



Sunday
September 15th, 2024

Pentecost 17B

The Season of CREATION: Sky

Breaking Open the Word

Pentecost 15
Liturgical Year B



St Peter's by the Lake
PAYNESVILLE

Anglican Diocese of
Gippsland



**TO HOPE AND ACT
WITH CREATION**

SEASON OF CREATION 2024


The firstfruits of hope
(Rom 8:19-25)



Prepared by
Dennis Webster

St Peter's by the Lake

Paynesville, Victoria Australia
Anglican Diocese of Gippsland



Beneath our radiant Southern Cross
we'll toil with hearts and hands;
to make this ancient land of ours
renowned of all the lands;
and though we've come across the seas
our boundless plains need care;
with courage let us all combine
to Advance Australia Fair.
With praise to God then let us sing,
Advance Australia Fair.

READINGS

Isaiah 50.4-9a
Psalm 116.1-8
James 3.1-12
Mark 8.27-38



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“

‘If any want to
become my followers,
let them deny
themselves and take
up their cross and
follow me.

”

Mark 8.34

O Lord, we beseech thee,
let thy continual pity
cleanse and defend
thy Church;
and, because it cannot
continue in safety
without thy succour,
preserve it evermore
by thy help and goodness;
through Jesus Christ
our Lord.

INTRODUCTION

The sermon titled “Faith in Action: Advocacy for Creation and Life,” draws upon the scriptures from Mark 8 and James 2 to emphasise the critical call for believers to engage actively in caring for creation and advocating for life in all its forms.

A personal anecdote about a blue tongue lizard, serves as a symbolic backdrop for understanding our relationship with all living things.

Through the narrative, the sermon illustrates the need for awareness and action in a world facing significant challenges like climate change and social injustice.

Highlighting the acknowledging of Jesus as the Messiah extends beyond spiritual salvation to encompass stewardship of the earth.

The call to take up the cross signifies a radical commitment to self-denial for justice and environmental care.

By citing James, it argues that genuine faith must manifest in tangible actions, urging the congregation to advocate for solutions to climate crises and champion the needs of marginalised communities.

Ultimately, all are encouraged to be believers who embody a life of advocacy, actively participating in God’s redemptive work in the world, thus inspiring hope and fostering healing for creation as part of their spiritual journey.

Key Reflection Points

1. **Faith and Action as Inseparable:** The sermon draws from James 2 to stress that genuine faith must lead to concrete actions. Believers are urged to actively engage in environmental care and justice for the marginalized, demonstrating that faith without works is incomplete.
2. **Stewardship of Creation:** Acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah involves more than spiritual salvation; it extends to the stewardship of the earth. Believers are called to care for creation, recognizing their responsibility in advocating for the environment amid global challenges like climate change.
3. **Radical Commitment to Justice:** The call to “take up the cross” signifies a profound commitment to self-denial and sacrifice for the sake of justice and environmental advocacy. This echoes the need for believers to align their lives with the work of addressing societal and environmental crises.
4. **Symbolism in Creation:** The personal anecdote of a blue tongue lizard serves as a metaphor for humanity’s interconnectedness with all living things. It calls for a heightened awareness of the natural world and its protection as part of honouring God’s creation.
5. **Participation in God’s Redemptive Work:** The sermon ultimately encourages believers to actively participate in God’s mission of redemption. Through advocacy and action, they bring hope and healing to both creation and marginalized communities, seeing this as integral to their spiritual journey and calling.

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.



****Sermon Title: "Faith in Action: Advocacy for Creation and Life"****

****Scripture Readings:****

- Mark 8:27-38

- James 2:18-26

On what was a difficult day on Monday, I was alerted very early in the morning by my two feline mistresses to something of note happening outside in the garden. After their insistence that I follow, being the faithful member of staff, I was able to see what it was that had them concerned. There, in the garden, hidden under leaves and debris, was a blue tongue lizard. I managed to get a photo and placed it up on social media with the caption, "Name my blue tongue lizard." Sure enough, before the day was out, Sunny, Twiggy, Lance, and Thing" were suggested. I haven't decided on a name yet.

