

Breaking Open the Word

Pentecost 13C, Proper 18, Ordinary Sunday 23
7th September, 2025



Choosing Life

No Longer Slave but Family

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 13C

Proper 18,

Ordinary Sunday 22C

Deuteronomy 30.15–20;
Psalm 1;
Philemon 1–21;
Luke 14.25–35



**SEASON OF
CREATION**



Garden of Peace
Isaiah 32:14-18

**PEACE
WITH CREATION**
SEASON OF CREATION 2025

Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collect

Almighty and everlasting God,
who art always more ready to hear than we to pray,
and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve:
Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy;
forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid,
and giving us those good things
which we are not worthy to ask,
but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, thy Son,
our Lord.

INTRODUCTION

What does it truly mean to "choose life" in today's world?

Today's readings feature three powerful biblical narratives: Deuteronomy's call to choose life, Psalm 1's image of flourishing trees, and Jesus' teachings on radical discipleship, all of which illuminate our sacred duty as stewards of creation.

Drawing from the natural beauty of Gippsland, with its majestic river gums and precious Burruran dolphins, we are challenged to see environmental stewardship as an essential expression of Christian faith.

Through Paul's letter to Philemon, it is revealed that transforming our relationships—whether with fellow humans or with creation itself—lies at the heart of authentic discipleship. Celebrating local environmental champions while calling the church to move beyond mere prayers to active participation in conservation efforts.

The message culminates in a stirring reminder that choosing life means making deliberate, sometimes sacrificial choices that benefit not only ourselves but also future generations and all of God's creation.

God's urgent call compels us to stand alongside nature's guardians, ensuring that the streams continue to flow and the trees continue to flourish for generations to come.

Prayer Points

- Ask God to help us choose Life in our daily decisions.
- Pray for wisdom in being stewards of our environment.
- Seek guidance in building relationships based on mutual respect and shared faith.
- Request strength in accepting the sacrifices of discipleship.

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

Introduction: Choosing Life

“Behold, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.” (Deuteronomy 30:15, 19).

Moses’ words to Israel resonate through the ages. Faith transcends mere abstract belief; it encompasses choices. Will we choose life—or paths that lead to harm?

This question really touches on some meaningful themes from our readings today. Psalm 1 beautifully illustrates two paths: the righteous, who are like a strong, thriving tree fed by streams of water, and the wicked, who lack nourishment and stability.

In Luke, Jesus calls us to embrace radical discipleship by committing fully rather than offering only half-hearted obedience. Additionally, Paul in Philemon encourages us to seek reconciliation, which can help dismantle oppressive systems and inspire us to pursue justice and unity.

Together, these readings raise the question: How does one live in a way that selects life, not only for our well-being but also for the sake of future generations?

Psalm 1: Trees by the Water

Psalm 1 portrays those who revel in God’s law:

“They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its appointed season, and their leaves do not wither.”

In Gippsland, we are familiar with the splendour of trees rooted near water—the river gums, the paperbarks along the lakeside. They stand firm, supported by deep roots. The psalmist reminds us: a faithful life is similar to that—steadfast, fruitful, and enduring.

However, let’s not forget that the tree doesn’t thrive on its own. It needs the stream to thrive. And just like that, our lives are better when we stay close to God’s word and the

wonderful world around us that takes care of us.

Luke 14 – Counting the Cost

In Luke 14, Jesus is direct in stating that discipleship is costly. He declares, “Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” Faith is not merely a hobby; it is an integral part of our lives.

Faith is often seen as private, but Jesus teaches that it affects every decision, including how we treat the environment and its inhabitants. Following Christ today means facing the cost of care, such as choosing sustainable lifestyles that may involve sacrifices.

Philemon – A New Approach to Relationships

In Paul’s letter to Philemon, he discusses Onesimus, a runaway slave. Paul urges Philemon to accept Onesimus as a brother in Christ, transforming their relationship from master and slave to family, grounded in shared faith. Onesimus, whose name means ‘useful,’ lives up to being useful, as Paul releases him from being mere property. No longer a slave, Onesimus is embraced by a new family.

