

Breaking Open the Word

The Fifth Sunday of Easter
18th May, 2025



**WHO AM I TO
HINDER GOD?**

**From Joppa to the World:
Taking the Voice of God to
the Ends of the Earth**

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

Dennis Webster



Revised Common Lectionary
Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 11.1-18

Psalm 148

Revelation 21.1-6

John 13.31-35

Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collect

Introduction

Reflection

Discussion Questions

Five Days of Meditation and Prayer

O Almighty God,
who alone canst order the unruly wills
and affections of sinful men:
Grant unto thy people,
that they may love the thing which thou commandest,
and desire that which thou dost promise: that so,
among the sundry and manifold changes of the world,
our hearts may surely there be fixed,
where true joys are to be found:
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

INTRODUCTION

In his sermon titled "From Joppa to the World: Taking the Voice of God to the Ends of the Earth," Dennis explores the significance of Joppa as a pivotal location in Scripture where God's call challenges individuals to transcend their comfort zones.

He reflects on the stories of Jonah and Peter, emphasising their contrasting responses to divine missions.

While Jonah fled from God's call to reach outsiders, Peter seized the opportunity to share the Gospel with the Gentiles, illustrating that God's voice transcends barriers and invites inclusion.

Dennis urges the congregation to discern whether they will respond to God's voice with obedience or resistance.

Furthermore, Dennis emphasises the mission's broader scope, extending beyond humanity to all creation, as expressed in Psalm 148. He stresses that every effort toward stewardship and care for the earth is an integral part of the Gospel.

He concludes by reminding the congregation that love should be the defining mark of their mission, as taught by Jesus in John 13.

The sermon calls upon believers to step boldly into their own "Joppa," engaging with the world through love and compassion, all while recognising the voice of God leading them to act and proclaim that God is making all things new.

Prayer Prompts

- Write down the names of all for whom your prayers have been asked.
- Pray for courage to respond to God's voice in our lives.
- Ask God to show us how we can love others in practical ways this week.
- Pray for guidance in caring for creation and fulfilling our mission.

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.

From Joppa to the World:
Taking the Voice of God to
the Ends of the Earth

Once again, we begin in a city
by the sea called **Joppa**. Now
renamed after the oranges of
the area, Jaffa, it is a most
interesting place to stay, sit,
and dwell, listening for the
Word of God.

In the Bible, Joppa is not
merely a geographical location;
it's a **crossroads**—a place where
prophets and apostles
encounter the voice of God
and are called to carry that
voice beyond the confines of
comfort, tradition, and fear.

A few stories from Joppa
resonate throughout Scripture:
the story of **Jonah**, who tried to
flee from God's mission, and
the story of **Peter**, who was
called to accept a mission he
never imagined. Last week, we
heard the story of the raising of
Tabitha/Dorcas, and Peter's
acceptance of hospitality at the
house of a certain Simon, the
Tanner.

And in these stories, God is
asking us something today:

**Will we take his voice to the
ends of the earth? Or will we
hold it back?**

1. Joppa: A Place of Decision

Let's begin with **Jonah**.

God called Jonah to go to
Nineveh—to speak a word of
warning and mercy to people
he saw as outsiders, even
enemies.

But Jonah didn't want to go.

So he ran. And where did he
go?
To **Joppa**.

From there, he boarded a ship
heading in the opposite
direction. Away from Nineveh.
Away from God's mission. Away
from the world God wanted to
reach.

Now fast forward centuries
later.

Another man of God is in
Joppa.
Peter, a Jewish follower of
Jesus.

He is also challenged by God's
voice—this time through a vision
of unclean animals being
lowered from heaven. A voice
says, "What God has made
clean, you must not call
unclean."

And Peter learns that **God is
opening the door to the
Gentiles**—those once
considered outside the
covenant.

Just like Jonah, Peter is being
called to transcend the
**boundaries of his
imagination**, crossing lines of
culture, religion, and comfort.

But unlike Jonah, **Peter obeys**.

He visits the house of
Cornelius, a Gentile. He
witnesses the Holy Spirit
descending upon people who
don't resemble him or worship
as he does. And he returns to
Jerusalem, declaring: "*Who
was I to hinder God?*" (Acts
11:17)

2. The Voice of God Breaks Boundaries

This is what the voice of God
does.

It **transcends** boundaries.
It **includes** the excluded.
It **calls** us to go, not stay.

But here's the thing: the Church
still faces this choice.

Will we, like Peter, recognise
the voice of God when it calls
us beyond ourselves?
Or will we, like Jonah, run in
the other direction?

