

Breaking Open the Word

Epiphany 6C

16th February 2025



Trusting in God's Word: The Call to Faithfulness in Scripture

A weekly reflection and
sermon, with study and
prayer guides following the
RCL Lectionary

Dennis Webster

I acknowledge that Grammarly has artificially corrected some of my clumsy grammar! (Grammarly 2025).

Revised Common Lectionary

Jeremiah 17.5-10

Psalm 1

1 Corinthians 15.12-20

Luke 6.17-26

Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collect

Introduction

Reflection

Discussion Questions

Five Days of Meditation and Prayer

O Lord, we beseech thee favourably
to hear the prayers of thy people;
that we, who are justly punished for our offences,
may be mercifully delivered by thy goodness,
for the glory of thy Name;
through Jesus Christ our Saviour,
who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost,
ever one God, world without end.

INTRODUCTION

This week I have been “benched”, or in my case, organ bench! What follows is what I may have used as the basis of a sermon, built around two quotes from theworshipcloud.com, by N.T Wright and Jane Williams.

In today's article, Dennis emphasises the importance of trusting God's Word as central to our faith journey, drawing on Jeremiah, Psalms, Corinthians, and Luke scripture. He highlighted the distinction between relying on human strength and embracing God's deep, unwavering support.

This is illustrated in Jeremiah's warning against trusting in mere mortals, and he contrasted that with the blessings bestowed upon those who trust the Lord, likening them to trees planted by water, thriving even in hardships.

Dennis reflects on faith commitments, cautioning against the lure of modern cultural trends that may lead to a distorted understanding of biblical truths.

Dennis also explored how the principles in Psalm 1 and the teachings of Jesus in Luke's Sermon on the Plain guide the paths of the righteous versus the wicked. He reinforced the notion that true fulfilment and hope come from aligning with God's kingdom values rather than the temporary rewards offered by society.

Encouraging believers to hold fast to the core tenets of Christianity, especially the significance of Christ's Resurrection, Dennis called on all to resist the pressures of conforming to cultural norms that challenge their faith.

By embracing God's Word and the foundational truths of Christianity, he assured the congregation that they would find lasting peace and strength, staying steadfast like trees nourished by a constant source of water.

Prayer Prompts

- Pray for guidance to trust in God's Word more fully this week.
- Ask for strength to resist relying solely on human wisdom.
- Request insight on how to share the message of the Resurrection with others.
- Take time to pray for any personal needs or concerns shared in the group.

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.

Choosing to trust the God of the resurrection is not without risk. But in the end, it is the only thing that makes any sense.

Jane Williams

The belief in question – not a general belief in immortality or ‘survival’, but the specific belief that God will give to all Christ’s people a new bodily life corresponding to the transformed body of Jesus’ resurrection – puts all present wealth, power and posturing into a different light. What passes for contemporary thought about ethics often only asks what it may be allowed to get away with: how far it can go. More self-deception.

A genuinely Christian ethic would ask: granted that God is going to create a new world and give us a newly embodied life in the future, what sort of life is appropriate in the present? Suddenly, Jesus’ blessings and woes look remarkably appropriate. Easter unmasks the heart’s greatest deceptions.

N.T. Wright

Trusting in God's Word: The Call to Faithfulness in Scripture

Today's readings clearly express the theme of trusting God's Word. It's essential for all of us on our faith journey.

Today's readings from Jeremiah 17:5-10, Psalm 1, 1 Corinthians 15:12-20, and Luke 6:17-26 call on us to trust God's promises. They gently remind us that there's a meaningful distinction between relying on our strength and embracing the hope found in God's steadfast support.

We are asked to trust Jesus, which can result in beautiful blessings and valuable lessons. It's a journey worth undertaking, and I urge you all to recognise its significance in our daily lives.

As we reflect on these passages, including the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), we're invited to ponder an important question in today's Christianity: Should we cherish traditional teachings or open our hearts to the changes society brings for our growth? The blessings and woes in Luke 6:17-26 warmly remind us to focus our faith on the Resurrected Jesus, encouraging us to resist getting sidetracked by the tempting pursuit of fleeting rewards.

The Peril of Relying on Human Strength

Jeremiah 17:5-10 clearly warns against trusting human wisdom and strength rather than the Lord. The prophet states:

"Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the Lord" (Jeremiah 17:5, NRSV).

This suggests that people who rely solely on themselves are akin to a "shrub in the desert." They lack connection and spiritual nourishment from life's source (v. 6). On the other hand, those who place their trust in the Lord are like a "tree planted by water, thriving even during challenging times (v. 8). This metaphor resonates with Psalm 1, emphasising that proper stability and growth stem from reflecting on and embracing God's teachings.

