

# Breaking Open the Word

Pentecost 10C, Proper 15, Ordinary Sunday 20  
17<sup>th</sup> August, 2025



**When aligning ourselves  
with the Heart of God  
is  
Uncomfortable**

A weekly reflection based on the preaching at St Peter's by the Lake, Paynesville, together with a study guide based on the readings, some liturgical resources RCL Lectionary, and a weekly devotion

**Dennis Webster**



Revised Common Lectionary Related

**Pentecost 10C**

**Proper 15,**

**Ordinary Sunday 20C**

Jeremiah 23.23-29

Psalm 82

Hebrews 11.29 - 12.2

Luke 12.49-56



**In Memoria**

Royce Leslie Webster

1966–2025

Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collect

**BCP**

**Grant to us, Lord,  
we beseech thee,  
the spirit to think and do always  
such things as be rightful:  
that we, who cannot do any thing  
that is good without thee,  
may by thee be enabled to live  
according to thy will:  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

## INTRODUCTION

What does true peace look like in a world filled with strife and conflict? This question invites us to explore the profound nature of peace that Jesus offers, which stands in stark contrast to the superficial peace that many individuals often settle for—peace that is merely built on denial and avoidance of difficult issues.

Jesus' peace is not just a soothing balm; it is a transformative force that can sometimes demand that we confront uncomfortable truths to bring about true healing and restoration in our lives. It encourages us to face our internal and external conflicts head-on, not in order to incite division, but rather to foster genuine resolution and meaningful growth. Acknowledging conflict is essential; it is through this acknowledgment that we can begin to understand ourselves and the challenges we face.

We are often encouraged to reflect on our own lives, to evaluate our circumstances, and to recognise the struggles we endure. This reflection leads us to embrace a holistic sense of peace, one that leads to restoration, even when the journey may be painful or challenging. It is through the discomfort of this process that we can emerge stronger and more resilient.

As a community of believers, we are called to embody this radical peace in our actions and interactions with others. We must seek opportunities to mend broken relationships, to heal wounds, and to create an environment where peace can flourish instead of perpetuating conflict and division. It is our responsibility to nurture a culture of understanding and compassion, where dialogue and empathy replace discord and misunderstanding.

Let us respond to this urgent call: seek the truth in our relationships with one another. In doing so, we allow the deep, authentic peace of Christ to transform not only our individual lives but also the world around us. This transformative peace invites us to act with kindness and grace, fostering an atmosphere where love prevails over hatred and unity triumphs over division. Through our commitment to living out this peace, we can create ripples of hope and healing that extend far beyond our immediate circles, impacting our communities and the world at large.

As we walk on this sacred ground, teach us  
Lord to make known your kingdom, and let  
this reflect in all that we do and speak.

[breaking-open-the-word.org](http://breaking-open-the-word.org)

When being aligned to the heart of God is uncomfortable

I make no secret of my origins from NW Tasmania. I attended school in Burnie, an industrial seaport. Every day, on the school bus from Penguin—a 1961 SB3 Bedford with art-deco curves—we crossed the River Emu bridge, breathed in the scent of the particleboard mill, and then the Associated Pulp and Paper Mills (APPM).

It was a town where APPM—collectively known as “The Pulp”—was the particle board mill, a sulphuric acid plant, another facility that turned ilmenite into titanium pigment and ore transported from the West Coast—requiring significant community investment for smooth operation in the 1930s. Why the deep breath? Because it didn’t half pong!

During school days, the town was known as Burnie, a lively industrial town. I remember a fortnight when RAAF bombers flew from Sale on reconnaissance over the Pulp. They never blew it up, but the sight of the F1-11s streaking and swooping distracted classes! It seemed as if “The Mainland” was at war with Hellyer residents.

Within twenty years, Burnie faced internal conflict as new Pulp NBH owners, amid a recession, cut costs by removing above-award pay and refusing union talks, leading to a general strike. The management dismissed all boiler-makers and engineers, leading to the 1992 strike.

During the Keating era, opposition leaders John Howard and Peter Reith supported NBH executives, deepening community divisions. Fly-in, fly-out non-union workers kept the plant running. Many local job seekers were hired as security guards to prevent union activity. The strike affected other industries, shutting down the rail line crossing the mills. Travelling through the plant meant crossing a picket line. Without trains, the sulphuric acid plant couldn’t supply the titanium plant with H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>, impacting Hobart’s zinc smelting at EZ Ltd.

