



Pentecost 26B

*Sunday
November 17th, 2024*

Pilgrimage towards Heaven

The Cost of Discipleship
and

Managing Expectations.



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



Breaking Open the Word

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INTRODUCTION

READINGS

Daniel 12:1-3,

Psalms 16,

Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25,

Mark 13:1-11

Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collect

Introduction

Discussion

Discussion Questions

Five Days of Meditation and Prayer

O God,
who knowest us to be set
in the midst of so many
and great dangers,
that by reason of the frailty
of our nature we cannot always stand upright:
Grant to us such strength and protection,
as may support us in all dangers,
and carry us through all temptations:
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This week, another person is preaching, so not so much a sermon, but a paper on the readings is being used. Dennis explores the theme of the cost of discipleship through various biblical texts, emphasising that genuine commitment to Christ requires sacrifice, resilience, and endurance, particularly during life's challenges.

Drawing from Daniel, Psalms, Hebrews, and Mark, he illustrates that the journey of a disciple is fraught with trials yet anchored in God's provision, hope, trust and the promise of eternal life.

The figure of Hilda of Whitby serves as a powerful example of dedication to God and the Church, highlighting how her adherence to Church teachings and willingness to navigate complex decisions reflect the essence of discipleship.

Dennis underscores that discipleship is not a solitary pursuit but a communal one, where believers support each other in their faith journey.

In light of the scripture, he encourages an understanding of trials not as signs of God's absence but as integral parts of the disciple's path. T

he call to follow Christ involves affirming orthodox teachings and maintaining unity within the Church, even when it demands personal sacrifice.

Ultimately, Dennis reassures the reader that while the cost of discipleship may be significant, the reward of lasting joy and eternal life with Christ far outweighs the sacrifices made.

Prayer 🙏

- Ask for prayer requests from your community.
- * Pray for clarity on managing expectations in our discipleship journeys this week.
- * Ask God for the strength to endure challenges we may face as disciples.
- * Seek God's presence and guidance in difficult decisions that reflect our commitment to him.

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.

To open our hearts to Jesus is to accept that there is a cost to becoming a disciple. Scripture informs us of the depth of commitment and the steadfast faith necessary, especially in challenging periods of life. Discipleship is not a path for the faint-hearted; it demands sacrifice, resilience, and a willingness to endure for the sake of Christ. This theme resonates in today's passages from Daniel, Psalms, Hebrews, and Mark. It is exemplified in the life of Hilda of Whitby, a 7th-century English abbess known for her dedication to Christ and adherence to Church teaching.

Usually, the feast day of Hilda would occur today. When it falls on a Sunday, the propers for the Sunday are that of the New Revised Lectionary Pentecost 26B, Proper 27 or Ordinary Sunday 32. Hilda is included in this discussion not only for her willingness to host the Synod of Whitby, held at the double houses of Whitby in the year 664. The result of the Synod was to see King Oswui decree that the Church in England would follow not the Celtic understanding of the dating of Easter, and the Ionian, Scottish and Irish manner of the monastic tonsure (hair shaving) would be abandoned in favour

of the Papal canons of Rome. This led to a change in discipline that initially resisted such rule or authority being dependent on Rome. Within 900 years, under Henry VIII, cow-towing to Rome would be a significant issue in the growing Reformation of the Church in Europe.

Discipleship in the Light of Daniel 12:1-3

The prophecy of Daniel presents a vivid portrayal of the end times, a time of trial and judgment where "Michael, the great prince," arises to defend God's people (Daniel 12:1). Those who are found righteous "shall shine like the brightness of the sky" (Daniel 12:3, NRSV). Daniel's words speak to the perseverance required of God's people, especially when faith is tested. Discipleship is bound up with the hope of resurrection and the promise of eternal life for those who endure.

Daniel's prophetic message reminds disciples that following God may involve significant suffering or persecution. The cost of discipleship here is not simply earthly but carries eternal implications. In Daniel's view, discipleship requires a commitment to God's righteousness, even in difficult times, with the assurance that one's

faithfulness will ultimately lead to "everlasting life" (Daniel 12:2).

Psalm 16: Confidence and Trust in God
Psalm 16 is a song of trust and contentment, declaring, "I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved" (Psalm 16:8, NRSV). Here, the psalmist articulates the foundation of discipleship: confidence in God as a refuge and source of joy. While Daniel reminds us of the endurance needed, Psalm 16 emphasises the assurance we find in God's presence and the inheritance that awaits those who follow him.

This psalm gives disciples a perspective that, despite trials or sacrifices, God's steadfast love and provision remain constant. In our journey of discipleship, the psalm encourages us to manage expectations realistically: while hardships may come, our joy and strength are found in God alone. Psalm 16 embodies the trust that sustains disciples even when the path of obedience is costly.

