



Sunday  
September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024

Pentecost 18B

# The Season of CREATION: Mountain

## Humble Like a Child, Focused on the Kingdom

Breaking Open the Word

Pentecost 18  
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)



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## READINGS

Jeremiah 11.18-20  
Psalm 54  
James 3.13 - 4.3, 7-8a  
Mark 9.30-37



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“  
‘Whoever welcomes  
one such child in  
my name welcomes  
me, and whoever  
welcomes me  
welcomes not me but  
the one who sent me.’”

Mark 9:37

Lord, we pray thee  
that thy grace may always  
prevent and follow us,  
and make us continually  
to be given to all good  
works;  
through Jesus Christ  
our Lord.

# INTRODUCTION

“Humble Like a Child, Focused on the Kingdom” emphasises the significance of humility and servanthood in the life of a Christian. Drawing from various scripture readings, including Mark, James, Jeremiah, and Psalms, Pastor highlights the contrast between earthly ambitions and the values of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The example from Mark, where the disciples argue about their greatness, illustrates how Jesus turns their worldly aspirations upside down by placing a child among them, indicating that true greatness is achieved through humility and service.

This teaching challenges listeners to reflect on their desires and motivations, encouraging them to adopt a childlike humility when aspiring to be part of God’s Kingdom. Furthermore, the

sermon addresses the dangers of unchecked words and selfish ambitions, as discussed in James’ letter.

We are reminded that conflicts often stem from a desire for recognition and power contrary to heavenly wisdom. As Jeremiah and the psalmist demonstrate, believers are encouraged to trust in God’s justice rather than seek revenge when faced with adversity.

The message concludes with a call to live with a heavenly focus, reminding us to seek God’s help and guidance amidst life’s struggles. Everyone is invited to embrace humility, serve one another, and keep their eyes fixed on God, the trustworthy source of strength and sustenance.

## Key Reflection Points

1. In what areas of your life do you find yourself striving for recognition or power, and how does this compare with the childlike humility that Jesus calls for in Mark’s Gospel?
2. How can you cultivate a heart of servanthood in your daily interactions, particularly in situations where earthly ambitions or personal desires may influence your decisions?
3. Reflecting on James’ warning about the dangers of unchecked words and selfish ambitions, how do you manage conflicts in your life? In what ways can you seek heavenly wisdom to guide your responses?
4. When facing adversity, how can you trust in God’s justice, as modelled by Jeremiah and the psalmist, rather than taking matters into your own hands? How can this trust shape your response to difficult situations?

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.



Well, our land is girt by sea. On the East Coast, as we lift our eyes to the hills, a massive volcanic ridge extends from the Atherton Tablelands down to Geebor/ Mount Macedon and that little outcrop nearby, Hanging Rock. Last week, we focused on the sea, but today, our inspiration comes from the surrounding ranges, and the diversity of native fauna and flora delights us.

And yes, volcanic is the correct term for the Great Dividing Range. Starting in Queensland and following the range down, it is like a potted history of the volcanism that shaped this Southern Land. And the excellent news is this: parts of it are simply dormant, slumbering, and more than likely, waiting for the opportunity to do more things to Hamilton, Mount Gambier and King Island! Such is life on a tectonic shelf!

In today's readings, we are invited to reflect deeply on a crucial aspect of our Christian walk—the need for humility, simplicity, and a focus on heavenly things over earthly ambitions. In a world that celebrates power, status, and success, we are called to live differently as followers of Christ. Our readings challenge us to confront the tensions between worldly desires and the call of God to humility, service, and a heavenly perspective.

### **\*\*1. Settling Disputes Over Earthly Ambition (Mark 9:30-37):\*\***

In today's Gospel reading from Mark, we see the disciples arguing over who among them is the greatest. It's easy to imagine how this dispute arose: these men had followed Jesus for some time, and like so many of us, they probably began to wonder what their roles would

be in the coming kingdom. What place of honour would they hold? Who would be first?

