



Pentecost 25B

Sunday
November 10th, 2024

Pilgrimage towards Heaven

Doth butter no parsnips



St Peter's by the Lake
PAYNESVILLE
Anglican Diocese of Gippsland



Breaking Open the Word

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INTRODUCTION

READINGS

1 Kings 17.8 – 36

Psalm 146

Hebrews 9. 23 – 28

Mark 12.38 – 44

Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collect

Introduction

Sermon

Discussion Questions

Five Days of Meditation and Prayer

O Lord, we beseech thee.
absolve thy people from their offences:
that through thy bountiful goodness
we may all be delivered
from the bands of those sins.
which by our frailty we have committed:
Grant this, O heavenly Father,
for Jesus Christ's sake.
our blessed Lord and Saviour.

The sermon emphasises Jesus' teaching on loving God fully and loving our neighbour, as seen in Mark 12.

The widow's story at Zarephath illustrates how true faith is given from our abundance—or even our scarcity—relying on God's provision. The widow's trust allowed her resources to be miraculously sustained, teaching us that God multiplies our offerings when we place them in his hands.

Psalm 146 reinforces this by calling us to rely on God, not on worldly powers, for our needs.

Loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength is a high calling that sometimes feels daunting in a self-centred world.

Yet, Hebrews 9 reminds us that Jesus' sacrifice provides both forgiveness and the strength we need to live this command.

The purpose of being part of the Church isn't about status but about becoming a community of faithful servants who journey together to know Jesus.

Through Christ's strength, we can give ourselves entirely, trusting that God will provide what we need each day.

We're invited to live as transformed people, offering our lives of complete devotion to God and service to others.

This love, flowing from our abundance and Christ's strength, is the foundation of a faithful life.

Prayer 🙏

- Ask for prayer requests from your community
- Ask God to help us love him wholeheartedly and serve others selflessly.
- Seek God's guidance as we strive to fulfil our duty to him in all we do.

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

Introduction

When I first came to Melbourne, I was immediately told to get a copy of Melways. It was to be indispensable at times. Football appointments would be given to us with a reference, and then, finding the appropriate directory of the various train groups, the path to the game was evident. It helped in my student readership, although the first place I was sent to was North Melbourne, an eight-minute walk to the South! Footscray was to be another story!

I know I have challenged people here and worldwide with my weekly questions. I don't say that to 'big note' myself, but I am surprised at the readership. Not all my questions are about achieving perfection, but they prompt us to consider whether we are well-advanced on the path or set out on our journey through life. These days, roadmaps are digital, and there is no guarantee that they will keep you on the straightforward

path. I remember seeing a sign at Mount Tamborine in Queensland quoting Dad's Army's Private Fraser, saying, "If you followed your GPS, turn back or you're doomed!"

Today's readings give us a roadmap for understanding what it means to serve God with our whole being—not out of superficial obligation, but with a commitment that flows from the heart. The Gospel, Mark 12:28-34 reveals a powerful encounter where Jesus reminds us of the greatest commandment: to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. This command to love is central to our faith and demands a deep understanding of duty and devotion.

Faithful Obedience from Scarcity: The Widow at Zarephath

In 1 Kings 17:8-16, we encounter the widow of Zarephath, a woman who knows

how challenging living on the edge is. Living during a severe drought and famine, she is on the brink of using her last handful of flour and oil to prepare a final meal for herself and her son. Encountering the prophet Elijah, he asks her to give him a portion of her last meal. The widow's response to Elijah is shown in obedience and faith. She offers what she has from her extreme poverty, trusting that God will provide as Elijah promised.

The widow's actions are a beautiful example of faith-driven obedience. Out of her scarcity, she fulfils a duty that requires everything she has. Because she obeys, God blesses her abundance, keeping her flour and oil miraculously replenished. Her story invites us to consider whether we trust God to provide from his abundance when we give what we have, even when we feel it's not enough. Her example shows that God sustains us beyond our imagination when we give of ourselves.

Psalm 146: Trusting in the Lord's Provision

Psalm 146 is a song of praise that reminds us that the character and faithfulness of God is always to show mercy. The psalmist tells us not to put our trust in human rulers or material wealth but in the Lord, who "executes justice for the oppressed" and "gives food to the hungry." God sustains, protects, and provides for all who look to him. More often than not, provision and help is through the actions and love of others. The psalm calls us to anchor our lives in God's trustworthiness, recognising that he is the source of all we need.