Soon, the impact spread beyond the city. Workers in related industries were laid off. The mostly male workforce was supported by SPEC (Support Pulp Employees Committee), which pooled resources but faced opposition from family and friends outside the APPM family, although they were also affected by the income loss.

Among union figures, a couple resembled my siblings, including my late younger brother, Royce, who passed Monday of this past week. They argued against a company employing unqualified boiler workers and stood firm on principle. Fathers turned against children, mothers against daughters, and mothers-in-law faced more pressure, trying to mediate. It was like Luke 12 was playing out at a scenic, slightly polluted seaport. Where was the RAAF when needed?

Mediated talks between APPM management and unions led to a return-to-work agreement. Workers were reinstated with modified conditions, but many original benefits were not restored. The union claimed victory in preventing full condition loss and rehiring most sacked workers. Despite ending pickets, social division in Burnie persisted for years, with unresolved tensions among families and neighbours over strike support, crossing picket lines, or siding with management.

APPM’s aggressive stance set a precedent for later employer confrontations in Australia, influencing industrial strategies throughout the 1990s; some locals, especially those involved in stevedoring, may remember this. The dispute highlighted the importance of community solidarity but also revealed how fiercely industrial conflict could divide a town.

APPM closed in 2009 as owners consolidated paper production at a single mill in Maryvale, Gippsland, instead of maintaining smaller mills needing costly rebuilds. While the export of raw timber chips continues, Burnie finally found peace, albeit with less prosperity, after a generation of workers had their family lives torn apart. I served a curacy in Burnie in the mid-1990s after the dispute ended, but the effects lingered.

Also, an unfortunate scandal involving the Church’s overreach, dating back to a conversation in Normandy between Henry II and Archbishop Thomas Becket, led to a deal where, unless a Church worker committed a capital offence, the Church could administer justice separately from the State. This decision caused scandal,

reformation, counter-reformation, neglect, abuse, and legalism to become part of the Church culture for a millennium.

Bruce Epperly, a US theologian and preacher, states in his weekend sermon:

“Most preachers might be on holiday this week. There is little comfort in these words. Division, persecution, destruction, and punishment are the watchwords. Jesus comes not to comfort but to challenge and agitate. God’s message divides as well as unites, and our interpretations can deepen divisions that threaten the nation and religious community.”

There have been moments before this week when I wished I were on holiday or that I could change the readings like I did last week, but here I stand, a member of the Church Workers Union, united and hopefully undefeated!

Sometimes, justice requires us to take a stand that may, and often does, put us at odds with others around us. How do we respond to our sisters and brothers when, in all good conscience, we cannot agree with their viewpoint? Surely, if we are ambassadors of God’s peace, then we should want all people to be like the oil that pours down upon Aaron’s beard, bringing prosperity to others? That image references Aaron’s priestly robes with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. His anointing as high priest symbolised the anointing of all tribes.

We are all anointed through baptism, but prayer for unity shouldn’t be taken for granted. When things are not right, we must speak out against anything that harms anyone in the community, including ourselves, our families, or the wider community.

I came across this commentary today and will read it as it makes perfect sense of the Gospel today. I quote Rev’d Debie Thomas, an Indian-born US seminarian at Berkeley and Episcopal priest. I like her writings as they invite readers and worshipers into a “spacious Christianity,” one where faith, identity, and spirituality can coexist with mystery, honesty, and transformation.

Thomas writes,

When Jesus talks about division in Luke’s Gospel, he’s describing, not prescribing. It’s not his aim to pit fathers against

sons or mothers against daughters. He doesn’t want us to stir conflict for its own sake or use his words to justify violence or war. His words remind us that the peace he offers isn’t the fake peace of denial, dishonesty, or harmful compromise.

Instead, it’s a holistic, truth-telling, disinfecting peace the kind of deep, life-changing peace that breaks to mend and cuts to heal.

