




BREAKING OPEN

Scripture Study



Chance would be a fine thing

Relating to the World

Pentecost 2a
7th June, 2026

Dennis Webster

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

Revised Common Lectionary Related

Pentecost 2A

Hosea 5.15-6.6

Psalm 50.7-15

Romans 4.13-end

Matthew 9.9-13, 18-26



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Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collects

O God, the strength of all them that
put their trust in thee,
mercifully accept our prayers:
and because through the weakness of our
mortal nature we can do no good thing
without thee,
grant us the help of thy grace,
that in keeping of thy commandments
we may please thee both in will and deed:
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

INTRODUCTION

Chance would be a fine thing!

What are the chances that two unplanned encounters with young British travellers could reshape a priest's understanding of divine providence?

Recently, I discovered that “chance would be a fine thing” when he met Ryan at Melbourne’s St Paul’s Cathedral during Evensong and Jake outside a Painesville pharmacy while fundraising for the Paralympics.

Through these serendipitous conversations about faith, pilgrimage, and belonging, I recognised how God weaves connection through the most ordinary moments.

Drawing on the biblical story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, he revealed how Scripture celebrates these “coincidental” encounters as divine appointments in which faith takes root through genuine relationships.

What is challenging for me is to see beyond religious rituals toward the mercy and gratitude that transform strangers into fellow pilgrims. His encounters remind us that our daily lives are sacred ground where unexpected meetings can awaken deeper spiritual truths.

As we navigate our own pilgrimages, we’re called to embrace openness to divine interruptions—whether through a shared hymn, a fundraising conversation, or a swan drifting by at the perfect moment.

The urgent invitation is clear: share your own stories of unexpected grace, build one another up through testimony, and walk gently upon the holy ground of everyday encounters where God is always waiting.

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.

Chance would be a fine thing:

Living in the Trinity

The words came to me more than once last week. Sometimes we say them with hope, sometimes with resignation, as if to say, “Dream on.”

Chance may unsettle us. In Christian faith, it can seem to stand at odds with grace or providence. It can sound as though nothing guides us at all. In recent weeks of wandering and resting, I found myself in two unexpected meetings.

Both times, it was a young British traveller appearing in places where I expected no encounter at all.

I met Ryan, from London, at St Paul’s Cathedral in Melbourne as the evening light gathered for Evensong.

Jake, from Yorkshire, I met outside Blooms Pharmacy here in Paynesville. In both meetings, unplanned and unscripted, we spoke of faith, nature, meaning, and beginning again.

Ryan had come to Melbourne hoping for a fresh start after a difficult season. During Evensong, he chose a seat in my row. I sang the hymns and responses with all my heart, and afterwards he told me that hearing another voice nearby had helped him feel at ease.

We began talking about what had brought him to St Paul’s, and soon his story and his questions found their way into our conversation. There were interruptions, as there often are, but I introduced him to the Director of Music and to Bishop Richard, who smiled at my continued activity even while on leave.

I encouraged Ryan to return to Evensong and offered to connect him with others, knowing that relationships are often what transform a place from somewhere unfamiliar into somewhere that feels like home.

There was a longing in him—to belong, to find himself, to gather together the scattered lines of his journey. There was hope, too, that Melbourne, with his sister nearby, might become a place of new beginnings.

I do not know if we will meet again. I told him about life on the Lakes and invited him to come by train one day. I hope he does.

Was it chance, or something more?

The question stayed with me as the days slipped away.

A few days later, Jake approached me while raising funds for the Paralympic team.

I told him I would speak with him after my errand, a promise he remarked many people make, though not everyone keeps.

When I returned, he shared his work with the Paralympic program. I smiled, remembering my own years involved in disability sport and education in Bendigo. Supporting his efforts felt natural, almost like meeting an old friend.

We spoke of Bendigo, and the conversation grew deeper. He had learned fundraising there. We talked about his story, my life as a local Anglican priest, and the journeys we had taken.

He had walked the Camino from Paris to Santiago with his grandmother. I spoke of one of my own pilgrimages—not to the continent, but to Iona. Mentioning Iona prompted him to tell me of another holy island: Lindisfarne.

We found common ground.

From there, our conversation wandered to nature. He asked about the island’s wildlife. We talked about birds, kangaroos, echidnas, snakes, and spiders. I shared advice on avoiding confrontations with protective animals and on keeping magpies onside. All you need to do, I suggested, is talk to them.

I told him about our swan population.

He had not yet seen one.

As if on cue, one drifted by.

We laughed about drop bears and the stories Australians tell visitors from the so-called motherland.

It was a remarkable meeting, the second in a week, and it could not have been planned.

In speaking of pilgrimage, a new relationship began.

Pilgrimage is more than walking with intention. It is the weaving of connection—with God, with others, and with meaning. These encounters reminded me how simple openness can become a doorway for the Spirit. When we welcome the small, unrehearsed moments, even the ordinary can become holy ground.

Our conversation eventually wandered from pilgrimage to faith, and from faith to places where Christianity first took root.

