



Sunday  
September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024

**Pentecost 16B**

# The Season of CREATION: Humanity

**Breaking Open the Word**

**Pentecost 16  
Liturgical Year B**



**St Peter's by the Lake  
PAYNESVILLE**


Anglican Diocese of  
Gippsland



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We worship this Sunday with all humanity, peoples of all ethnic origins. We celebrate the kinship between humanity and the rest of creation. We rejoice that humans who bear the image of God now understand their role as servants who follow Christ, the true image of God.

READINGS

Isaiah 35.4-7a  
Psalm 146  
James 2.1-10 [11-13] 14-17  
Mark 7.24-37



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“

So faith by itself, if it  
has no works, is dead.

”

James 2.17

Keep, we beseech thee,  
O Lord, thy Church  
with thy perpetual mercy;  
and, because the frailty of  
man without thee cannot  
but fall,  
keep us ever by thy help  
from all things hurtful,  
and lead us to all things  
profitable to our salvation:  
through Jesus Christ our  
Lord.

# INTRODUCTION

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In this sermon, the focus is on the significance of humanity within the context of creation, as illustrated in the biblical accounts from Genesis and the message in the Letter of James.

Highlighting the universality of human beings as integral parts of creation, emphasis on human standards or societal divisions does not determine our worth.

Instead, God sees us all through a lens of love and mercy, encouraging the congregation to reflect on how we interact with one another and to remember that everyone is valued and embraced by God.

Exploration of two healing narratives from the Gospel of Mark underscoring the importance of Jesus' interactions with marginalised individuals—the Greek woman and the deaf man.

These stories not only emphasise Jesus' radical approach to inclusion but also highlight the breaking of boundaries and the sharing of God's grace.

Closing with a call for believers to act as stewards of this love, sharing the 'bread' of the Gospel with others regardless of their background or status.

In essence, the message is a powerful reminder of our collective identity as humanity, created good by God, and our call to extend that goodness to all, making space for healing and acceptance in a broken world.

## Key Reflection Points

- Reflect on whether societal standards or personal judgments influence how you view people's value.
- Consider how Jesus' actions towards marginalised individuals reflect on your approach to those who might feel excluded.
- Think about how you can share the 'bread' of the Gospel with others, regardless of their background or status.
- Reflect on the role you can play in creating spaces of love and inclusion in a divided world.
- Explore areas where you may unintentionally create barriers and how you can work to break them down as Jesus did.

God of Creation, breathe into us, made of clay,  
your gift of life so that we, made in your image  
may be your eyes, ears, hands and voice.



As we continue to move through the Season of Creation this week, our attention turns towards Humanity. So we are all on the same page; let's consider what humanity means. It is a straightforward word, but its use depends on context and structure. Is it a noun, an adjective, or an adverb? Reflecting on the so-called first story of creation in Genesis 1 through 2.4a, then I would say humanity is all-embracing and appropriate for today.

"Humanity refers to human beings as an integral part of creation. All human beings are included, regardless of ethnic origin or visual appearance. Human beings, as part of creation, are kin with all other living creatures." [UCA Season of Creation] Male and female, we were created, and like all things in creation, God sees it and considers that all things are made well. That will be echoed shortly in the sequencing of the Bible.

To top it all off, we have in James 2 a reminder that God does not judge or respond according to human precepts or titles. I have a great fondness for this passage in James. For me, it was the first text I was to preach on as a very nervous 22-year-old in 1986. I remember my nerves as I ascended the great pulpit in St David's Cathedral and was about to preach mainly to my peers, the choir and the servers. Thinking back to that time, the theme that God sees us all differently and through the power of the heart, not by the standards of human values, is something that I hold firmly today as I did then. It has a faint echo of the anointing of David after God had rejected all the other male children of Jesse.

And then, we have two healing moments in the narrative of Mark, both exceptional in not only their content but the location of Jesus and the way it is sandwiched between the feeding of 5000 and the feeding of the 4000. Where the stories are placed is significant, and in both cases, the interaction between Jesus, the woman, and

the man born deaf and mute occurs not in crowded scenes but between them alone.

Jesus, we are told, is walking north but up the wrong side of the lake through Gentile territory. It is a bit bold on his part, being a Jewish itinerant Rabbi. Possibly, he did so, not so much because it was a shortcut, but rather, a chance to be away from the crowds. Stopping to eat privately, a Greek lady suddenly appears and throws herself at the feet of Jesus. How do we know she was a lady? The clue is in the telling in the Greek tongue! This lady does the unthinkable. As well as lacking in good manners by interrupting at mealtime, she demands Jesus healing for her unwell daughter. It's unclear what is happening to her other than "an unclean spirit" or "demon", a power over her.

