



BREAKING OPEN

Scripture Study



Called into the Light, Made a People

Epiphany 3a

25th January 2026

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A weekly reflection based on the teachings 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

INTRODUCTION

Revised Common Lectionary Related

Epiphany 2A
Isaiah 9.1-4
Psalm 27.1, 4-12
1 Corinthians 1.10-18
Matthew 4.12-23



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Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collects

O God, who,
through the preaching of the blessed
Apostle Saint Paul,
hast caused the light of the Gospel to shine
throughout the world:
Grant, we beseech thee, that we, having his
wonderful conversion in remembrance,
may shew forth our thankfulness
unto thee for the same,
by following the holy doctrine
which he taught:
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Called into the Light, Made a People

What if unity isn't about sameness, but about standing together in God's light?

There are times when we need to challenge our conventional understanding of Christian unity, weaving together insights from Scripture and modern literature.

Through powerful examples from Isaiah's prophecy of light breaking through darkness and Paul's letters to the diverse Corinthian church, he reveals how true unity emerges not from enforced conformity, but from our shared journey toward Christ.

Drawing a compelling parallel between a recent parish lunch and the early disciples' calling illustrates how authentic community embraces our differences while maintaining Christ at the centre.

Masterfully contrasting this divine vision with worldly attempts at unity through control, referencing Orwell's cautionary tales to emphasise how forced sameness ultimately leads to spiritual poverty.

The message resonates particularly for today's church, where divergent voices often struggle to find harmony, offering hope that our differences can become gifts rather than obstacles.

Just as Jesus called his first disciples by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus invites us to participate in God's messianic mission not by erasing our uniqueness, but by walking together toward the light, allowing Christ to shape how we see, hear, and serve one another in love.

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

Called into the Light, Made a People

Isaiah 9.1-4

Psalm 27.1, 4-12

1 Corinthians 1.10-18

Matthew 4.12-23

Today's readings do not smooth over our disagreements or hide what makes us different. They reveal something deeper. God gathers people, not by making us the same, but by calling us together. Picture a room where every voice is distinct, yet all are drawn by hope. Stories mingle. Questions are welcome. Wisdom grows in the quiet work of listening and caring. Unity is not a plan, but a table set, a hand offered, a choice shaped by many hearts.

Sometimes we are told we should all think the same way. There is a longing, in politics and even here in East Gippsland, for one voice, one mind. Life would be easier, simpler, peaceful. A single purpose. All working together for the greater good.

We imagine unity as everyone agreeing, acting, and believing the same. Same words. Same tone. Same outlook. It sounds tidy, even virtuous. But have you felt the quiet pressure to fit in, to seem good by echoing others? Our stories tell us: this kind of unity fades.

If I could, I'd add two more books to every school's reading list alongside the Bible: George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four and Animal Farm. Imagine everyone learning the same thing at the same time across the state. It sounds tidy and fair, but that's not how people grow. As John Dewey said, "A teaching situation applicable to all situations is always doomed to failure."

In Nineteen Eighty-Four, unity comes by shrinking language until there's almost nothing left to say, and nothing left to argue about. In Animal Farm, the dream of equality lasts until the pigs change the rules and claim that some animals are more equal than others. That's a lesson we remember, and maybe it's why pigs haven't been very popular in religious circles since then.

Orwell does not say unity is wrong. He warns us: unity built on sameness becomes control. When difference feels like a threat, when we choose what is easy over what is true, when trust slips away, people may look united, but the heart of the community unravels. Yet when difference is received as gift, something new begins. Hope stirs. Strength grows. The beauty in every voice appears. Unity becomes a journey, not a task.

The readings offer another vision. God does not make a people by erasing difference or silencing voices. God calls us into the light. There, we see our differences, speak truth, share life. It is not sameness, but a shared direction. Not control, but belonging. This is the community we are learning to become. called into the light, made a people.

Isaiah speaks to people divided, tired, burdened. They live under pressure, in darkness, carrying loads not their own. We know these struggles: the weight of drought, the uncertainty of changing markets. God does not send instructions. God sends light. Light does not erase the past, but breaks the yoke that kept the future far away.

The psalmist knows this light. Fear is not hidden. Dangers are named. Even family ties can feel thin. Yet the psalm ends not with certainty, but with longing: One thing I seek. Pause and feel that yearning—the wish to dwell in God's presence. Unity begins there, not in agreement, but in turning toward God.

Paul writes to a lively, noisy church. He is not troubled by their

differences, but by where they look for their identity. He does not shame. He calls them back. He points to the cross, where pride falls away, power shifts, and all stand equal. Unity is not forced. It is found when Christ stands at the center.