We don't always get to choose
the direction of the mission. But
we always get to choose our
response.

3. All Creation Is Listening (Psalm 148)

And this mission is not just
about people. It's about **all of
creation**.

Psalm 148 is a magnificent,
uplifting song of praise—from
the heavens, the sea, the
mountains, the wild beasts, and
yes—even the weather!

"Praise the Lord from the
earth... fire and hail, snow and
mist... mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars..."

It's as if the whole earth is
being invited into the choir.

The voice of God speaks not
only to humanity but also to
creation itself. And creation
responds in praise.

So our mission, as followers of
Jesus, is not merely to carry

good news to individuals. It is to unite **with the whole earth** in declaring that the Creator is also the Redeemer, and that every part of life—every creature, every landscape—is being drawn into God’s purposes.

4. God Is Making All Things New (Revelation 21)

And here’s the promise:

In **Revelation 21**, we hear the voice from the throne say:

“See, the home of God is among mortals... He will dwell with them... See, I am making all things new.”

Notice what it says: not “all new things”—but **all things new**.

God is not abandoning creation. He’s redeeming it.

This means our mission includes **creation care**. Stewardship. Sustainability. Justice for people and for the planet.

It’s all part of the Gospel.

Every tree we plant, every garden we tend, every effort we make to reduce harm to the earth—these are acts of **worship** and **witness**. They are part of how we say to the world: **God has not given up on this world—and neither will we.**

5. Love as the Mark of the Mission (John 13)

But how will people know this mission is real?

How will they trust the voice of God when they hear it through us?

Jesus gives us the answer in John 13.

Just before his death, he says: *“A new commandment I give you, that you love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. Everyone will know you are my disciples if you love one another.”*

Love is the mark. Not an argument. Not dominance. Not fear. **Love.**

And this love—honest, sacrificial, visible love—gives power to the mission.

It is love that welcomes strangers. It is love that crosses boundaries. The love hears the groaning of creation and responds with compassion and action.

6. From Joppa to the World: What Is Ours to Do?

So here we are—**our kind of Joppa**.

We are a Church standing at a crossroads.

Will we resist God's voice, like Jonah, because the calling seems too difficult, foreign, and costly?

Or will we, like Peter, hear the voice, see the Spirit at work, and boldly go into new places—carrying the Gospel, loving our neighbour, caring for creation, and proclaiming that God is making all things new?

We are not called to save the world alone.

But we are called to be faithful witnesses, to listen for God’s voice, to speak it where it’s needed, to love as Christ loved us, and to care for the earth and all who dwell in it.

Closing Words

Friends, this is our moment.
This is our Joppa.
And the voice of God is calling.

Let us not run. Let us not hesitate. Let us go—from Joppa to the world—in the strength that God provides, with hearts full of love and hands ready to serve.

So ask yourself:

What is your Joppa moment?

Where is God calling you to go, speak, love, and act?

Don’t run. Don’t wait. Go.

God is already ahead of you, making all things new.

Discussion Questions

What does the story of Jonah teach us about responding to God's calling, and how does it compare to Peter's response in Joppa?

-The sermon explores Jonah's attempt to flee from God's command and Peter's obedience to God's calling, highlighting two distinct responses to God's voice.

-Can you think of a time when you hesitated to follow a personal calling or task? How did you feel, and what did you learn from that experience?

How can the Church today recognise and respond to the voice of God calling us beyond our comfort zones?

-The sermon emphasises that the Church faces the choice of recognising God's voice and either moving forward or turning back, much like Jonah and Peter.

-What is one area in your life where you feel God might be prompting you to step out of your comfort zone? How can you act on that?

In what ways is the mission of sharing God's voice with the world connected to caring for creation, according to the sermon?

-The sermon notes that our mission encompasses not only people but also all of creation, and that caring for the environment is integral to the Gospel.

-How can you personally help support the environment and show love for creation in your community?

Why do you think love is described as the mark of true discipleship, according to John 13, as mentioned in the sermon?

-The sermon refers to Jesus' commandment to love one another as the defining characteristic of being his disciples, contrasting love with other responses, such as arguments or fear.

-How can you demonstrate love in your daily interactions with others, especially those who may be different from you?

What steps can we take as a community of faith to ensure that we are listening for and responding to God's voice in our lives?

-The sermon encourages the Church to be faithful witnesses, to listen for God's voice, and to respond actively, just as Peter did.

What are some practical ways your group can get involved in loving neighbours and responding to the needs in your community?

Walking Gently on Sacred Land

This five-day devotional will delve deeper into the sermon from this weekend. We will explore the calls to action from the Word of God, the meaning behind the stories of Joppa, and how we can embody love and stewardship in our lives.