Later in the morning, as I went to a home in Paynesville to journey with a dying man, I encountered his son chasing a blue tongue lizard down their driveway. This was a rescue effort as it was in danger of being run over. By the end of the day, blue tongues were out and about. I heard tales of people having them fall on them and being startled by them in the garden. Eventually, a colleague in WA posted his blue tongue online and proceeded, as is his wont, to preach and pontificate about the genus type, sub-species and their manner of mating for life, if that is their bent. If they are bent, maybe that doesn't apply. Inclusivity matters!

And so, tongues became the theme of the week, and in our epistle reading and our Gospel, it is the power of the tongue that comes to the fore.

Today, we gather in the spirit of faith, hope, and action. We find ourselves in a world where creation groans under the weight of climate change, ecosystems are threatened,

and communities most vulnerable cry out for justice. This is not just a political or scientific issue—it is a profoundly spiritual one. As people of faith, how do we respond? What is our role as followers of Jesus in a world that seems to be teetering on the edge?

Our scriptures today, from Mark 8 and James 2, challenge us to take up a cross not only for our salvation but for the world's healing for creation itself. They remind us that faith without action is dead, and they call us to be advocates for life—life in all its forms.

In Mark 8, Jesus asks His disciples a question that rings through the ages: "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answers, "You are the Messiah." But what does it mean to call Jesus the Messiah? For many, the Messiah saves, redeems, and brings hope to a broken world.

When we proclaim Jesus as Messiah today, it is not enough to recognise him as a spiritual Saviour. Jesus is the Lord of all creation. Paul writes in Colossians 1:16 that "all things have been created through him and for him." Jesus is the one through whom all things hold together—earth, sky, sea, and every living thing. So, if we declare Jesus as Lord, we also acknowledge our call to care for his creation.

But look at what happens next. After Peter's declaration, Jesus explains that being the Messiah involves suffering, rejection, and, ultimately, the cross. Peter rebukes Him, not understanding how the Messiah could suffer. Jesus responds: "Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns" (Mark 8:33).

Here, we see the tension between human concerns and divine concerns. As the world faces climate change, we see human concerns—economic growth, convenience, political power—often placed above the concerns of God, which include justice,



stewardship, and the flourishing of all life.

Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow him. But what does this look like regarding creation care and climate change?

Taking up the cross means self-denial for the sake of others, for the sake of the earth, and the sake of future generations. It means standing up against systems that exploit the earth's resources and impoverish the vulnerable. It means rethinking our lifestyles, consumption, and priorities in light of the gospel's call to care for the least of these—including the earth itself, which has no voice.

Jesus says, "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:35). This is a radical call to reorient our lives. It is an invitation to participate in God's redemptive work in the world—a work that includes renewing and restoring creation.

Our second scripture from the letter of James deepens this call. James speaks to a human tendency: believing that faith alone is enough, without action. But James confronts this, saying, "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds" (James 2:18).

Faith, if it is true, must lead to action. And in today's world, where creation itself is at

risk, our faith must lead us to advocacy—advocacy for life, the earth, and future generations.

James brings up the example of Abraham, whose faith was credited to him as righteousness because he acted. He didn't merely believe in God; he obeyed. And that obedience had real-world consequences. So, too, must our faith lead us to real-world action—especially regarding the climate crisis. It's not enough to acknowledge the problem. We must advocate for solutions, we must work for justice, and we must care for creation as a testament to our faith in the Creator.

How does advocacy relate to our faith? True advocacy—especially in the realm of climate justice—stems from a deep love for God, for our neighbours, and for all that God has made. It's about embodying the Kingdom of God here and now. It's about being co-creators with God in nurturing and preserving life on earth.

Advocacy might be reducing our carbon footprint, standing with marginalised communities most affected by climate change, or calling on our leaders to enact policies that protect the environment. But above all, advocacy is about standing in the gap, interceding through prayer and action for a world in need.