This teaching holds a special place in Christianity! It's easy to see how many people sometimes prioritise personal ambitions, social acceptance, or financial security over their commitment to God's Word. We notice this trend in some modern movements that tweak biblical teachings to fit today's views, which often risks losing essential truths. Remember Jeremiah's warning—if we drift away from faith in God's Word

towards just human reasoning, we might find ourselves spiritually empty and disconnected from the divine blessings. We must thoughtfully reflect on our commitment to faith because the impacts of straying can be pretty severe!

The Righteous and the Wicked in Psalm 1

Psalm 1 explores the theme of trusting in God and showcases the different paths of the righteous and the wicked. The righteous are portrayed as those who "delight in the law of the Lord" and "meditate on it day and night" (Psalm 1:2, NRSV). Their unwavering steadfastness is likened to "trees planted by streams of water," painting a warm picture of divine nourishment and peace that flows through their lives.

On the other hand, the wicked are compared to "chaff that the wind blows away" (v. 4). This can lead to the feeling of being insignificant and fleeting—those who stray from God's Word are bound to encounter judgment and loss. This contrast invites today's believers to reflect thoughtfully on where they find their spiritual nourishment. Are they seeking wisdom in the everlasting truth of God, or are they swayed by passing cultural trends and personal desires?

Faith in the Resurrected Christ: The Cornerstone of Christian Hope

In 1 Corinthians 15:12-20, Paul emphasises how vital the Resurrection is to our Christian faith. He earnestly shares that if Christ hadn't risen, "our faith is futile and we are still in our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17, NRSV). Paul's vigorous defence of the resurrection reminds us how essential it is to trust in God's promises, even when they feel beyond our understanding. The Resurrection is not just a belief; it's a powerful truth that forms the foundation of our faith (2022). Discerning Between True and False Prophets in Jeremiah. <https://core.ac.uk/download/554884334.pdf>

Paul's letters to the Corinthian community continue to inspire us today, mainly as many people reflect on the supernatural aspects of Christianity. Understandably, some within the Church might feel tempted to adjust their core beliefs to align with the pressures from non-believers. In response, Paul clearly emphasises that if we let go of our faith in the Resurrection, we risk losing the very essence of Christianity. To believe is to be invited to embrace God's Word, which empowers us to cherish these fundamental truths, even when they stand apart from popular opinions or current cultural trends.

Blessings and Woes in Luke 6:17-26

In Luke 6:17-26, Jesus delivers his Sermon on the Plain, a message that contains both blessings and some firm reminders. It is full of themes found in Jeremiah 17 and Psalm 1. In offering blessings to the poor, hungry, and sorrowful, Jesus gives them hope that their struggles will be transformed in the Kingdom of God. At the same time, he gently cautions the wealthy, the comfortable, and those chasing after human praise, reminding them:

6

"Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26, NRSV).

Jesus' words discuss a perspective on Christianity that associates material success with God's favour, which may be somewhat constraining. Jesus' teachings highlight that God's kingdom is based on different values—faithfulness, humility, and a profound dependence on God, which are far more significant than earthly accomplishments.

The Magnificat and the Ethics of Christian Faithfulness

Recalling the words of The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), there is a connection with Jesus' teachings in Luke 6. Mary celebrates God's justice in uplifting the humble and gently bringing down the proud, saying:

"He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted the lowly" (Luke 1:52, NRSV).

The Magnificat and Luke 6 highlight God's care for those often overlooked or rejected. These passages remind us to be mindful of our reliance on wealth and status when considered together. This encourages modern Christians to reflect on an important ethical question: Is there a good reason to set aside traditional teachings for our benefit?

It can be tempting to bend biblical truths to get a job promotion, fit in socially, or not be true to our core values. Jesus' teachings call on us to seek fulfilment that embraces God's kingdom values. At the heart of Christianity is the call to look beyond earthly successes and

strive for lasting rewards that truly matter.

Conclusion: Holding Fast to the Basics of Faith

The readings for Epiphany 6 (Proper 2C) invite us to grow our faith in God's Word and cherish the core principles of Christianity. Jeremiah reminds us that relying solely on our strength isn't enough. Psalm 1 highlights the blessings of reflecting on God's law. Paul shares his heartfelt devotion to the importance of faith in the Resurrection. At the same time, Jesus' Sermon on the Plain encourages us to open our hearts to the unexpected values of the kingdom.

These scriptures provide a warm embrace, offering comfort in a world

that pressures us to distort biblical teachings for our benefit. Luke 6's blessings and woes inspire us, reminding us to resist seeking approval from others and stay rooted in divine truths. We are invited to trust in the Resurrected Christ, stand firm in our faith, and embrace the values of God's kingdom.