Restorative justice fundamentally involves redefining how we coexist and embracing new viewpoints. This idea extends to our relationship with nature. Instead of seeing creation as a resource to exploit, we should view it as a sanctuary to nurture, a gift entrusted to us by God.

Keepers of Nature – Our Local Collaborators

In Gippsland, we are fortunate to have numerous individuals who serve as guardians of the natural environment.

- National Parks and Wildlife Service rangers, caring for fragile habitats.
- Friends of the Gippsland Lakes, restoring wetlands and protecting birdlife.
- Dolphin research and preservation groups, ensuring the Burrunan dolphins, unique to our waters, are cherished and safe.

In their own distinctive way, they make a conscious choice to live—acting so that future generations can enjoy the same joys we do. They resemble the psalmist’s tree-planters, ensuring streams remain sufficiently supplied with water.

As a Church, we are called to care for creation actively, not just through prayers but by working with those who diligently seek to safeguard our natural environment. This involves engaging with environmental initiatives, supporting conservation projects, and being willing to learn more about the challenges facing our planet.

We are called to raise our voices and stand firm in these vital conversations. Today, true discipleship involves caring for the land, waterways, and all living creatures God has entrusted to us. Embracing this role honours the beauty and sacredness of the surrounding creation.

Conclusion: Choosing Life for the Future

“Choose life,” proclaims Deuteronomy, “so that you and your descendants may live.”

Choosing to follow Christ is a deliberate lifelong commitment that profoundly impacts our families, neighbours, and all creation. It calls us to acknowledge the sacrifices it entails and to stand steadfast like trees by a riverbank. We should view others not as possessions or obstacles, but as our brothers and sisters. This is our divine calling, and it's time to embrace it fully.

In Gippsland, picking a meaningful life means partnering with nature's guardians—working toward healthy lakes, thriving dolphins, and lush forests. It involves living with the awareness that the future genuinely counts because it does.

Let's answer Christ's call again with heartfelt courage: Yes, Lord. We confidently choose life and fully commit to following You. Additionally, we willingly decide to care for your people, your creatures, and your beautiful creation.

Amen.

Discussion Points

In Deuteronomy 30:15,19, Moses presents two clear paths: life and prosperity or death and adversity. How does this choice manifest in our modern environmental decisions?

- The sermon connects Moses' ancient call to 'choose life' with our current responsibility to care for creation and make choices that benefit future generations.
- What specific environmental choices are you currently making that reflect your commitment to 'life and prosperity' for future generations?

The sermon compares faithful people to trees planted by streams of water. How does our connection to God's creation strengthen our spiritual growth?

- The Sermon uses the imagery of Gippsland's river gums and paperbarks to illustrate how being rooted near life-giving water leads to flourishing.
- Where do you find your spiritual 'streams of water' in nature, and how do these experiences deepen your faith?

How does Paul's letter to Philemon about treating Onesimus as family rather than property relate to our relationship with creation?

- The sermon draws a parallel between transforming master-slave relationships into family bonds and changing our perspective from exploiting nature to nurturing it.
- In what ways might you need to change your perspective to view creation as something to protect rather than something to use?

The sermon mentions various local environmental guardians in Gippsland. How can churches better partner with environmental organisations while maintaining their spiritual mission?

- The sermon discusses National Parks rangers, Friends of the Gippsland Lakes, and dolphin research groups as examples of creation care in action.
- What specific role could you or your church play in supporting local environmental initiatives?

Jesus speaks about the cost of discipleship in Luke 14. What sacrifices might be required of us today if we take environmental stewardship seriously as part of our Christian faith?

- The sermon emphasises that following Christ means making conscious choices that may require sacrifice, including adopting sustainable lifestyles.
- What personal comforts or conveniences would be the hardest for you to give up in order to better care for God's creation?