Jake expressed a desire to explore Ethiopia and its Christian heritage. He asked whether Ethiopia was among the oldest Christian nations.

I confirmed that it was and shared the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch.

Given the opportunity to form a relationship with a stranger on the road, Philip shared the good news of Jesus and baptised him. In turn, the Ethiopian carried that good news home, where the Christian faith took root and flourished in one of the world's oldest continuous Christian traditions. Scripture rarely dismisses such encounters as mere coincidence. Again and again, God works through conversations, hospitality, and relationships that appear ordinary at first glance.

Philip did not follow a strategic plan. He met a person. Faith took root.

An unlikely messenger became a bearer of good news.

The same pattern appears throughout the Gospels.

The woman at Jacob's well inspired a town. The man born blind became a witness to what God had done. Matthew's call gathered a new community around a table. Faith brought healing to a grieving father's daughter and to a woman who had suffered for years. Again and again, conversations became turning points.

Relationships became places of transformation.

Rituals have their place, but relationships remain central. Pilgrimage is ultimately about connection—with God and with one another. Hosea, Jesus, St Paul, and the psalmist all remind us that mercy, gratitude, and sincere relationships matter more than outward performance.

Psalm 50 gathers these themes together beautifully. God seeks true hearts rather than empty ritual. Lives marked by mercy and gratitude matter more than religious appearance. When we meet others with sincerity, we grow not only in our relationship with one another but also in our relationship with God.

Perhaps that is why we sometimes joke that God accepts no bull—not because God has anything against bovines, but because empty religion without mercy misses the point entirely.

What are the chances?

Perhaps the better question is this:

How do these unanticipated encounters shape our journey?

Where, in our daily pilgrimage, do we find opportunities to meet God as we walk gently upon holy ground?

Have you known a moment when an unexpected meeting awakened something deeper within you, or gave you a glimpse of God's presence? If so, share the story. In sharing, we build one another up and remember that even in the ordinary, grace is waiting.

A better question.

And perhaps, a better way to live.

This week contains two testimonials describing unexpected encounters with young travellers that led to meaningful conversations about faith and life. What do you think made these 'chance' meetings so significant?

- Dennis met Ryan at St Paul's Cathedral during Evensong, and Jake outside a pharmacy while fundraising. Both conversations naturally moved from casual topics to deeper discussions about faith, pilgrimage, and meaning.
- Think about a time when you had an unexpected conversation with a stranger that surprised you. What made that encounter memorable, and how might God have been present in that moment?

The Sermonn mentions the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch as an example of how God works through ordinary encounters. How does this biblical story connect to the theme of unexpected meetings?

- The opportunity to share this story when talking with Jake about Ethiopia's Christian heritage. Philip didn't follow a strategic plan; he met a person on the road, shared the gospel, and baptised him, which led to Christianity taking root in Ethiopia.
- When have you been in a position to share something meaningful with someone you just met? How comfortable are you with the idea that God might use your everyday conversations to impact others?

'Pilgrimage is more than walking with intention' and involves 'weaving of connection—with God, with others, and with meaning.' What does this broader understanding of pilgrimage

mean to you?

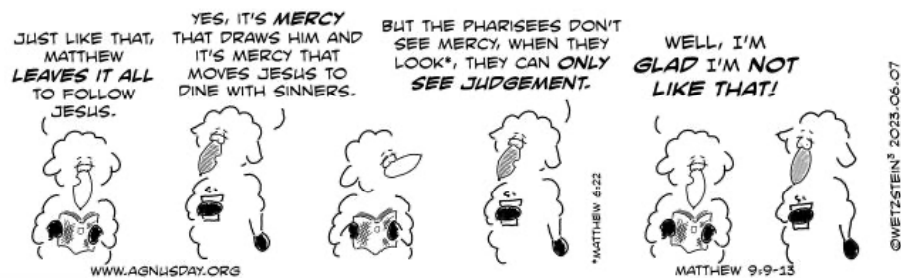
- The Sermon describes pilgrimage not just as a physical journey to holy places like the Camino or Iona, but as being open to connections and meaning in everyday encounters.
- How might you approach your daily routine as a form of pilgrimage? What would change if you saw each day as an opportunity to connect more deeply with God and others?

The Sermon references Psalm 50 and the idea that 'God seeks true hearts rather than empty ritual' and that 'mercy and gratitude matter more than religious appearance.' Why do you think relationships are more important than religious performance?

- Throughout Scripture—from Hosea to Jesus to Paul—the focus is on sincere relationships and mercy rather than just going through the motions of religious activities.
- In what areas of your spiritual life might you be focusing more on 'doing the right things' rather than building genuine relationships with God and others? How could you shift toward a more authentic connection?

'Where, in our daily pilgrimage, do we find opportunities to meet God as we walk gently upon holy ground?' How would you answer this question based on your own experience?

- The Sermon suggests that ordinary moments and unexpected encounters can become 'holy ground' when we approach them with openness to God's presence and work in our lives.
- What specific places, activities, or types of interactions in your routine could become opportunities to experience God's presence more fully? How might you cultivate greater awareness of the sacred in the ordinary?