This psalm reinforces the idea that our duty to God is not about what we can accomplish in our strength but what God does through us when we trust him. The widow's flour and oil lasted because she trusted God's provision. Our strength, resources, and abilities are multiplied when we place them in God's hands.

True Worship:

Not for Status, but for Relationship

In the Gospel passage, Jesus' warning against the scribes who seek status and honour for themselves sheds light on a critical problem that can arise in the Church and our hearts. Being a member of the Church is not about earthly recognition, titles, or status. It's about joining other pilgrims on the journey to know and worship God.

Church membership is not a badge of honour nor a means to social status. It's a call to know the truth that is in Jesus and to live that truth daily. We should not be like the scribes, using our position for appearance's sake or self-promotion. Instead, we are to live as people who understand the weight of our duty—who seek to love God and serve each other humbly.

Our Duty: Loving God with Our Whole Heart, Mind, Soul, and Strength

When Jesus calls us to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, we are being asked for our total devotion. This command is comprehensive, asking for every part of us. God doesn't want a divided heart; what is required is our total commitment.

This can be a challenge! Being dedicated in every aspect—intellectually, emotionally, physically, and spiritually—is a lofty goal, and it's perfectly okay to acknowledge that we can't achieve it alone. Solomon recognised his need for God's wisdom, and as Psalm 127 beautifully reminds us, we are given the strength we need from God. We never have to journey through this alone!

The Sacrifice of Christ: The Source of Our Strength

Hebrews 9:23-28 beautifully highlights the essence of our faith—the incredible sacrificial love of Christ. Jesus gave himself once and for all, driven by a profound love that inspires us to respond with heartfelt gratitude and a sense of responsibility. Thanks to Jesus' tremendous sacrifice, we can fulfil our duty to God; he has paid the price, freeing us from sin and empowering us to love in the same way he loves.

Jesus' sacrifice teaches us that our devotion is not meant to be drudgery but a response to His love. He provides all we need for the morrow, as Paul reminds us in Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

In Christ, we find both our example and our enabler, the One who strengthens us to carry out our duty from the abundance of what he has provided.

Applying This to Our Lives

What does this mean for us? It invites us to pause and reflect on our hearts: Are we following Jesus out of love and commitment, or are we, like the scribes, chasing after status? Are we concentrating on constructing our own homes or careers without including God in the mix, or are we opening our hearts to collaborate with Him, letting Him guide our steps and multiply our efforts?

Our duty is not burdensome when it flows from our love for God and reliance on God's strength. Each day, we're called to renew our commitment to love God and serve one another, understanding that we are partners in his work. We have a duty not to show off but to serve and to give from our abundance, as Solomon did, with humility and wisdom.

Conclusion

We are invited to be a Church that genuinely expresses God's love, sharing not out of a sense of duty but from the overflowing love we have received in Christ. Let's embrace the challenge to serve with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. In this journey, we can trust that God is our provider, strength, and builder, supporting us every step of the way.

Unlike a roadmap or a synthesised voice on our GPS, the call to give our all is complete and not limited by two dimensions. The map is the same, but how we interpret that journey and the decisions we may face are ours to make. We are called to live as a testament to the joy and power of serving God. This we do—not for status, but for the glory of his name, as faithful fellow pilgrims on the journey of faith.

Amen.

Discussion Questions

In what ways can being part of a church community help us focus on serving others rather than seeking status or recognition?

- Church membership should centre on knowing and worshipping God, not personal status.
- How can you contribute to your church community in a way that prioritises serving others over seeking attention or recognition?

What does it mean to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, as described in Mark 12:28-34?

- This command from Jesus emphasises the importance of total devotion in our relationship with God.
- How can you practically show your love for God in your daily life and interactions with others?

What level of risk and strength would be present if you were asked to share of your limited resources?

- The woman is called upon to give of her only supply and trust in God's promise.
- Given the risk of not having enough, would you be prepared to trust God's promise?

Is it a safer position to trust ourselves rather than God?

- This psalm reinforces the idea that our duty to God is not about what we can accomplish in our strength but what God does through us when we trust him.
- How can you, individually or as a member of the body of Christ, build on the strength of our community?

What challenges do you face when trying to love and serve others, as Elijah or Jesus instructed?

- The sermon highlighted that true love and service can be challenging but essential for our faith.
- How can you overcome these challenges or obstacles to serve those around you better?

This five-day devotional will be taking a deeper dive into the sermon from this weekend. We will explore themes of hope, unity, and God's eternal love as we remember those who have gone before us and look forward to the promise of resurrection in Christ.