This five-day devotional will take a deeper dive into the sermon from this weekend, exploring the theme of choosing life for ourselves and future generations. We will reflect on scriptures and explore how faith, discipleship, and our relationship with creation guide us in this life-affirming choice.



Day 1 Scripture: Deuteronomy 30:15-19

Moses' charge to "Choose life" is a timeless call that resounds within us today. This choice is pivotal, influencing not only our spiritual path but also the well-being of those around us. The call is to embrace a holistic view of life where faith interweaves through decisions that ensure the prosperity of future generations.

In making this choice, we are invited to consider our responsibility as custodians of creation. Like the psalmist's vision of a tree by the water, our lives flourish when rooted in God's word and nature. By acknowledging this sacred relationship, we align ourselves with the flourishing intention of the Divine.

- What does "choosing life" mean to you personally?
- In what ways can faith guide your daily choices?
- How can you incorporate care for future generations into your current lifestyle?
- Pray for clarity in identifying paths that align with life.
- Reflect on how your actions today can bless future generations.

Day 2 Scripture: Psalm 1

The imagery of trees planted by water in Psalm 1 offers a poetic vision of spiritual vitality and resilience. It reminds us that our lives, too, require sustenance from God's presence and wisdom, nurturing us to yield fruits of righteousness in due season.

Our life choices, when anchored in the spiritual stream, gain vitality and purpose. We are reminded that as individual lives flourish, so do the communities and environments we're part of. Rooted in divine wisdom, our actions contribute to a

broader legacy of life.

- How do you nurture your spiritual roots?
- What fruits of the Spirit are evident in your life?
- Consider the balance between personal growth and community well-being in your choices.
- Seek guidance to stay rooted in God's word.
- Pray for the wisdom to discern ways to nourish your spiritual journey.

Day 3 Scripture: Luke 14:27

Jesus' call to discipleship in Luke is a vivid reminder of the cost associated with true commitment. Bearing the cross is a metaphor for embracing a lived expression of faith that influences every aspect of our lives, from personal decisions to communal responsibilities.

Today's environmental realities urge us towards sustainable choices that often require personal sacrifice. Yet, these sacrifices serve a greater purpose, aligning our lives with Christ's call to care for creation and ensuring that our choices reflect a genuine commitment to discipleship.

- Reflect on the costs of discipleship in your life.
- How can your faith influence environmentally conscious decisions?
- What sacrifices do you need to make for a sustainable future?
- Ask for strength to embrace the challenges of authentic discipleship.
- Pray for insight on how to align your lifestyle with environmental stewardship.

Day 4 Scripture: Philemon

Paul's appeal to Philemon brings forth a radical approach to relationships, one that transcends societal structures and embraces kinship through Christ. It challenges us to rethink how we view others, urging us to foster relationships grounded in mutual respect and shared faith.

This call extends beyond human interactions and into our relationship with the earth. Viewing creation as kin invites us

into a nurturing and protective role, reshaping our interactions with the natural world into partnerships of care and respect.

- How does your faith influence your relationships with others?
- What societal structures can you challenge through faith-driven actions?
- Consider ways you can foster relationships that reflect divine love and justice.
- Pray for courage to challenge oppressive structures in your life.
- Seek guidance on fostering respectful relationships.

Day 5 Scripture: Deuteronomy 30:19

The call to "Choose life" in Deuteronomy serves as a beacon, guiding us toward decisions that resonate through time. It's an invitation to live purposefully, ensuring that our choices today contribute positively to the generations that follow.

Standing alongside those who care for creation, we affirm our role as stewards of this earth. This commitment is an act of worship, acknowledging the Creator's call to sustain and protect the sanctity of life in all its forms.

- Consider how your choices impact future generations.
- Reflect on the ways you can act as a guardian of creation.
- How can living purposefully transform your spiritual journey?
- Pray for a deeper understanding of your role as a steward of creation.
- Invite God's guidance in making life-affirming decisions.

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

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

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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.

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