The Role of Sacrifice in Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25

The writer of Hebrews contrasts priests' repetitive sacrifices with Christ's single, sufficient sacrifice, "for by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14, NRSV). This profound truth underscores the completeness of Jesus' atonement and the freedom it brings to his followers. Discipleship involves

responding to Christ's ultimate sacrifice by living in gratitude and obedience, recognising that his work has already secured our salvation.

Hebrews also encourages believers to "hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering" (Hebrews 10:23). Discipleship is not merely about personal devotion. It includes being part of a faith community where mutual encouragement helps us remain steadfast. Just as discipleship may cost us individually, it also calls us to build one another up, supporting each other in our shared pursuit of Christ. Discipleship is not done in isolation but is life in communion with others following the same path. Discipleship is a call to be part of a community.

Expectation of Trials in Mark 13:1-11

In Mark 13, Jesus foretells the destruction of the Temple and the trials his followers will endure, saying, "When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed" (Mark 13:7, NRSV). He warns that discipleship will involve hardship, betrayal, and opposition. These verses set realistic expectations for those who follow Jesus, teaching that discipleship often involves conflict with worldly powers and enduring persecution.

There is a possibility that this passage set in Jerusalem is an editorial insertion by the Markan community. The first Jewish-Roman war that lasted from 66 – 72 CE certainly includes the

destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Mark 13 indeed points to this event, possibly even foretold in the previous chapter, concerning the lack of faith of those in authority and their failure to live the word of God.

Preferring to seek status over service, the warning and example of the Widow's Mite was unequivocal in the words of Jesus. A simple play on words in the traditional English story rendering, substituting "mite" with "might", may well be entertained. The woman did not give from her abundance; she gave in worshipping her entire wealth.

The prophetic passage of destruction and the frothing coming apocalypse is crucial for managing expectations in the life of faith. Here, we must remind ourselves that literally, apocalypse refers to revealing the reign of God, a lifting of the veil. In the context of the Temple, the veil is lifted through the action of Jesus (as explored in Hebrews 9) and vicariously in the life of those who chose to become disciples of Jesus. Jesus' emphasis points to trials as not signs of God's absence but as an expected part of the disciple's journey. While the cost of discipleship may be high, Jesus assures us that God's Spirit will empower and sustain His followers even in the darkest times. In moments of trial, disciples can hold fast to Jesus' promise of the Spirit's guidance and presence.

The Cost of Discipleship:

Hilda of Whitby

Hilda of Whitby, a renowned abbess in 7th-century England, exemplifies the cost of discipleship through her commitment to Christ and the Church's teachings. Hilda

was known for her wisdom, dedication, and strict adherence to ecclesiastical authority, including the observance of canon law. At the Synod of Whitby, she supported a decision that aligned the Church in England with Roman practices despite opposition from local traditions. Hilda's obedience to Church authority, even at a personal cost, reflects the essence of discipleship: placing God's will and the unity of His Church above personal preference or ease of life by adhering to a more straightforward method of discipleship.

Hilda's life illustrates the challenge of remaining faithful when differing doctrines and practices threatened the Church's unity. Like Hilda, disciples today may find themselves called to uphold orthodox teachings in a world that often values personal belief over biblical truth. Her life serves as a reminder that discipleship sometimes involves difficult decisions, including adherence to Church teachings over popular or convenient beliefs.

A brief word on 'biblical truth.' On a week where this phrase is again being used in a manner that is pointed as a reason why the resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury rocked the traditional authority of the established Church of England. As many will link the resignation with the continuing feud between parts of the Church, particularly the so-called 'global south' and the Global Anglican Fellowship Conference members (GAFCON), this would miss the point that Welby resigned not because of calls from that mob were considerable, but rather, a somewhat

outdated idea that in terms of integrity, the 'buck stopped with him.' Institutional integrity failed to stop an inherently evil act, and as such, in accepting the responsibility for the failure, integrity demanded a ransom.

So, what could be defined as 'biblical truth' and did Hilda choose canon law over and above the traditions of the Celtic church?

in his book "The Truth War" (2008), the controversial American preacher John F MacArthur states the following regarding truth as defined by the Bible. The "...Bible teaches that truth is that which is consistent with the mind, will, character, glory, and being of God. Even more to the point, Truth is the self-expression of God. That is the biblical meaning of truth. Because the definition of truth flows from God, truth is theological.

Truth is also ontological—which is a fancy way of saying it is the way things really are. Reality is what it is because God declared it so and made it so. Therefore God is the author, source, determiner, governor, arbiter, ultimate standard, and final judge of all truth."