Many of us have been troubled by the way Jesus talks with women. In John's gospel, at the Wedding feast at Cana, also in Galilee, he calls his mother "Woman." What follows here is a frightful retort. "It is not for me to throw the children's bread to the dogs."

Dogs were considered unclean, unsavoury animals, but it was customary in the Middle East that smaller dogs, "little dogs", would be the last in the pecking order to be fed. The household first, then the children, and then the house dogs (and cats and whatever else the children may have managed to befriend). Did Jesus call her a dog? Really? Maybe...maybe not.

Let's unpack that for a moment. In the tradition of households, the dogs were last. So far, in our narrative, we have heard Jesus talk about bread, manna, proper bread, sustenance of life, and what is required for eternal life. He takes bread and, in breaking it, shares it, commanding that this is an act of remembrance of what he has done for humanity. He came first to the lost sheep of Israel, another interesting animal metaphor, and then, the word was to be taken to the ends of the earth beginning in Jerusalem. That taking of the word was the passing





down of the bread from the position of seniority to the children (Israel) and then to the Gentiles (the Greek woman).

Not wanting to wait and concerned for her daughter, who in the community hierarchy had a dubious position, more than likely just above the house pets, this woman argues back in Greek and with great force. "Even the house dogs receive the crumbs under the table." The woman at the well in Samaritan territory realised that whilst not Jewish, new life had come to her house that day. She immediately returned to the community and bid the town to go and see. "I think he's the Messiah!" Hold that thought!

Does Jesus change his mind? God has a history of relenting and forgiving. Nineveh was spared after the repenting of the king, people, cattle and sheep. Impressed by their actions and fasting whilst in sackcloth and ashes, the Lord changed his mind. The loving father welcomes home his wayward son, whom the family had considered dead to them. This is the same God whose nature is always to show mercy.

"For saying that", writes Mark, your daughter is at home and well. The woman left and found her daughter as she was told. Immediately, the word went out across the region about what had happened, and it was time for Jesus to move on once more.

The travelogue is a bit interesting. Jesus heads due north. Keep in mind he was heading to the Decapolis. A sharp turn to the right would have been more efficient, but he moves now into another part of the region. This time, he encounters a man who is deaf and with a profound speech impediment. The locals ask Jesus whether he could do anything for him.



Once again, what happens is just between the man and Jesus. Given we are in a Greek-speaking part of the world, the language that Jesus uses is, again, challenging and foreign. He first places his fingers in the man's ears and then, taking saliva from his mouth places it on the tongue of the man. Why Mark records Jesus' words in Aramaic is in itself puzzling. He lets out a loud groan as he does, and the man receives his hearing, and his tongue is loosed. "I came to bring good news to the poor, to let the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear and the dumb speak." Isaiah's words echo what just happened.

The crowd, now aware that the man could not only hear but had gained eloquence in speech, were amazed. They praised Jesus, for he had done everything well, again, echoing the Genesis understanding of creation, which was good.

"Shhh!" says Jesus. Don't tell anyone! We all know this is the equivalent of a wet paint sign on a park bench. "Don't touch!" How many of you have gone home to wash off the sticky paint?

Jesus' fame continues to spread, and this time, not amongst the teachers and Pharisees in the synagogues, but in the broader world where people of varying needs and humanity seek to find the love and acceptance of God and the restoration of those in need, and the forgiveness for a broken world.

All humanity, together with all creation, is being held in the highest love of God. Beginning from Jerusalem and spreading to the ends of the world, the Good News of Jesus Christ does not have boundaries. Just as God does not see in the manner and traditions of men, and I say that quite deliberately acknowledging that a woman sees Jesus for who he is, the gift of wholeness, healing, comfort and strength knows no human precepts, boundaries or ideologies. All of us, no matter where we are born and into what station, are equally loved and seen as children of the most high.

And, as children of the highest, inheritors of

the kingdom of God, as it was at the tables at the time, the manna, the bread, the crumbs were to be shared further down the line. Every time we eat the bread, we, too, are passing the gospel onto the next generation, the next person in need of grace, the next person seeking unconditional love.

A dear friend of mine keeps reminding me that "I'm just another pilgrim on the journey, begging for bread." Who are we to include, exclude, deny, vilify, or declare effective death to people?

You, me, sister and brother are fellow workers in the vineyard. Some may well be supervisors, officers or enablers; others are those who will reap the leftovers of the harvest. But as God sees us in creation, the Divine Word looks at everything made and calls it "good." As such, creation sings a new song in the Lord.

The earth and all that is in it, all people, all humanity, call on us to be stewards of the word. May our Lord who sees the potential in all of us place in our ears and upon our tongues the words to be open, ephephata, that we, with the eloquence gifted, may seek a better place where all humanity is celebrated and honoured.

