

Breaking Open the Word

Pentecost 6C, Proper 11, Ordinary Sunday 16
20th July 2025



The Better Portion:
Compassion that Listens,
Moves,
and Transforms

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

Dennis Webster



Revised Common Lectionary Related

**Pentecost 6C,
Proper 11,
Ordinary Sunday 16**

Genesis 18.1-10a
Psalm 15
Colossians 1.15-28
Luke 10.38-end



Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collect

BCP

*Grant, O Lord,
we beseech thee,
that the course of this world
may be so peaceably ordered by thy governance,
that thy Church may joyfully serve thee
in all godly quietness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

INTRODUCTION

What if the key to an abundant life lies not in doing more, but in listening better?

In this sermon, Dennis draws us into the depths of Luke 10, where three distinct yet interconnected scenes reveal the essence of the Christian life—a life steeped in the nearness of God.

He starts with Jesus commissioning the seventy disciples to share peace and healing, emphasising that the Kingdom of God is not a distant hope but an immediate reality, rooted in relationships and vulnerability.

As the narrative unfolds, we encounter the parable of the Good Samaritan, a powerful reminder that true compassion defies societal boundaries and expectations.

Finally, Dennis highlights Mary and Martha's encounter with Jesus, illustrating that discipleship begins with attentive listening rather than mere busyness.

This message is an urgent call to reflect on our own lives and priorities—who are the strangers we are called to see, and how can we seek the 'better portion' of time spent with Christ?

We are all on a transformative journey as we learn to listen, love, and live out the Kingdom's reality in our daily lives.

We are called to deepen our faith; listen to the full message and embrace the better portion waiting for you.

Prayer Point

- Ask God to help us see the kingdom in our everyday lives.
- Pray for hearts that are willing to cross boundaries in compassion.
- Ask for the wisdom to listen closely and respond to His guidance this week.
- Lift up any personal prayer requests that you may have.

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.

For what we are about to receive, may we all be truly thankful!

**Texts: Luke 10:1–42
(NRSV)**

One of the most important things we often overlook when using the Lectionary system is that, unless you are reading the Bible continuously over a set period, you tend to get only small portions.

Remembering that the Bible is, in fact, a library of books, there is a lot that requires us to recall what was read before and hope that the preacher can draw together the threads. Some people like to read it 'chapter and verse', often neglecting to own the fact it wasn't constructed that way, or gloss over any contradictions.

Then, like these last three weeks dealing with Luke's tenth chapter, we can lose sight of the ordered account that has been made for us as we, like Luke, try to make sense of everything. Luke chapter 10 is one of those

remarkable passages where, if you sit with it long enough, the shape of the Christian life becomes startlingly clear. Three scenes, stitched together not just by narrative order, but by deep spiritual intention: Jesus sending out the seventy disciples, the telling of the parable of the Good Samaritan, and the household moment between Martha and Jesus. Three moments. One Kingdom. And in all of them, a call to live in the nearness of God.

1. A Kingdom That Comes Close (Luke 10:1–24)

We begin with the seventy being sent out, two by two, like lambs among wolves. They are told not to carry a purse or sandals, not to greet people along the way, but to focus entirely on the task of proclaiming peace and healing. "The kingdom of God has come near to you," Jesus says. This is not a mere hope for the future. It's a present reality

breaking into people's homes, lives, and hearts through hospitality, vulnerability, and trust.

The disciples go out without power as the world sees it. No provisions, no protections. But this is the point. The Kingdom of God is not carried by might or control. It is held in a relationship. In being received. In risk.

Jesus rejoices when they return. Not because demons submit, but because they are beginning to see. "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see."

And that invitation is for us, too: To see that God's reign is not abstract. It is as close as the person who opens their door. As simple as the peace we speak. As profound as the healing we pray for.

2. A Kingdom That Crosses Boundaries (Luke 10:25–37)

The second movement in this chapter is the parable of the Good Samaritan — perhaps the most well-known story Jesus ever told.

It begins with a legal question:

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answers with another question — and eventually, with a story.

A man is beaten and left for dead. A priest sees him and passes by. A Levite sees him and does the same. Then comes a Samaritan — a cultural outsider, one despised by many of Jesus' Jewish hearers. And it is he, the foreigner, who is moved with compassion. He not only tends to the man's wounds but also places him on his animal, pays for his care, and promises to return.