For Hilda, the decision to live in the way things are, that is, obedience to the authority of Rome, was critical in maintaining community cohesion. Although the reality was to adopt the Roman ways for the dating of Easter, oddly, the dating of Easter based on the Passover being the 14th day of Nisan

and celebrated on that day was displaced with a complex formula based on the moon's phases. As for the tonsure, if that rule were introduced today, the only benefactors of such a decision would be those engaged in the hairdressing industry.

Discipleship, Obedience, and Church Unity

The teachings of Scripture call disciples to uphold the faith in its fullness, adhering to orthodox beliefs rather than following doctrines that lead away from Christ. Hebrews 10 highlights the value of a faith community, encouraging us to "provoke one another to love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:24). This commitment to communal faithfulness is echoed in the life of Hilda, who prioritised the Church's unity and doctrinal integrity, even when it demanded sacrifice.

Adhering to true doctrine is part of the cost of discipleship. Church canon law, which provides structure and orthodoxy, safeguards the integrity of the faith. Hilda's commitment to following the authority of the Church and maintaining unity among believers exemplifies that true discipleship often includes resisting false or unorthodox teachings. By adhering to orthodox teachings, disciples affirm their commitment to Christ and the Church.

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Discussion Questions

What does it mean to you to accept that discipleship comes with a cost, as discussed in the sermon?

- The sermon emphasises that becoming a disciple of Christ requires sacrifice and resilience, as illustrated in the life of Hilda of Whitby and the scriptural references.
- Can you think of a time when you had to sacrifice something important to you for a greater purpose? How did that experience shape your understanding of commitment?

In what ways do the messages of Daniel 12:1-3 about perseverance and hope impact your view on facing challenges in life?

- The sermon highlights Daniel's prophetic message, which calls for enduring faith during difficult times and assures the faithful of eternal life.
- How can you apply Daniel's message of perseverance to a personal challenge you are currently facing?

How does Psalm 16 encourage us to find joy and strength in God, even during hardships?

- The sermon points out that Psalm 16 teaches us to trust God's presence as a source of joy and strength throughout our discipleship journey.
- How can you seek God's presence in your life when you're going through tough times?

According to the sermon, why is being part of a faith community important in your journey as a disciple?

- The sermon suggests that discipleship includes mutual encouragement within a faith community, as emphasised in Hebrews 10.
- How can you contribute to building up your faith community and supporting others in their discipleship?

What lessons can we learn from Hilda of Whitby's commitment to Church teachings and authority in today's world?

- The sermon discusses how Hilda exemplified the cost of discipleship through her dedication to the Church's authority and adherence to orthodox teachings.
- Are there areas where you feel pressured to conform to popular opinion rather than sticking to your values? How can you navigate those situations?

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 Core Scripture: Daniel 12:1-3

Discipleship is a journey that brings joy, challenges, and trials. As we delve into Daniel 12:1-3, we are reminded that God's people will endure times of testing, and it is through these moments that our faith is refined. Daniel speaks of Michael, the great prince who defends God's people, highlighting that we are not alone in our struggles. The promise is clear: those who stand firm in their faith will ultimately shine like the sky's brightness.

This assurance encourages us to remain steadfast, knowing that our commitment to God carries eternal significance.

Reflecting on this call to discipleship, we recognise that the cost may involve personal sacrifices. Yet, what we lose in this life pales compared to the eternal life we gain through our faithfulness to God. These verses reveal the cost and the incredible hope that sustains us amidst trials. Let this day be one in which we commit to reflecting God's light in a world filled with darkness.

- In what areas of your life are you facing trials challenging your faith?
- How can you lean on God's promises to find strength during challenging times?
- What does it mean for you to shine brightly for others around you?
- Pray for strength and perseverance in your current challenges.
- Ask God to reveal areas where you must commit more deeply to him.

Day 2 Core Scripture: Psalm 16

Psalm 16 is a beautiful reminder of our security in trusting God. This psalmist expresses deep confidence in the Lord as their protector and guide. In an age where many seek refuge in fleeting pleasures, the psalm calls us to find our joy and strength in God alone. "I have set the Lord always before me." This verse encapsulates the essence of discipleship: consistently placing God at the centre of our lives.

As we embrace the reality of trials, we should remember the assurances in God's presence. The joy described in this psalm reassures us that God's steadfast love remains, even in our sacrifices. Think about how you can cultivate a deeper trust in God and how that trust can transform your outlook on life's challenges. Like the psalmist, we may focus our hearts on God's promises as we navigate through trials.