But notice how Jesus responds. He doesn't rebuke them harshly or even directly address their ambition. Instead, He takes a child, places the child among them, and says, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." In essence, Jesus turns their worldly aspirations upside down.

A child in Jesus' time was the lowest in the social hierarchy. They were without status, power, and claim to greatness. Yet, Jesus says it is the childlike—the humble, the lowly, the simple—who are the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. This profound lesson silences the disciples' dispute over ambition. Jesus calls them and us to a radically different vision of greatness: one rooted in humility and service, not status and power.

### **\*\*2. The Dangers of the Tongue and Earthly Desires (James 3:1-12):\*\***

In James's letter, we are reminded of the destructive power of the tongue. He warns that although the tongue is small, it can cause great harm, much like a spark that fires a forest. James' message is clear: disputes, like the one the disciples had, often arise from unchecked words, selfish ambition, and the desire to elevate oneself over others.

What is the root of such desires? More often than not, it is an earthly perspective, a fixation on power, recognition, and control. James contrasts this with the heavenly wisdom that is "pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit." To achieve this, we must train ourselves





to look beyond the immediate, beyond the earthly desires, and to focus on the things of heaven.

**\*\*3. A Cry for Help and Divine Justice (Jeremiah 11:18-20; Psalm 54):\*\***

Jeremiah and the psalmist cry out to God in their distress, seeking justice and deliverance from those who seek to harm them. Faced with a plot against his life, Jeremiah turns to God, trusting in divine justice rather than seeking revenge. Similarly, in Psalm 54, the psalmist trusts God as their helper and sustainer.

These readings remind us that in moments of conflict or when we face opposition, our response must not be to retaliate or seek retribution through earthly means. Instead, like Jeremiah and the psalmist, we are called to turn our gaze upward and trust in God's justice, not our own.

**\*\*4. "I Look to the Mountains" (Psalm 121):\*\***

Psalm 121 is a beautiful reminder of where our help comes from: "I lift my eyes to the mountains—where does my

help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth."

This psalm invites us to shift our focus from this world's struggles, disputes, and ambitions to the eternal and heavenly. We are to look up, beyond ourselves, beyond the fleeting things of this world, and fix our eyes on God. When caught up in earthly disputes or overwhelmed by the desire for status or recognition, we must remind ourselves to look to the mountains—to seek God's presence and help, which is far more important than anything the world offers.

**\*\*Conclusion: Living with a Heavenly Focus:\*\***

Today's message is simple yet profoundly challenging: As followers of Christ, we are called to live with humility, serve others, and resist the temptations of earthly ambition. The disciples' argument about greatness in Mark's Gospel reflects our struggles with pride, status, and self-importance. But Jesus calls us to something greater—something eternal.



We must remember that it is not the pursuit of worldly success, power, or recognition that matters but the pursuit of God's kingdom. As Jesus shows us, to be great in the Kingdom of Heaven means to humble ourselves like children, serve others without seeking reward, and trust God with our lives.

So when we find ourselves in disputes, let us ask ourselves: are we driven by earthly desires or a heavenly focus? Are we seeking greatness in the eyes of the world or the eyes of God? And let us always remember to "look to the mountains" to fix our eyes on the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth, who is our true help and sustainer.

Let us pray that God may grant us the grace to live humbly, to settle our disputes with love, and to keep our eyes fixed on His Kingdom. Amen.

**Loving God,  
be among us like a young child  
in our midst  
that embracing the potential  
that the least in our eyes  
may become the living presence  
of your Divine Word,  
in whose name we pray  
forever and ever. Amen.**



### Key Words in today's Gospel

#### -1. Παρεδίδου (paredidou)

Found within Mark 9:31, this is the Greek verb for "to deliver". It signifies the act of Jesus being handed over to sinful men before His crucifixion. This hearkens to the fact that His suffering is not accidental, but part of a Divine plan.