Scripture presents us with many beautiful names for Jesus. Son of God. Son of Man. Emmanuel. Logos. Lord. Christ. Dare we add another? Jesus, the Disturber of Peace? What would it be like to allow him to unsettle us, deconstruct us, and divide us? What would it be like to experience the peace that costs, the peace that breaks, the peace that saves? Jesus will indeed “guide our feet into the way of peace.” He will. But only if we’re willing to let him.

Our faith can sometimes put us at odds with others. Surrounded by the Great Cloud of Witnesses- many bearing wounds from the crucifixion of Jesus and the promises of eternal life- they show that sometimes, there is no gain without pain. Being Christian, baptised, or faithful doesn’t give us a ‘happy ever after’ now; that belongs to the world to come. We are called to live our faith, aware that we may see a speck in our neighbour’s eye while having a plank in our own.

Epperly sums it up succinctly. Faith opens us to deeper and broader visions of reality. It offers us a greater perspective and energises us to be God’s companions in transforming the world, enabling our world to embody on earth God’s heavenly dreams. It reminds us and inspires us to be the hands and feet of God, God’s partners in shifting the world from death to life and hate to love.

Calling out issues requires bravery, but permitting harm to others when alternatives exist is unacceptable. Thomas emphasises that we should follow the path of peace, even if it means risking physical, emotional, or spiritual pain along the way.

Our ultimate benefit, as we work through our differences, will be to align ourselves with the heart of God. We may be weary or bruised, but we are among the cloud of witnesses who understand that, in loving Christ, there are times when we must stand firm and be prepared to call out that which unnecessarily divides.

**What does it mean to have a holistic peace, according to the sermon, and how is it different from the fake peace of denial?**

The sermon discusses how Jesus offers a deep and life-changing peace that is honest and healing, unlike superficial peace that avoids conflict.

Can you think of a situation in your life where you chose honesty over avoiding conflict, and how did that affect your sense of peace?

**Why do you think people often confuse God's peace with a false sense of security or avoidance of truth?**

The sermon emphasises that God's peace is truth-telling and not about denial, suggesting many people might prefer comfort over reality.

Have you ever avoided a hard truth in order to feel at peace? What was the outcome of that choice?

**In what ways might God's peace require us to break something in our lives to bring about healing?**

True peace may sometimes require breaking things down to mend and heal, indicating that healing can be uncomfortable. Can you identify something in your life that might need to be broken down or changed so you can experience true peace?

**How does the idea of using God's words to justify violence or conflict relate to the theme of aligning with the heart of God?**

The sermon warns against misusing God's words for harmful purposes, suggesting that true alignment with God means working towards peace, not conflict.

Reflect on a time when you saw someone justifying their actions as 'God's will.' How do you think that compares with the genuine heart of God?

**Can you think of a scripture that supports the idea of peace being connected to truth and honesty, as discussed in the sermon?**

The sermon speaks about the importance of truth-telling in achieving genuine peace, which is a significant theme in many scriptures.

How can you apply a scripture about peace and truth to a situation you're facing right now?

This five-day devotional will take a deeper dive into the uncomfortable sermon from this weekend. It will explore the true peace that Jesus offers, which is not merely the absence of conflict, but a deep, transformative state of being that confronts and heals.



**Day 1**

**John 14:27**

The peace that Jesus bestows is not just a temporary solution to life's conflicts but a profound gift that addresses the very core of our being. This peace is an antidote to the false comfort we often seek in denial and superficial harmony. Instead of shying away from discomfort, Jesus encourages us to confront the truths of our lives, healing the wounds that lie beneath the surface. This holistic approach to peace is transformative and liberating, allowing us to experience wholeness in every aspect of our lives.

As we reflect on this peace, we should ask ourselves how we typically respond to conflict. Do we seek to escape it, or do we allow it to guide us towards deeper truths? Embracing the peace of Christ means understanding that sometimes, healing requires uncomfortable conversations and actions. This is the richness of the peace that Jesus offers, one that breaks and mends in perfect harmony.

- What areas of my life need the healing peace of Jesus?
- How can I confront conflicts in a way that aligns with Christ's teachings?
- In what ways do I seek superficial peace instead of the deep peace Jesus offers?
- Pray for the courage to face conflicts head-on with Christ's peace.
- Reflect on your need for a deeper understanding of peace in your life.