- What does it mean to you to always have the Lord before you?
- Where do you typically seek joy and security outside of God?
- How can you remind yourself of God's presence in your daily life?
- Thank God for His unwavering presence in your life.
- Could you invite him to help you turn to him for joy and security?

Day 3 Core Scripture: Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25

The message of Hebrews emphasises the significance of Christ's sacrifice and the call to support one another in faith. We are perfected through Christ's singular offering, and this incredible act leads us to embrace our identity as His followers. Living in gratitude extends beyond individual worship; it encompasses being part of a community that fosters mutual encouragement. The writer encourages us to "provoke one another to love and good deeds," suggesting that discipleship is personal and communal.

In today's context, we are to uplift one another during tough times. The church is where we can share burdens, celebrate victories, and encourage perseverance. Reflect on how you can be part of a supportive faith community. Ask God for guidance in becoming that source of love and encouragement to others within your community.

- How do you view your role within your faith community?
- In what ways can you encourage someone else in their walk with Christ?
- What are some barriers you face to being involved in community support?
- Pray for the strength to be a source of love and encouragement to others.
- Ask God to show you how to engage more with your faith community.

Day 4 Core Scripture: Mark 13:1-11

In Mark 13, Jesus speaks to the inevitability of trials and tribulations that His followers will encounter. He offers caution to prepare His disciples for the challenges ahead—not to be alarmed by worldly events, as they are all part of a more excellent plan. Discipleship requires a sober understanding of what it means to follow Jesus, especially in times of upheaval and uncertainty. Recognising that trials may be expected helps reshape our perspectives on suffering as not being a sign of God's absence and part of the journey toward faith maturity.

This passage invites us to reconsider our reactions to hardship. Jesus assures us that God's Spirit will empower and sustain us through these trials. With this promise, we can navigate difficulties with hope and courage. Reflect on the trials you are currently facing and how embracing them with faith can foster growth in your walk with Christ.

- What trials are currently challenging your faith?
- How can understanding the purpose of trials change your perspective?
- In what ways do you seek comfort and assurance during challenging times?
- Pray for clarity and strength amid your trials.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you through your current challenges.

Day 5 Core Scripture: Hilda of Whitby Reflection

The life of Hilda of Whitby serves as a contemporary reminder of the cost of discipleship. Hilda exemplified obedience to church authority and the importance of maintaining unity among believers, demonstrating that true discipleship can require difficult choices. As she navigated the complexities of varying doctrines, her commitment to Christ and the Church highlights the essence of discipleship: choosing God's ways over personal preferences or ease of life. Hilda's example encourages us to reflect on our faith journeys and whether we are willing to sacrifice for God's will.

In our current context, Hilda's commitment serves as a call to uphold biblical truth despite cultural pressures. Standing firm in our beliefs can be challenging, but like Hilda, we are called to prioritise God's kingdom above our comfort. Today, contemplate living out your faith authentically and courageously in an increasingly complex world.

- Are there areas in your life where you struggle to uphold biblical truth?
- What sacrifices is God calling you to consider in your journey of faith?
- How can you stand firm in your faith while engaging with the world around you?
- Pray for the courage to stand firm in your beliefs.
- Ask God to help you live authentically in your faith journey.

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Conclusion: Embracing the Cost of Discipleship

The call to discipleship is not without cost. Daniel 12, Psalm 16, Hebrews 10, and Mark 13 collectively remind us that following Christ involves trials, commitment, and a realistic understanding of what it means to be His disciple. The cost of discipleship is a willingness to endure hardship, as Daniel describes, and finding our joy and strength in God, as Psalm 16 expresses. Hebrews 10 encourages us to value Christ's sacrifice and commit to the faith community He established.

The life of Hilda of Whitby reinforces this message. Her dedication to Christ, obedience to the Church, and resolve to maintain orthodox teachings exemplify the depth of commitment that discipleship demands. Just as Hilda did, disciples today must be willing to sacrifice personal desires and submit to the

faith's truth and unity.

Following Christ means accepting the sacrifices that come with faith, including adherence to orthodoxy and readiness to face trials. Christ's promise in Mark 13 of the Spirit's presence assures us that we are not alone on this journey.

As we navigate the challenges of discipleship, we can be confident that God strengthens and sustains those who faithfully follow him. Through the examples of Scripture and saints like Hilda, we are reminded that while the cost of discipleship may be significant, the reward of eternal life with Christ is far greater.

Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Mark (St Paul's Press)

The Worship Cloud: articles by N.T. Wright and Jane Williams

Andrew's Version: <https://substack.com/@abmcg>

Church's guidance, upholding the

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Acknowledgement of use appreciated

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

Biblical Quotes are from The New Revised Standard Version - Anglicised, which is © 1990 the National Churches of Christ, USA.

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