Embracing God's Word means recognising that true life, peace, and enduring hope are found not in the transient nature of human wisdom but in the solid foundation of divine truth. Those who adopt these teachings will stand firm like a tree by the water's edge, persevering through challenges and flourishing over time, filled with confidence in the Lord's promises.

Questions for Reflection

What does it mean to trust in God's Word rather than relying on our strength, according to Jeremiah 17:5-10?

- The article discusses how trusting in human strength leads to spiritual emptiness, while trusting in God brings nourishment and growth.
- Can you think of a time when you relied on your abilities instead of seeking guidance from God? What was that experience like?

How can we differentiate between the righteous and wicked paths described in Psalm 1?

- The sermon contrasts the righteous, who meditate on God's law, with the wicked, who are insignificant like chaff blown away by the wind.
- What practical steps can you take in your daily life to stay on the path of righteousness and avoid distractions from God's Word?

Why is the resurrection of Christ considered the cornerstone of Christian hope according to 1 Corinthians 15?

- The sermon emphasises that our faith would be lacking without the resurrection, and we would still be in our sins.
- How can understanding the importance of the resurrection change your perspective on challenges in your faith journey?

In Luke 6:17-26, what are the implications of Jesus' blessings and woes for how we view success and approval in our lives?

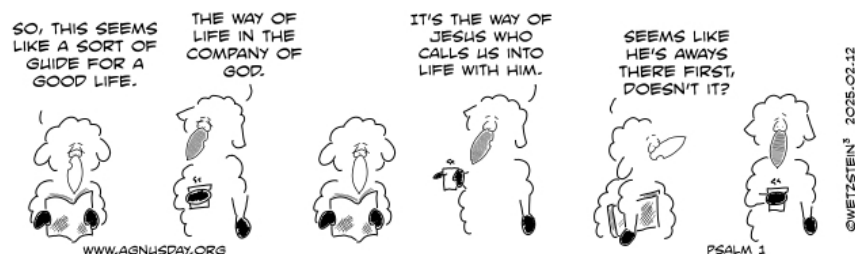
- Jesus reminds us that actual value is found not in earthly accomplishments but faithfulness and humility.
- How do society's definitions of success and approval differ from what Jesus teaches? How can you align your values more closely with his?

What ethical questions arise when considering setting aside traditional teachings for personal gain, as mentioned in the article?

- The sermon warns against the temptation to adjust biblical truths for job promotions or fitting in socially.
- Have you ever felt pressured to compromise your beliefs for a benefit? How did you navigate that situation, and what did you learn?

Discussion Starters with Younger People

- What does it mean to trust in God rather than in ourselves?
- This question comes from the theme of relying on God's promises versus human wisdom, referenced in Jeremiah 17:5-10.
- How can we live like a tree planted by the water in our everyday lives?
- This question relates to the metaphor of stability and growth from Psalm 1, where the righteous are compared to trees planted by streams.
- Why is the Resurrection so important to our faith?
- This question is derived from 1 Corinthians 15:12-20, where Paul emphasises that without the Resurrection, our faith is futile.
- How do the blessings and woes in Luke 6 challenge what we typically think about success?
- This discussion point comes from the Sermon on the Plain, where Jesus discusses true blessings versus worldly views of success.
- What lessons can we learn from The Magnificat about humility and God's justice?
- This is drawn from the connection between the Magnificat and Jesus' teachings in Luke 6 about lifting the lowly and bringing down the proud.



Walking Gently on Sacred Ground

This five-day devotional will explore the sermon from this weekend in greater depth. Each day will focus on key scriptures that emphasise the importance of trusting God's Word and the blessings of faithfulness.



Day 1 Jeremiah 17:5-10

Trusting human wisdom often leads to disappointment and spiritual emptiness. Jeremiah warns us against placing our confidence in mere mortals, reminding us that reliance on our strength is like being "a shrub in the desert." In contrast, when we trust the Lord, we flourish despite adversity like well-watered trees. This imagery serves as a powerful reminder of the nourishment and support that comes from God. We can withstand life's challenges and blossom in our faith when we anchor ourselves in His promises. Reflecting on today's scripture, we must examine where we place our trust. Are we leaning on our understanding, or do we genuinely seek God's guidance? This devotion challenges us to reassess our priorities and draw deeper from the well of His wisdom. Let us cultivate a heart that delights in God's law, leading us to meaning and purpose in our daily lives.

- What areas of my life do I rely on my strength instead of God's?
- How can I consistently implement God's teachings in my daily routine?
- How can I encourage others to trust the Lord's promises?
- Pray for wisdom to discern God's guidance in your decisions.
- Reflect on a time when trusting in God led to a positive outcome.