**Day 2**

**Philippians 4:7**

The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, serves as a protective shield over our hearts and minds. This divine peace allows us to navigate life's storms without losing our sense of security or hope. In a world rife with uncertainty, the invitation to experience this transcendent peace empowers us to face challenges with faith rather than fear. It reminds us that even amidst chaos, there is a refuge available—a soothing presence that calms the tempest within us.



As we lean into this divine peace, we engage in daily practices that cultivate an awareness of God's goodness and love. Meditation on His Word, prayer, and moments of gratitude help us to realign our thoughts and feelings, fostering an environment where His peace can thrive. It's a proactive choice to invite God's peace into our lives and trust that it will empower us through every circumstance.

- How can I create a daily practice to invite God's peace into my life?
- What specific worries or anxieties do I need to surrender to God?
- In what ways can I support others in finding this peace?
- Ask God to help you experience His peace in a profound way today.
- Meditate on a specific scripture that speaks to God's peace.

### Day 3 Colossians 3:15

As we allow the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts, we realise its call to unity and love among believers. This kind of peace enables us to forgive, to let go of bitterness, and to pursue reconciliation. It is a powerful reminder that our community can flourish in an atmosphere of grace, grounded in love for one another. When we embody the peace of Christ, we create a ripple effect, impacting how we relate to our neighbours and the world at large.

Moreover, applying this peace means actively choosing to diffuse tensions in our relationships. While conflicts might arise, it is our responsibility to navigate them with a heart that seeks understanding and harmony. By doing so, we honour the peace that Jesus has provided, showcasing it as a beacon of hope in a divided world.

- In what relationships do I need to embody the peace of Christ more fully?
- How can I practice forgiveness in my interactions today?
- What steps can I take to promote unity within my community?
- Pray for the ability to be a peacemaker in your relationships.
- Reflect on the importance of community and the role of peace within it.

### Day 4 Isaiah 26:3

The promise from Isaiah that God will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast is a profound meditation on trust and focus. When we steady our minds on God and His promises, we experience a peace that is not determined by external circumstances. This unwavering peace comes only when we

cultivate our faith by anchoring our thoughts in truth rather than the chaos that surrounds us.

In striving for this steadfastness, intentionality is key. We need to actively counter distractions and negativity in our thought patterns, redirecting our focus back to God's faithfulness. It takes practice and diligence, yet the reward is immense—a heart and mind enveloped in a peace that surpasses all worldly understanding.

- What distractions in my life hinder my ability to trust God completely?
- How can I keep my mind focused on His promises amid life's challenges?
- What practices can I adopt to nurture steadfastness in my faith?
- Pray for a mind steadfast on God's truths.
- Contemplate the areas of your life where you need peace and strength.

### Day 5 Matthew 5:9

Jesus calls us to be peacemakers, reflecting His heart in our daily interactions. This profound task goes beyond merely avoiding conflict; it requires us to actively pursue peace, seeking harmony and understanding wherever we go. To be a peacemaker, we must embody the characteristics of empathy, patience, and grace, allowing others to see Christ through our actions.

Being a peacemaker also challenges us to live out our faith courageously, especially when faced with injustice or division. It calls upon us to stand firm and advocate for peace even in the most difficult circumstances. While we may face resistance, the assurance that we are God's children lights our path, guiding us to be vessels of His peace in an often chaotic world.

- How can I actively pursue peace in my community and relationships?
- What are specific actions I can take to be a peacemaker?
- In what situations do I struggle to reflect Christ's peace?
- Pray for the strength and courage to be a peacemaker in challenging situations.
- Reflect on the impact that your actions have in promoting peace among others.

# End notes and further reading

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

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

David Adams, Glimpses of Glory, Year C

From <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/livingaholyadventure/2025/08/the-adventurous-lectionary-pentecost-10-aug-17-2025/> Bruce Epperly is Theologian in Residence at Westmoreland Congregational United Church of Christ, Bethesda, MD (rephrased into a more Australian cultural idiom in places) 2025

Disturbing the Peace, Debie Thomas

<https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2305-disturbing-the-peace>

The following authors as featured at The Worship Cloud

[www.theworshipcloud.com](http://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.

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.

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