#### 2. Ανάστασις (anastasis)

This noun, found in the line "and after (He is) killed, He will rise the third day" is Greek for "resurrection". This is a cornerstone of Christian faith, symbolizing Christ's victory over death.

#### 3. Διαλογίζομαι (dialogizomai)

In Mark 9:34, the disciples were arguing about which of them was the greatest. The verb 'were arguing' translates to 'dialogizomai' and it implies a heated or intense debate. This brings to light the human tendencies of pride and ambition.

#### 4. Πρῶτος (prōtos)

This term, found in Mark 9:35, translates to "first". It challenges the worldly concept of greatness and establishes the biblical principle where the first must be last and the servant of all.

#### 5. Παις (pais)

This word, meaning "child" or "servant" in Mark 9:36, reinforces Jesus' teaching about humility. By calling a little child to stand among them, Jesus emphasizes servitude and humility as great virtues in the Kingdom of God.

### Prayer Points

- Ask for prayer requests from your community.
- Pray that we may embody humility in our interactions with others.
- Ask God to help us focus on His Kingdom rather than earthly ambitions.
- Request God's guidance in looking up to Him for strength during challenging times.



# GROUP DISCUSSION

## Question 1

**Why do you think Jesus used a child to teach about greatness in the Kingdom of Heaven?**

In Mark 9:30-37, Jesus contrasts the worldly view of greatness with being humble like a child.

How can you practice humility in your own life, especially when you want to be recognised?

## Question 2

**What does James mean when discussing the power of the tongue in James 3:1-12?**

James warns that our words can cause much harm, often leading to disputes driven by selfish ambition.

Can you think of a time when your words led to a misunderstanding? How might you handle that differently in the future?

## Question 3

**How does trusting in God's justice, as mentioned in Jeremiah and Psalm 54, change how we deal with conflict?**

Jeremiah and the psalmist rely on God's help rather than seeking revenge when distressed.

In what situations have you felt tempted to retaliate? How can trusting God help you manage those feelings?

## Question 4

### What does it mean to 'look to the mountains' as stated in Psalm 121?



Psalm 121 encourages us to seek help from God instead of focusing on our worldly struggles.

When facing challenges, what are some practical ways you can 'look to the mountains' in your life?

## Question 5

### How can we shift our focus from earthly ambitions to serving others as Jesus taught?

Emphasis is placed on humility and serving others instead of chasing worldly success.

How can you serve those around you in your daily life, and how might that impact your perspective on success?

## 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 themes of humility, service, and a focus on God's Kingdom, guiding us to reflect on our lives and relationships.

Day 1

Mark 9:30-37

Monday 23rd September

In today's scripture, we witness the disciples' struggle with pride and ambition as they argue about who is the greatest among them. Jesus, in His profound wisdom, subverts their expectations by bringing a child into their midst. This act is a powerful reminder that in the Kingdom of Heaven, greatness is not measured by status or power but by humility and service to others. As followers of Christ, we are invited to re-evaluate our ambitions and motives, instead embracing a childlike faith that values love and service above worldly recognition.

Reflecting on this passage, we must ask ourselves: Are we seeking greatness in our lives through the lens of the world, or are we embracing the humility that Jesus exemplifies? Each day presents us with opportunities to serve those around us and to be last in a world that often prioritises the first. Let us strive to embody the heart of a servant, remembering that true greatness comes from placing others' needs before our own.

What ambitions do I need to surrender to God to serve others better?

How can I cultivate childlike humility in my interactions with others?

In what ways can I prioritise service over status in my daily life?

Pray for the wisdom to recognise and let go of worldly ambitions.

Ask God to help you see opportunities to serve those around you.