Day 2 Psalm 1

Psalm 1 contrasts the paths of the righteous and the wicked, illuminating the blessings that come from a life rooted in God's Word. The righteous delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night, symbolising a deep and personal connection with Him. This connection nourishes their spiritual lives, enabling them to flourish like trees planted by streams of water. Conversely, those who stray from God's teachings are likened to chaff, echoing their existence's fleeting and insubstantial nature. This passage invites us to reflect on our spiritual diets. Are we filling our minds and hearts with divine truths, or are the distractions of society consuming us? The challenge lies in evaluating our commitment to God's Word daily, ensuring that we prioritise spiritual

growth and stability above all else.

- How can I incorporate God's Word into my daily life?
- How do I define a successful and flourishing spiritual life?
- What distractions do I need to minimise to grow closer to God?
- Pray for a renewed passion for scripture and a heart that yearns to meditate on God's Word.
- Consider how you can make space for spiritual practices in your life.

Day 3 1 Corinthians 15:12-20

The resurrection of Christ is the cornerstone of our faith, as highlighted in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Without this pivotal event, our faith would indeed be futile. The resurrection affirms Jesus's divinity and serves as our assurance of eternal life. Paul emphasises that understanding and embracing the resurrection allows us to hold fast to the hope and promises of God. Being anchored in the truth of the resurrection empowers us to face cultural pressures while remaining steadfast in our beliefs. It reminds us of the significance of trusting God's Word, especially when confronted with doubts or opposing ideologies. This devotion encourages us to live boldly in our faith as we celebrate the transformative power of the resurrection in our lives.

- How does the resurrection shape my understanding of faith and hope?
- How can I share the message of the resurrection with others?
- Am I allowing cultural pressures to sway my beliefs?
- Pray for strength to uphold your faith amidst challenges.
- Consider how the resurrection influences your daily decisions and interactions.

Day 4 Luke 6:17-26

In his Sermon on the Plain, Jesus lays out a radical concept of blessings and woes that challenges societal expectations. He blesses the poor, hungry, and mourners, offering hope that transcends current hardships. Simultaneously, He cautions the wealthy and self-satisfied, inviting us to rethink what it means to be truly blessed in the Kingdom of God. This perspective echoes the theme of dependence on God, emphasising spiritual worth over material gain. As we

embrace Jesus' teachings, we are invited to align our priorities with God's values rather than the fleeting standards of the world. This devotion encourages us to seek fulfilment in grace and humility, recognising that true success in God's kingdom is not dictated by worldly applause but faithfulness and a heart open to his leading.

- What does true blessing look like from God's perspective?
- How can I cultivate a heart that seeks God rather than earthly rewards?
- In what areas of my life do I need to redefine success?
- Pray for humility and a deeper understanding of God's kingdom values.
- Reflect on how you can embrace the blessings and challenges in your life.

Day 5 Luke 1:46-55

The Magnificat presents a powerful articulation of God's justice and mercy as Mary praises Him for lifting the humble and casting down the proud. This pivotal moment reminds us that God's kingdom differs fundamentally from worldly paradigms. Mary's song reveals a profound faith in God's ability to overturn societal norms, emphasising that true fulfilment comes from aligning with God's purposes rather than personal agendas. In light of this passage, we must examine our lives: Are we clinging too tightly to our status and possessions? Are we willing to embrace God's will, even when it challenges our comfort? This devotion encourages us to cultivate a spirit of humility and to commit ourselves to walking in the values of God's kingdom, as Mary exemplifies.

- How can I celebrate and uplift those who are marginalised in my community?
- What comforts or privileges might I need to surrender to follow God's call?
- Where can I seek to promote justice and humility in my daily life?
- Pray for a heart that reflects God's justice and care for the marginalised.
- Consider how you can engage in humility and service in your community.

End notes and further reading

Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke (St Paul's Press)
The Gospel of Matthew
The Gospel of John

Tannehill, Robert C, **Narrative Unity Luke Acts Vol: A Literary Interpretation: Volume One: The Gospel According to Luke:**, Augsburg Fortress Publishers 1991

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

The Vine Newsletter SPCK

The Working Preacher: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fifth-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-luke-51-11-8>

First United Methodist Church commentaary, Fort Riley: <https://www.jc1stunc.com/post/called-into-the-deep-a-reflection-on-luke-5-1-11>

Center for Excellence in Preaching, Calvin Institute, Missouri: <https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2025-02-03/luke-51-11-4/>

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

Bible Hub etc



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.

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.

Study notes are prepared in conjunction and by subscription of www.church.tech, an AI
open source for

pastors. Content is modified for local use.

Images are either from public domain, theworshipcloud.org, original work or
generated.

tastigr.info

is registered to D. M Webster

and all rights are

reserved. © 2025

www.breaking-open-the-word.org

Email: dennis-at-stpetersbythelakeanglicanchurch.org