a job unexpectedly or had your dream crushed or have been betrayed by someone you love, and you wonder how you will ever make it through all of this, but then from somewhere deep within you, you find a spark of courage and strength that you never knew existed – This *is* God's story.

If you've ever been trapped in the tomb of an addiction or watched someone you know being buried in their addiction, and find a path to the freedom of sobriety – this is *God's* story.

If you have ever held a deep secret, fearful that someday someone might find out, and then one day that secret does come out and you find yourself embraced in the arms of loving acceptance – you know God's story.

If you have ever found yourself in despair, maybe even doubting the very existence of God, or the existence of God's love, and are able to hear that quiet but persistent voice calling you out of your doubt, assuring you that God does exist and God does, without a doubt, love you - you know the story of God.

We *do know* the desperation of the exiles of Israel and what it meant to be given another chance, to be called out of their graves and welcomed home by God, because we've been there. We *know* the grief of Martha and Mary and the reassurance that comes in their belief that Jesus could, indeed, restore life. We *know* what it means to be called out of the tomb, what it is to be bound with burial cloths only to be untied and set free. We *know* what it is to have the Spirit of God burn through the limitations of our very flesh giving us whatever it is we need to make that first step toward recovery, whatever strength we need to start over, whatever trust we need to let go, whatever perseverance we need to kindle hope.

And because we know these stories of our lives, we do know God's story. God's story today, on this 22nd day of March in 2026, is exactly what God's story has always been, is now and will be forever.