### Key Words in James' letter.

For a comprehensive study of James 2:1-2:26, a crucial chapter talking about favoritism and faith in action, several Greek words provide deeper insights. Understanding them is instrumental to developing a sermon with depth and nuance. Here are some noteworthy Greek words:

#### - "Prosopolemptes" (Favouritism)

This Greek word appears in James 2:1 where the believers are urged not to show favoritism. Prosopolemptes directly translates to 'respector of faces,' implying that loving or favoring others based on external appearance isn't a representation of genuine faith. This could provide meaningful insight for a sermon about superficiality and God's impartiality.

#### - "Pistis" (Faith)

Appearing multiple times across the chapter, Pistis is translated as faith. Understanding its etymology and context allows you to explore the nuances of faith described in James - conceptualizing it as not just belief in God but also a practical outworking of that belief in one's life.

#### - "Erga" (Works/Deeds)

James significantly talks about faith and deeds. Erga, meaning deeds or works, is an important term to delve into. It helps to understand the biblical perspective of works as it relates to faith - not as a means to earn salvation but as evidence of genuine faith.

#### - "Plousios" (Rich) and "Ptōchos" (Poor)

James uses these words when discussing favouritism. It could be useful to explore the original meanings and cultural implications of these terms during James's time. It could provide context and deeper understanding to the social issues being addressed.

#### - "Dikaios" (Righteous)

Used in verse 2:21 and 2:24, Dikaios sometimes translates to 'just,' 'righteous,' or 'he who is in right standing with God.' This word presents an opportunity to elucidate on righteousness through faith as viewed in the context of the New Testament.

#### Conclusion

While understanding and studying these Greek words is beneficial, it is equally important to examine them in the context of the passage as a whole and the entirety of biblical teaching for a holistic view. This ensures the sermon remains balanced and nuanced, promoting a rounded understanding of James 2:1-2:26.



# GROUP DISCUSSION

## Question 1

**What does it mean to be part of humanity as described in the sermon, and how does this understanding affect how we view others?**

The sermon discusses how humanity includes all human beings and emphasises our kinship with all living creatures, regardless of appearance or background.

How can you practice viewing others through this inclusive lens in your everyday life?

## Question 2

**How does the story of the Greek woman challenging Jesus' perspective illustrate the theme of mercy and compassion?**

The sermon highlights the woman's bold approach to Jesus and how she argues for her daughter's healing, showing that she sees her worth despite societal expectations.

Can you think of a time when you had to stand up for someone or advocate for what is right? How did that experience shape your understanding of compassion?

## Question 3

**Reflect on the idea that God sees us differently than human standards; how can this perspective change how we treat people?**

The sermon draws from James 2, reminding us that God does not judge based on human titles or precepts.

How can you challenge your judgments or biases towards others in your school or community?

## Question 4

What significance do you find in the actions of Jesus when he heals the deaf man, and how does it relate to the message of being open to others?



The sermon describes the intimate healing process of the deaf man and how it demonstrates Jesus' compassion and willingness to connect personally.

How can you be more open to connecting with people who may be different from you or in need?

## Question 5

Why is it important to recognise that every time we share bread, we also share the Gospel, as mentioned in the sermon?

The sermon discusses how sharing bread symbolises passing on grace and the good news of love and acceptance.

How can you share acts of kindness or the message of hope in your community?

## End notes and further reading

(A JOINT MESSAGE FOR THE PROTECTION OF CREATION, The Holy See, 2021)

Pope Francis, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Archbishop of Canterbury Release Joint Statement on Care for Creation – Millennial.

<https://millennialjournal.com/2021/09/09/pope-francis-ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-archbishop-of-canterbury-release-joint-statement-on-care-for-creation/>

Sacra Pagina, **The Gospel of Mark** John Donaghue, Daniel Carrington

Andrew's Version: [https://open.substack.com/pub/abmcg/p/two-gentiles-and-the-power-of-god?r=3zdc09&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=email](https://open.substack.com/pub/abmcg/p/two-gentiles-and-the-power-of-god?r=3zdc09&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email)

from The Worship Cloud (SPCK): N.T. Wright Early Christian Letters for Everyone

and Jane Williams, Lectionary Reflections — Year B



Brabarlung Totem  
This is produced on  
Gunaikurnai Land, and our  
respects are paid to the First  
Nations people everywhere.



# Spring is here!

This five-day devotional will be taking a deeper dive into the sermon from this weekend. We will explore the theme of humanity as an integral part of creation, reflecting on scripture and the healing messages from Jesus that remind us of our shared dignity and calling.