The world we live in is under threat. Climate change affects every corner of the earth, from melting ice caps to wildfires, from rising sea levels to food shortages. And yet, as people of faith, we are not without hope. Our belief in Jesus compels us to act. We can bring hope to a world under threat because we know the One who holds the world in His hands.

Jesus' call to deny ourselves and take up our cross is not a burden but an invitation into the abundant life of partnering with Him to restore all things. The cross is the place where death turns into life, where hope is reborn, and where our faith becomes action.

So today, I challenge us all to reflect on our role in God's creation. What is God calling you to do? How can your faith become a driving force for advocacy, justice, and protecting our fragile earth? Let us not be like those who say, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without doing something to address the real needs of our world (James

2:16)

Some may think I speak with the forked tongue of a mortal, or given my nickname growing up as being "Blue", maybe with a serpent's tongue. Advocacy requires us to voice our concerns regarding creation and put into action all we can to bring about change. We cannot serve mammon and ignore what is happening beneath our radiant Southern Cross and all the sky worldwide.

The world is waiting. Creation is groaning. And the good news is that God is already at work, calling us to join him in healing the world. Let us take up our cross, deny ourselves, and follow Jesus in bringing life to creation and hope to a threatened world. Amen.

Key Words in James' letter.

For a comprehensive study of James 2:1-2:26, a crucial chapter talking about favouritism 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 favouritism. 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

How does calling Jesus the Messiah shape our understanding of our responsibility towards creation?

The sermon highlights that recognising Jesus as the Messiah means acknowledging him as Lord of all creation, which calls us to care for the Earth.

In what ways can you live out this understanding in your daily life?

Question 2

What are some examples of ‘taking up our cross’ related to climate change and creation care?

Taking up the cross means self-denial for the sake of others and standing up against systems that harm the Earth.

What personal sacrifices are you willing to make to advocate for the environment?

Question 3

In James 2, it states that faith without action is dead. How can this apply to our response to environmental issues?

The sermon references James, who challenges believers to show their faith through their actions, especially concerning the climate crisis.

Can you identify a time when your faith prompted you to take action on an issue? What did you do?

Question 4

What does it mean to advocate for life, and how can that relate to caring for creation?



Advocacy stems from love for God and creation, indicating it involves standing up for those affected by climate change.

How can you advocate for both people and the environment in your school or community?

Question 5

Creation is groaning under the weight of climate change. What does this image mean to you?

This metaphor illustrates the urgent need for action and awareness of the impact of human activities on the environment.

How can you raise awareness among your friends about caring for our planet?

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://substack.com/@abmcg/p-148619515>

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.



One with the Earth

This five-day devotional will be taking a deeper dive into the sermon from this weekend. It will explore the themes of faith, action, and advocacy for creation and life as we reflect on our responsibilities as stewards of God's creation.

Day 1 Mark 8:27-38

As we reflect on the question Jesus posed to His disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” we must consider the implications of our answer in the context of creation care. We acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah carries with it a call to stewardship of the world He created. It means understanding that our role as followers of Christ extends beyond personal salvation to the care and advocacy for all living beings. When we call Him Lord, we are reminded of our responsibilities to nurture and protect the earth, which God deeply loves.

This call to action reflects the reality that faith must inspire us to engage with the pressing issues of our time, particularly those that strain our ecosystems and marginalised communities. Jesus' revelation of His mission—one that includes suffering and sacrifice—compels us to reassess our priorities. It urges us to align our concerns with God's will, encompassing justice and stewardship. We are to be advocates for the voiceless, embodying the radical love of Jesus through our actions.

- What does it mean to you to say Jesus is the Messiah?
- How can you reflect this belief into action for creation care?
- In what areas of your life do you feel challenged to deny yourself for the sake of others?
- Pray for clarity on your role in caring for creation.
- Ask God to help you identify ways to be an advocate for the earth.