Matthew shows us this in motion. Jesus does not gather disciples by answering every question. He calls: Follow me. They become a people, not by certainty, but by response. The first disciples leave behind nets, family, the comfort of what they know. The journey begins, not in clarity, but in trust.

This is where the gospel finds us. Some seek depth, drawn to silence, prayer, the steady comfort of words handed down. Others long for a voice that speaks, a church that acts, that faces pain. Some come for rest. Others bring music, movement, joy. What if the quiet could give courage to the restless, and the justice-seekers could awaken longing in those who wait in silence? Can we make space for both stillness and proclamation, and find the sacred in each? In these small moments, our bonds are woven. The beauty of many gifts shines through.

We saw this last week at the parish lunch. Music filled the room. Some danced. Some spoke quietly. Some stayed close to friends. Others sat wherever a chair was free. It was not tidy or planned. It was a mix of people and stories, and somehow, it worked. Not because we all wanted the same thing, but because we were willing to be there for each other.

That is part of the messianic mission. Unity does not erase our differences or choose only one way to be church. It means seeing Christ already among us, calling us to follow, to stay, to let God shape us into a people formed by light, not fear. In quiet moments and shared work, we notice Christ in each other. Our vision becomes life together.

This is good news for us. Unity is not something we create or control. It is an invitation. We become one, not by fixing each other,

but by walking together toward the light God has already given.

Being part of the messianic mission does not mean escaping life's complexity, but staying faithful within it. We keep turning toward the light. We let God gather us, again and again, into a people shaped not by fear or rivalry, but by hope.

That is not moralising.

That is encouragement.

And it is how God has always made a people.

Keeping Christ at the center does not make us less ourselves, but more truly who we are. When Paul calls us to be of one mind, he does not ask for uniform thinking or the same story, but for a shared direction. We come from different homes, histories, hopes, wounds, ways of prayer. The gospel does not erase these differences. The light of Christ shows them, holds them, leads them toward love. Unity is not something we achieve by agreement, but by standing in the light and letting Christ shape how we see, hear, and act together.

Paul saw in Corinth what we see here. Sometimes unity fails, not because we are different, but because Christ is no longer at the center. The community Paul hopes for is diverse, lively, imperfect, held together by turning toward Christ. This is the unity we see in the body God has called into the light, holding us together as one people.

We are called into the Light,

not to become the same,

but to become a people,

Seeing, listening, serving in Christ's name. Called into the light, becoming a people made whole by love, we move quietly, with grace, woven together in faith and hope.

Questions for Reflection and/or Group Discussion

The sermon talks about unity not being about everyone thinking the same way, but rather about having a shared direction. What do you think this means for how we handle disagreements in our church community?

- The sermon states: 'When Paul calls us to be of one mind, he does not ask for uniform thinking or the same story, but for a shared direction.'
- Can you think of a time when you experienced unity with someone despite having different viewpoints? What made that possible?

The sermon references how Jesus gathered disciples not by answering every question, but by simply calling 'Follow me.' How does this challenge our modern desire for certainty before taking action in our faith?

- From the sermon: 'The first disciples leave behind nets, family, the comfort of what they know. The journey begins, not in clarity, but in trust.'
- What is holding you back from following Jesus more fully in areas where you don't have complete certainty?

How does the image of light in the sermon relate to how we should view our differences in the church community?

- The sermon mentions: 'The light of Christ shows them, holds them, leads them toward love. Unity is not something we achieve by agreement, but by standing in the light.'
- In what ways has God's light revealed both your unique gifts and your need for others in the church?

An example of a parish lunch is used to illustrate true unity. How does this practical example help us understand what genuine Christian community looks like?

- The sermon describes: 'It was not tidy or planned. It was a mix of people and stories, and somehow, it worked. Not because we all wanted the same thing, but because we were willing to be there for each other.'
- What opportunities do you see in our church to create spaces where people can be authentically themselves while still maintaining unity?

The sermon warns against unity built on sameness becoming control. How can we ensure our pursuit of church unity doesn't become forced conformity?

- The sermon states: 'Orwell does not say unity is wrong. He warns us: unity built on sameness becomes control.'
- Have you ever felt pressure to conform in a church setting? How can we create an environment that celebrates diversity while maintaining biblical truth?
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This five-day devotional will take us into Christ's light through the sermon from this weekend. We will explore how we are called into the light, made a people, and how our differences are gifts rather than divisions. Join us as we reflect on how love and hope shape our unity in Christ.