Day 2

James 3:1-12

Tuesday 24th September

James warns us about the destructive power of our words, reminding us that the tongue can ignite conflicts and foster division, just as a tiny spark can set a forest ablaze. This admonition invites us to examine our speech and its impact on our relationships. In a society that often encourages harsh criticism and divisive rhetoric, we are called to rise above and instead choose words that reflect heaven's wisdom—ones that bring peace, encouragement, and growth.

Our journey of humility and service must extend to how we communicate. As we reflect on our words, we must ask ourselves if they are building bridges or erecting walls. By committing to speak life and truth, we can combat the negativity that permeates our culture and reflect Christ's love in tangible ways. Let us be a source of healing, actively choosing to guard our tongues and speak only what uplifts and supports.

How do my words contribute to the atmosphere around me—are they uplifting or damaging?

What changes must I make to align with Christ's message in my speech?

How can I practice speaking with love and wisdom in my conversations?

Pray for guidance in choosing your words wisely.

Could you ask for strength to speak life into the lives of those around you?

Day 3

Jeremiah 11:18-20; Psalm 54

Wednesday 25th September

In today's readings, the psalmist and Jeremiah offer a heartfelt cry for help as they navigate injustice and danger. Their reliance on God's justice teaches us an essential truth: our response to adversity must be anchored in faith and trust rather than the impulse to retaliate. When faced with opposition, we are reminded to look upward, seeking God's strength and divine intervention rather than seeking revenge through our means.

This acknowledgement of our weakness is met with God's infinite strength and justice. By placing our faith in God, we align ourselves with His purposes, fostering a resilience that allows us to endure trials without resorting to bitterness or hostility. We may also encounter moments of injustice; let us respond like Jeremiah and the psalmist, trusting in the Lord's fidelity and righteousness.



How can I respond to conflicts or injustices with faith instead of anger?  
In what areas do I struggle to trust God's timing and justice?  
How can I support others who are facing unjust situations?  
Pray for the ability to trust God in difficult situations.  
Could you ask for compassion to help those in distress?

Day 4                      Psalm 121                      Thursday 26th September

This beautiful psalm reminds us of where our accurate help comes from: God, the Maker of heaven and earth. In moments of uncertainty and struggle, it is easy to become consumed by our problems and lose sight of the bigger picture. This psalm invites us to lift our eyes higher, to look beyond our immediate circumstances to the one who can deliver as He promises. The mountains represent God's majesty and unwavering ability to support and sustain us.

As we reflect on Psalm 121, let us shift our focus from the challenges we face to the God who is ever-present and powerful. This week, we have examined humility, service, and our desire for recognition. Amidst all this, we must remember that our strength lies not in our achievements but in our dependence on God. Trusting Him allows us to pursue His will over our plans, confident that He is our ultimate source of hope and help.

What distractions might hinder my ability to see God's presence in my life?  
How can I cultivate a mindset that looks to God first for help?  
In what ways have I experienced God's faithfulness in times of trouble?  
Pray for a greater awareness of God's help in your daily life.  
Express gratitude for the times when God has supported and sustained you.

Day 5                      James 3:1-12                      Friday 27th September

As we conclude our devotional, we return to James' powerful message about the tongue and our words. The lessons we've learned this week about humility, service, and trust in God culminate in our communication. Our words not only reflect our hearts but also have the power to influence those around us. Let us be mindful that every interaction is an opportunity to either build up or tear down, and with this knowledge, we are called to speak with intention and love.

In reflecting on our journey, we are reminded of the importance of living with a heavenly focus, intentionally choosing words that embody Christ's love and humility. As we step into our days ahead, may our speech always point others to the heart of God, exemplifying the service and love we experienced in our relationship with Him. Remember to keep looking to the mountains and seeking God in every situation.

What steps can I take to ensure I speak with love and integrity?  
How has this week's reflection deepened my understanding of humility?  
In what ways can I encourage others through my words?  
Pray for resilience and to speak truthfully and lovingly in all situations.  
Seek God's guidance as you strive to live out these teachings daily.

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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