This is compassion that moves. It breaks through social and religious boundaries. It sees the suffering one not as a label — not "enemy," not "other," — but as a fellow human being, created in the image of God. Jesus finishes with the command: "Go and do likewise."

Not, "Think about it."

Not, "Feel inspired by it."

But "Go and do."

Here, compassion becomes not just a feeling but a practice. A risk. An offering.

We must ask ourselves: Who are the people I'm tempted to walk

past? Who have I been trained to see as too complex, too different, too far gone? Jesus doesn't allow us to draw lines around our mercy. He expands the very idea of neighbour until it includes the enemy, the outsider, and the inconvenient.

3. A Kingdom That Listens First (Luke 10:38–42)

And then, suddenly, the pace shifts. We find ourselves in a quiet home. Just as the seventy were sent, Jesus received the hospitality due to an itinerant worker. He is staying in one space and bringing the news of the kingdom to those who are sitting and listening attentively. Martha is working hard. She is doing what is expected of her — providing hospitality, caring for the meal, fulfilling the duties of a host.

Mary, by contrast, sits at Jesus' feet, listening as a disciple. Not passive, but present. Martha is frustrated, maybe even justified. "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work?" The responsibility for Mary's

behaviour is placed firmly at the feet of Jesus, where Mary was sitting, listening. The idea of a meal is hinted at in the Greek using not 'better part' but rather, likening the choice to receiving a dish, a portion. Mary had chosen the portion that Jesus was offering, not the need to do things in another way.

This passage is not necessarily a feminist template for abandoning or role defining according to gender. Jesus came to the house bearing the news that the kingdom of God is near. The situation was to either accept the offer or not. And Jesus, so gently, replies: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things. There is a need for only one thing. Mary has chosen the better portion."

I reiterate again: the kingdom of God is as close as the person who opens their door. As simple as the peace we speak. As profound as the healing we pray for.

St Augustine, in Sermon 104, noted this about the scene.

Martha was absorbed in the

matter of how to feed the Lord; Mary was absorbed in the matter of how to be fed by the Lord. Martha was preparing a banquet for the Lord, and Mary was already revelling in the banquet of the Lord¹

The story of Mary and Martha reminds us that discipleship begins in listening. Before we rush to serve, to organise, to respond, we are called to sit. To listen. To abide.

And perhaps that is the most countercultural act of all.

We live in a world that prizes busyness, productivity, and constant noise. But the Kingdom of God breaks in through silence, attention, and worship.

Mary teaches us that compassion — the kind that truly transforms — begins not in action, but in adoration.

Conclusion: Listening, Moving, Transforming

So, how do these stories hold together?

- The Seventy teach us that we are sent — vulnerable, trusting, proclaiming peace.
- The Samaritan teaches us that love must cross every boundary and be lived out in mercy.
- Mary teaches us to begin not with the doing, but with the listening — to let compassion be rooted in presence with Christ.

In a world full of distractions, where we're tempted to define others by their differences, and ourselves by our achievements, Luke 10 brings us back to the better portion.

To sit with Jesus.

To see the stranger.

To serve with grace.

To proclaim that the Kingdom is near — because He is near.

Let us listen well. Let us love boldly.

And may our lives — as individuals and as the Church — reflect a compassion that listens, moves, and transforms.

1: Dr Andrew McGowan, Dean of Yale School of Divinity Martha and Mary Eat

with Jesus: <https://substack.com/home/post/p-167973868>

Discussion Questions

What does it mean to you that the Kingdom of God is described as 'near' in Luke 10:9?

- In the sermon, it's emphasised that the Kingdom of God is not just something for the future, but is a present reality that we can experience through relationships and acts of compassion.
- Can you think of a time when you felt God's presence in your life? How did that change your perspective on your daily actions?

Why do you think Jesus chose a Samaritan to be the hero of the parable in Luke 10:25-37?

- The sermon explores how the Samaritan, often regarded as an outsider, demonstrates genuine compassion to the beaten man, thereby transcending social and religious boundaries.
- Who are the people around you that might be considered 'outsiders'? How might you show them compassion?

How does the story of Mary and Martha challenge our view of productivity and busyness in our lives?

- The sermon illustrates that while Martha was busy serving, Mary chose to sit at Jesus' feet, highlighting the importance of being present over merely doing tasks.
- In what areas of your life do you feel pressured to be busy? How can you make time to 'sit and listen' instead?