Day 1 Matthew 4:19

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus called His first disciples not with promises of certainty but with an invitation: "Follow me." This simple call marked the start of a journey that was not about uniformity but about shared direction. As they left behind their nets and old lives, they didn't possess all the answers but had trust in Jesus to guide them.

This day reflects the heart of the sermon: unity is not forged by stripping away our differences but by moving together towards the common light of Christ. It highlights how, through faith and trust, we can grow into a thriving community that celebrates diverse gifts and stories.

- What aspects of my life require me to trust more deeply in this journey with Christ?
- How can I better embrace the differences within my community and see them as a strength?
- Where is Christ inviting me to 'follow' today?
- Pray for guidance to see the light of Christ in others.
- Ask for courage to step towards unity, even when it's challenging.

Day 2. 1 Corinthians 1:10

Paul called the church in Corinth to unity, not by demanding identical thoughts but by urging them to align their lives around Christ's teachings. His reminder is that diverse communities can thrive when their central identity rests in Jesus, rather than in individual pride or division.

Unity here is seen as a transformation where our differences are held together through mutual respect and Christlike love. It underscores how becoming a community isn't about achieving perfect agreement but finding the beauty and strength in our collective journey towards the light.

- In what ways can my relationship with Christ help centre my interactions with others?
- How do I balance maintaining my unique identity while being part of a broader community?
- Where do I see Christ already at the centre of our community life?
- Pray for unity in the community through Christ's love.
- Seek open-heartedness to differences and new perspectives.

Day 3. Isaiah 9:2

Isaiah spoke to a people burdened and divided, yearning for hope. God's response was not a set of rules but the gift of light, breaking through the darkness. This prophecy foretells how unity is not enforced through control but arises naturally when we all turn towards God's light.

This day of the devotional reflects on how true unity can arise when we collectively let go of fear and embrace God's light. This kind of unity invites us to stand together in our differences, understanding that through God's illumination, our paths are aligned in grace and compassion.

- When have I experienced God's light breaking through my personal darkness?
- How can I contribute to casting light on divisions within my community?
- In what ways can I support those around me who are burdened?
- Pray for light to illuminate areas of distrust and division in my life.
- Ask for the strength to be a beacon of God's love in my community.

Day 4. Psalm 27:4

The psalmist's yearning, "One thing I seek," captures the essence of longing to be in God's presence. This desire is what initiates genuine unity—not superficial agreement but a profound orientation towards God's will and community in Him.

This day reflects on the power of yearning for the divine presence as the source of unity. It encourages us to understand that our differences can serve to connect us deeper to God when we turn collectively towards His light, seeking the peace and love that surpasses understanding.

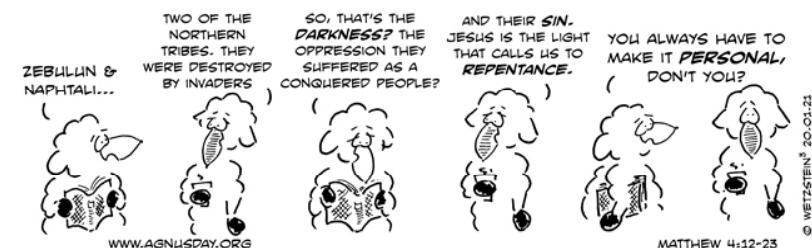
- What does it mean for me to dwell in God's presence in everyday life?
- How does longing for God's presence influence my relationships with others?
- How can I cultivate a personal and communal sense of seeking?
- Pray to deepen your desire to abide in God's love and light.
- Seek wisdom to guide your community toward God's presence.

Day 5. Ephesians 4:3

Paul exhorts believers to pursue unity by making "every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." This isn't a call for uniformity but for conscious action rooted in love and faith to embrace our diversity as a gift from God.

This day focuses on unity as a dynamic process of becoming—a journey where differences are celebrated as vital components of a vibrant community. We are reminded that, as we turn towards the light and allow Christ's presence to guide us, we are united in one Spirit.

- How can I actively contribute to the unity of my community today?
- What barriers prevent me from experiencing unity with others?
- In what ways can I serve as a peacemaker in the body of Christ?
- Pray for discernment to build bridges and foster peace.
- Seek God's guidance in transforming division into unity.



End notes and further reading

End notes and further reading

Harrington, Daniel J Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Matthew
Moloney, Francis J, SBD, Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Matthew
Collins, Raymond F., Sacra Pagina: First Corinthians
Andrew McGowan
substack.com/@abmcg
N.T. Wright, Twelve months of Sundays Year A

**Let your faith and relationships
be shaped by love and patience.**

Brabarlung Totem

This is produced on
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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.

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