## **Day 1**      **Scripture: James 2**

The concept of humanity is central to our understanding of our place within creation. In James 2, we are reminded that God does not judge by human standards. This is a powerful reminder that societal precepts or appearances do not determine our worth. Reflecting on this theme, we find that God sees us all differently, through the heart rather than through the lens of worldly values. As we embrace this truth, we are called to challenge our own biases and recognise the inherent dignity in every person, regardless of their background. This day encourages us to embody that sense of equality and acceptance in our interactions with others. Just as God welcomes all into His family, we will mirror this unconditional love and grace. Let us open our hearts to those who may feel marginalised or unseen and commit ourselves to being agents of love and acceptance.

How do you view others in light of God's unconditional love?

What biases do you need to confront in your life?

In what ways can you demonstrate God's love to those around you?

Pray for the ability to see others as God sees them.

Could you ask for guidance in confronting biases within yourself?

## **Day 2**      **Scripture: Mark 7:24-30**

In Mark 7, we witness a powerful encounter between Jesus and a Gentile woman seeking healing for her daughter. In this intense dialogue, we can see the barriers of culture and tradition being challenged. This woman's boldness serves as a reminder that faith knows no boundaries. Her tenacity and resilience in the face of perceived rejection highlight the importance of advocating for ourselves and others, especially those often overlooked. Reflecting on this narrative, the Good News is for everyone, including those rejected by societal norms. As followers of Christ, we are reminded to step forward boldly in our faith, just like the woman did. We are called to break down walls that divide us and to extend Christ's love and healing to all corners of the earth. Let this story inspire us to be fearless in pursuing love and justice for all humanity.

Have you ever felt overlooked or rejected? How did you respond?

What barriers do you encounter in sharing God's love?

How can you advocate for others who feel marginalised?

Pray for the courage to speak out for those who are voiceless.

I'd like you to reflect on ways you can bring healing to relationships.

## **Day 3**      **Scripture: Isaiah 35:5-6**

The promise of healing that we find in Isaiah is beautifully fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus. His actions continue to echo the heart of God, who desires restoration and wholeness for humanity. As we explore the miracle of healing for the deaf man in Mark, we are reminded that Jesus approaches each individual with tenderness and intent. His methods might seem strange to us, yet they reveal the depth of His compassion and love for each person. Embracing the understanding that we are all seen and valued by God challenges us to reach out to those in need. We, too, can be instruments of God's love, healing our world. In moments where we feel unqualified or ill-equipped, let the assurance that God uses the humble and ordinary guide us. Just as Jesus took time for the one, we can make a difference in the lives of those around us.

Who in your life needs a touch of healing or hope?

How can you be an instrument of God's love to those in pain?

What does it mean for you to be called to bring healing?

Pray for opportunities to show love and compassion.

I'd like you to please reflect on past experiences of healing and restoration in your own life.

#### **Day 4                      Scripture: Mark 7:31-37**

The narrative of the deaf man's healing is a profound illustration of God's desire to communicate with all, breaking through barriers that restrict understanding. The act of Jesus placing His fingers in the man's ears foreshadows how God's touch reaches into our lives to open our hearts and minds. This story reflects our spiritual journeys as we seek to have our eyes and ears opened to the love and truth of God. As we delve deeper, we recognise that our faith involves a willingness to be open to new experiences, inviting God to work in ways we do not expect. The awe generated by the crowd's reaction reminds us how Jesus' work leaves a mark on our community. Let us be encouraged to share our testimonies of God's goodness and healing, recognising that this edifies others in their walk of faith.

What barriers have you encountered in your faith journey?

How can you open your heart to God in new ways?

What testimony do you have to encourage others?

Pray for an open heart to receive God's word.

Reflect on the ways God has worked in your life to bring you closer to Him.

#### **Day 5                      Scripture: Genesis 1:26-27**

At the heart of creation, we are reminded that humanity is made in the image of God, a profound truth that elevates our understanding of human dignity. This truth calls us to respect and honour the inherent value of every person. As we conclude our devotional, let us reaffirm our commitment to being stewards of the word, sharing the Good News of Jesus that transcends boundaries. Furthermore, we are invited to embrace our roles as caretakers of creation and each other, reflecting God's love in practical ways. The call to celebrate and honour all humanity is a personal commitment and a communal responsibility. Every interaction provides an opportunity to convey God's love, and when we strip away our prejudices and embrace inclusivity, we can truly reflect the heart of Christ.

How can you honour the image of God in others?

What steps can you take to promote inclusivity in your community?

How does acknowledging our shared humanity change your perspective?

Pray for wisdom to see every person through God's eyes.

Reflect on your role as a steward of God's creation and love.

Prepared by Rev'd Dennis Webster, Rector of the Anglican Parish of Paynesville, Diocese of Gippsland for personal or small group use.

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