What are some practical ways we can live out the command to 'go and do likewise' as shown in the parable of the Good Samaritan?

- The sermon encourages us not just to feel inspired by compassion, but to actively practice it in our daily lives with those around us.
- Think of one small act of kindness you could do this week. How will you ensure that you follow through?

Why is listening considered an essential part of compassionate living, according to the sermon?

- The sermon emphasises that true compassion starts with listening to others and understanding their needs, rather than rushing to take action.
- How can you improve your listening skills in conversations with friends or family? What impact could that have on your relationships?

Five-Day Devotion

This five-day devotional will serve a rich portion of the sermon from this weekend. We will explore the themes of compassion, vulnerability, and listening as we reflect on the powerful messages shared through the stories in Luke chapter 10.



Day 1 Luke 10:1–24

The first day of our devotional emphasises the call to embrace vulnerability as we are sent out into the world, echoing the instructions given to the seventy disciples. They were not equipped with worldly power or resources but were instructed to proclaim peace and healing, reminding us that God's kingdom comes close through our actions of trust and hospitality. This call challenges us to step beyond our comforts and to see the divine work in ordinary circumstances.

- What fears hold me back from taking a step of faith?
- How can I practice receiving others in my life more openly?
- In what ways can I proclaim peace in my immediate surroundings?
- Pray for courage to step out in faith.
- Reflect on moments of connection and trust you have experienced.

Day 2 Luke 10:25–37

On the second day, we delve into the parable of the Good Samaritan, a poignant reminder that love must cross boundaries and be embodied in acts of mercy. The Samaritan's compassion challenges our assumptions about who our neighbours are, urging us to see beyond labels and engage with those in need. This day calls us to action: to not just feel inspired by love but to live it out by serving those who are often overlooked or labelled as "other."

- Who in my life have I tended to overlook or judge?
- How can I expand my understanding of who my neighbour is?
- What can I do to show love to someone who may seem different from me?
- Pray for a heart open to seeing and serving those in need.
- Reflect on ways compassion has transformed your life.

Day 3 Luke 10:38–42

As we move to day three, we find ourselves in the home of Martha and Mary, where the contrast between busy service and attentive listening emerges. This passage teaches us the importance of prioritising our relationship with Christ above our busy lives. Like Mary, who chose the 'better portion', we are invited to take time to sit, listen, and absorb God's presence in our lives. In a world filled with distractions, discipling begins in stillness and prayer.

- In what areas of my life can I create space for quiet and listening?
- How does my busyness impact my relationship with God?
- What does it mean for me to choose the better portion each day?
- Pray for the ability to prioritise time with God amidst life's demands.
- Reflect on what you hear in silence when you spend time with the Lord.

Day 4 Luke 10:1–42

Day four synthesises the themes we've explored thus far. The Seventy confirm our calling to step out in faith and vulnerability, while the parable of the Good Samaritan

illustrates the necessity of active compassion. Lastly, the home of Martha and Mary exemplifies that before we serve, we must first listen and connect with God. In summarising these lessons, we are reminded that our faith must be rooted in listening, moving, and transforming.

- How can I integrate the lessons of listening and serving in my daily life?
- What steps can I take this week to practice seeing others as neighbours?
- In what ways can I invite God's presence into my busyness?
- Pray for guidance on how to embody these principles in your life.
- Consider specific acts of kindness you can perform this week.

Day 5 Luke 10:1–42

As we conclude our five-day devotional, we reflect on the overarching themes of listening, moving, and transforming our faith into action. These stories serve to remind us that the Kingdom of God is near, and as followers, we are called to sit with Jesus, observe the needs of others, and live with compassion. Ultimately, let our lives be a testament to the proximity of God's kingdom through our actions and presence.

- What changes can I make to ensure I'm living out these principles daily?
- Who can I reach out to this week to extend compassion and grace?
- How can I grow in my ability to listen to God and others?
- Pray for a heart that reflects God's compassion and presence.
- Reflect on how you can continue to grow in these areas beyond this devotional.

End notes and further reading

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

The Gospel of Matthew

The Gospel of John

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

David Adams, Glimpses of Glory, Year C

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



Brabarlung Totem

This is produced on Gunaikurnai Country and our respects are made to the First Nations people everywhere.

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and all