Day 2 James 2:18-26

The letter of James speaks clearly about the relationship between faith and action. As we build on the foundation laid on the previous day, we recognise that a living faith must manifest in tangible deeds. The message reminds us that it is insufficient to believe without demonstrating that belief through our actions. In a world grappling with climate change, our faith should drive us to be advocates for justice, seeking not only to acknowledge the crisis but to respond actively to it.

True faith leads to a commitment to solutions that respect and restore creation. Just as Abraham's faith resulted in action that had real-world implications, our faith should lead us to advocate for policies and practices that protect vulnerable communities and ecosystems. We are called to work alongside God in His renewal mission, letting our faith propel us into the necessary actions demonstrating our love for Him and His creation.

- How can you integrate your faith with acts of advocacy?
- In what ways can you demonstrate commitment to justice for creation?
- What specific actions can you take this week to care for the earth? - Reflect on your actions regarding the environment.
- Pray for guidance in taking actionable steps for advocacy.

Day 3 Colossians 1:16

The passage from Colossians declares that all things were created through Christ and for Christ. This profound truth invites us to consider our relationship with the creation around us. Recognising that everything we see is interconnected and established by Jesus forms a foundation for understanding our role as stewards. Our actions toward creation reflect our acknowledgement of Christ's authority and the care He demands we exercise over it.

We live in a time when the integrity of creation is threatened, and our faith calls us into a deeper awareness of our responsibilities. This means not only caring for our immediate surroundings but also understanding the broader impact of our lifestyles on global ecosystems and acknowledging Christ as the creator prompts us to forge connections with nature, actively working to restore beauty and balance by being mindful of how our choices affect others and the world.

- In what ways can you witness the sovereignty of Christ through your actions?
- How do you view creation in light of Christ being its creator?
- What steps can you take to reduce harm to the environment in your life?
- Spend time in prayer, appreciating the beauty of creation.
- Ask God to reveal areas where you can serve as a steward.

Day 4 Mark 8:33

Jesus' rebuke of Peter invites us to examine our perspectives on the concerns that dominate our lives. In our fast-paced world, human concerns often overshadow divine priorities, leading to disconnects in how we engage with the world around us. This passage highlights the need to align our agendas with God's concerns: justice, care for creation, and empathy for the most vulnerable. Taking up our cross calls us to make sacrifices for the sake of others and the planet.

The heart of Jesus' message is radical love, which cannot merely exist in sentiment but must translate into action. Moving beyond a shallow understanding of faith requires us to actively choose actions that affirm our commitment to God's will and the flourishing of all life. This reflects a faith that is alive, one that animates our thoughts and decisions, challenging us to prioritise creation care and advocacy in our daily lives.

- What are your primary concerns in your daily life?
- How can you invite God's priorities into those concerns?
- In what ways can sacrifice lead to a deeper faith?
- Pray for the courage to follow Jesus' example in your life.
- Reflect on areas where you can let go for the sake of justice.

Day 5 James 2:16

As we conclude this devotional journey, James challenges us to ensure that our faith leads us to action that genuinely meets the needs of our world. It is not enough to speak of love and compassion; we must embody these values in our relationships with creation. Our final reflection calls us to consider how we can be the hands and feet of Christ in a world that is often indifferent to suffering and environmental degradation.

True advocacy begins with awareness and develops into commitment and action. It is our duty as believers to not only respond to the cries of those suffering due to climate change but to proactively engage in preserving the earth that God entrusted to us. This is how we fulfil our calling to be stewards, showing that our faith is alive and impactful. Let us challenge ourselves to create a tangible legacy of love and advocacy for future generations.

- How have you been challenged to act on behalf of creation?
- What commitments are you willing to make to advocate for justice?
- How will you continue to grow in your faith through action?
- Reflect on your journey during this devotional and share it with someone.
- Pray for strength to continue advocating for a just and sustainable future.

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

Acknowledgement of use appreciated

Subscription to "www.breaking-open-the-word.org" is available.
Published every weekend, usually on Saturday evening, AEST.

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