Day 1

Jonah 1:1-3

On this first day of our devotional journey, we begin with the story of Jonah, whom God called to deliver an essential message to Nineveh—a city he considered an enemy. Instead of embracing his mission, Jonah chose to flee to Joppa, boarding a ship to escape his calling. This act serves as a profound reminder of our inclination to resist God's voice when it leads us to uncomfortable places.

Just as Jonah faced a crossroads and chose detour over destiny, we often grapple with what God is asking of us. The challenge is not merely to recognise God's voice but to respond to it. Will we move beyond our comfort zones and answer the call to share God's love and truth, or will we, like Jonah, run in the opposite direction?

-What fears may hold you back from fulfilling your God-given purpose?

-In what areas of your life is God calling you to be bold and obedient?

-How can you better recognise God's voice amidst distractions?

-Pray for the courage to follow where God leads you.

-Ask God to help you recognise and overcome your fears.

Day 2

Acts 10:9-16

As we delve into Day 2, we reflect on Peter's experience in Joppa, where he received a transformative vision. Unlike Jonah, Peter responded to God's call to break through cultural and religious boundaries. This pivotal moment reminds us that God invites us not just to act in love but to love inclusively, extending grace and acceptance beyond our comfort zones.

When Peter recognised the voice of God calling him to the Gentiles, he moved past his preconceived notions. This challenges us to ask: Who are the “outsiders” in our lives? Are we ready to welcome those who are different from us? The call to love transcends all barriers, and God's voice encourages us to embrace all of creation in our mission.

- Who in your life is God calling you to extend love and grace to?
- What barriers do you need to break to share God's love?
- How can you become more inclusive in your community and relationships?

- Pray for openness to welcome those you see as different.
- Reflect on ways to dismantle barriers in your heart and community.

Day 3 Psalm 148

On Day 3, we focus on Psalm 148, a celestial chorus of praise that encompasses all of creation. This passage not only highlights nature's reverence towards its Creator but also our responsibility to join this grand symphony of glorifying God. It underscores that our mission extends beyond humanity, encompassing all of creation. Consider how creation itself listens and responds to God's voice.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to unite our voices with nature in praise, recognising that every tree, every creature, and every mountain plays a role in God's narrative. What might this mean for us in our care for the environment and our engagement in stewardship?

- How can you be more aware of creation's voice in your daily life?
- What steps can you take to better care for the environment?
- In what ways can you recognise God's presence in creation?

- Pray for a heart that is attuned to the cries of creation.
- Ask God to guide you in actions of stewardship over the earth.

Day 4 Revelation 21:1-5

On this fourth day, we draw from Revelation 21, where God promises to make all things new. This passage assures us that God

is not abandoning creation but is actively redeeming it. The hope we find in this promise compels us to act in ways that reflect God's redemptive mission, integrating care for people and the planet into our daily lives.

The challenge set before us is to understand our role in this redemption. Every act of kindness towards others and every effort to protect creation is a part of our worship. Let us remember that we are not only called to share the Gospel, but also to participate actively in God's restorative work in the world.

- What are some practical ways you can live out your faith through action?
- How do you view your responsibility towards creation in the light of God's promise?
- Where can you see God at work in creating new things around you?
- Pray for wisdom and creativity in your stewardship efforts.
- Reflect on areas in your life where God is inviting you to make a difference.

Day 5 John 13:34-35

As we conclude our devotional, we revisit Jesus' words in John 13, where He gives us a new commandment—to love one another. This love is the essence of our mission, the proof of our discipleship. In a world hungry for connection, our passion must reflect the heart of Christ: honest, sacrificial, and visible.

This day encourages us to reflect on how our expressions of love influence our testimony to the world. What would it look like for our communities to be known by love? How can we embody this love in our daily interactions, crossing barriers, and extending a hand to those in need? As we embrace this challenge, we become instruments of God's voice in the world.

- In what ways can you show love to those around you this week?
- How can you cultivate love within your community?
- What barriers are you willing to break to show love to others?

- Pray for strength to love as Jesus loved.
- Consider the specific actions you can take to demonstrate Christ-like love.

End notes and further reading

Sacra Pagina:
Paul's Press)

The Gospel of Luke (St
The Gospel of Matthew
The Gospel of John

The following authors as featured at
The Worship Cloud

www.theworshipcloud.com

N. T. Wright,
Jane Williams,
P James Woodward,
Paula Gooder
Mark Pryce,
David Perry

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



Brabarlung Totem

This is produced on
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