This five-day Devotional will intentionally walk with the Sermon from this weekend. We will explore the theme of unexpected encounters as divine appointments and how these moments offer opportunities to connect with God and others. Through the stories shared, we aim to uncover the grace found in ordinary interactions and how they shape our spiritual journey.



Day 1

John 4:7-30

Our journey begins with the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. As the pastor emphasised, encounters that seem accidental can carry profound meaning. Jesus's interaction with the woman at the well was more than a simple discussion; it was an invitation to a new life. Similarly, our everyday conversations can become conduits for transformative grace.

Think about the chance meetings or conversations you've had. These moments often carry the seed of God's presence, allowing us to witness His work in unexpected ways. As we meditate on this scripture, let's remember that no meeting is truly coincidental when viewed through the lens of faith.

- Reflect on a recent conversation that had a deeper impact on you than expected. Why do you think it resonated with you?
- Have you ever felt prompted to speak to someone, only to realise it was a divine appointment?
- What steps can you take to be more open to God's presence in daily interactions?
- Pray for the awareness to recognise when God is moving through ordinary encounters.
- Ask for a heart open to both speaking and listening with intention and love.

Day 2

Acts 8:26-40

The story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch challenges us to see every interaction as a ministry. As the pastor reminded us, Philip's encounter wasn't planned but purposeful. It highlighted the importance of being prepared to share faith through conversations, however brief or unplanned they may be.

How can we follow Philip's example today? By being ready to offer spiritual insights and letting God's love flow through us naturally. This passage encourages us to seize every opportunity

to be a vessel for God's message, reinforcing the ties among faith, action, and grace.

- Have you ever felt compelled to share your faith with someone unexpectedly? What happened?
- How can you prepare yourself to engage in meaningful conversations about your faith?
- What can you learn from Philip's willingness to be led by the Spirit?
- Pray for courage and wisdom to speak about your faith when opportunities arise.
- Ask God to guide you to those who need to hear about His love.

Day 3

Psalm 50:14-15

This psalm brings us back to the heart of worship and relationship with God and others. The pastor spoke about the importance of sincere relationships over empty rituals. God's desire for true hearts rather than religious façade prompts us to consider what our worship looks like both publicly and privately.

By focusing on gratitude and mercy in our interactions, we begin to cultivate a sincere faith that invites others into the presence of God. Let's strive to embody the values that Psalm 50 brings to light, understanding that our connections with others can be acts of worship themselves.

- How do your relationships reflect your worship?
- In what ways can you prioritise mercy and gratitude in your daily life?
- Consider a time when a sincere relationship helped bolster your faith. What did you learn?
- Pray for God to illuminate areas where you may be going through the motions rather than engaging sincerely.
- Ask for guidance to live in a way that prioritises heartfelt worship over mere ritual.

Day 4

Matthew 9:9-13

Matthew's call and subsequent gathering of a new community underline the power of invitation and inclusion. As the pastor shared, the transformative potential in relationships is often

unlocked through simple acts of hospitality and welcome. Jesus didn't just call Matthew; He invited him into a circle of believers and world-changers.

Let today's reflection urge you to consider who you might invite into a deeper connection, both with you and with God. Relationships initiated by faith have the potential to create profound impacts, fostering communities rooted in grace and change.

- Who in your life is God nudging you to reach out to or include more?
- Reflect on the community around you. How might you extend Jesus's invitation of grace and belonging?
- What steps can you take to be more hospitable and inviting this week?
- Pray for the courage to invite others into your life and faith community.
- Ask God to prepare both your heart and theirs for these new connections.

Day 5

Romans 12:9-13

The epistle to the Romans captures the essence of authentic love and community. Pastor reminds us that in God's kingdom, relationships are nurtured by actions that endorse love, patience, and kindness. Romans encourages us to love genuinely, abhor what is evil, and remain devoted to one another in brotherly love.

Applying these virtues within our relationships invites God's kingdom to manifest here and now. Through sincere engagement with those around us, we provide fertile ground for faith to flourish, turning the ordinary moments into sanctified encounters with the divine.

- How can you practice authentic love in the relationships you have?
- Reflect on the notion of being devoted to one another in love. How does that practically shape your community?
- Identify habits or attitudes that might prevent you from loving others as completely as God calls us to.
- Pray for God to cultivate in you an authentic love that reaches beyond barriers.
- Ask for patience and kindness in your interactions, and the ability to see others as God sees them

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 John
Johnson, Luke Timothy: Sacra Pagina: The Gospel on Luke
Collins, Raymond F., Sacra Pagina: First Corinthians
Andrew McGowan substack.com/@abmcg
N.T. Wright, Twelve months of Sundays Year A
Andrew Pratt, pastor and hymn writer (theworshipcloud.com)

Let your faith and relationships
be shaped by love and patience
for God's love is
revealed in lives, not letters.



Brabarlung Totem

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