Day 1 Mark 12:28-34 Monday: Martin of Tours, d. 387; Remembrance Day

Today's devotional focuses on the greatest commandment, as taught by Jesus: to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. This principle is a call to worship and a holistic commitment encompassing every aspect of our lives.

The challenge is to view our relationship with God as a profound partnership rather than a transactional obligation. Understanding that our love for God is reflected in how we love others transforms our faith into an active expression of grace and compassion.

As we consider this scripture, we are invited to examine our motivations. Are we serving because we must or because we genuinely love and want to reflect God's love? Let this day be a moment to recalibrate our hearts, ensuring that love is at the core of our service to God and each other.

- What does it mean to love God with your whole being?
- In what ways can you better show love to your neighbour?
- How can you ensure your service to God flows from love rather than obligation?
- Ask God to reveal areas in your heart where love is lacking.
- Pray for a deeper understanding of His love for you.

Day 2 1 Kings 17:10-16 Tuesday: Charles Simeon, Evangelist (d 1836)

In 1 Kings 17:8-16, we encounter the widow of Zarephath, a woman who knows scarcity all too well. Living during a severe drought and famine, she is on the brink of using her last handful of flour and a little oil to prepare a final meal for herself and her son. Yet when the prophet Elijah asks her to give him a portion of her last meal,

she responds in obedience and faith. She offers what she has from her meagre supply, trusting that God will provide as Elijah promised.

The widow's actions exemplify faith-driven obedience. Despite her scarcity, she fulfils a duty that requires everything she has. Because she obeys, God blesses her abundance, miraculously replenishing her flour and oil.

- What part of her story invites us to consider whether we trust God to provide from his abundance when we give what we have, even when we feel it's not enough?
- How does her example show that God sustains us beyond our imagination when we give ourselves entirely?
- Pray for God to grant you wisdom in your decisions and interactions.
- Ask God to cultivate a heart of humility and service in you.

Day 3 Psalm 146 Wednesday

Psalm 146 is a song of praise that reminds us of God's character and faithfulness. The psalmist tells us not to trust in human rulers or material wealth but in the Lord, who "executes justice for the oppressed" and "gives food to the hungry." God sustains, protects, and provides for all who look to Him.

The psalm calls us to anchor our lives in God's trustworthiness, recognising that He is the source of all we need. It also reinforces the idea that our duty to God is not about what we can accomplish in our strength but what God does through us when we trust him.

- How does the widow's decision to trust in the words of God spoken through Elijah challenge you?
- How can our strength, resources, and abilities be multiplied when we place them in God's hands.?
- What projects or responsibilities in your life need God's guidance?
- Pray for God's wisdom to direct your efforts and priorities.
- Could you ask for God's strength to face your current challenges?

Day 4 Hebrews 9:23-28 Thursday

This day's focus is Christ's sacrificial love, as beautifully highlighted in Hebrews. Jesus' ultimate sacrifice secures our freedom and empowers us to fulfil our duty

with gratitude. His love motivates us to serve not from a place of obligation but from a profound response to His grace. Understanding that He bore our burdens opens our hearts to love others in a similar sacrificial manner.

As we reflect on the implications of Christ's sacrifice, we must consider how it shapes our calls to service. Are we willing to relinquish our status and privilege to serve others as Christ did? By embodying His love and sacrifice, we become vessels whose grace flows into the world.

- *How does Christ's sacrifice influence your understanding of love and service?*
- *In what ways are you currently reflecting Christ's love to others?*
- *What barriers prevent you from serving as Christ served?*
- *Thank God for the sacrifice of Jesus and what it means for your life.*
- *Pray for the ability to love and serve those around you selflessly.*

Day 5 Philippians 4:13 Friday

As we conclude our devotional journey, Philippians 4:13 reminds us that we can do everything through Christ, who strengthens us. This verse encapsulates what it means to journey through life relying on our Saviour. His strength is not just for lofty achievements but also for the everyday acts of love and service that reflect His heart.

The call to love and serve empowers us to know we are not alone. We can confidently approach our duties, knowing Christ equips us for whatever lies ahead. By embracing His strength, we can fulfil our commitment to God and each other with joy and purpose.

- What does it mean for you to find strength in Christ in your daily life?
- In what areas do you need to embrace His strength more fully?
- How can you encourage others to rely on God's strength?
- Pray for confidence in your abilities through Christ.
- Thank God for His empowering presence in your life.

End notes and further reading



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

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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