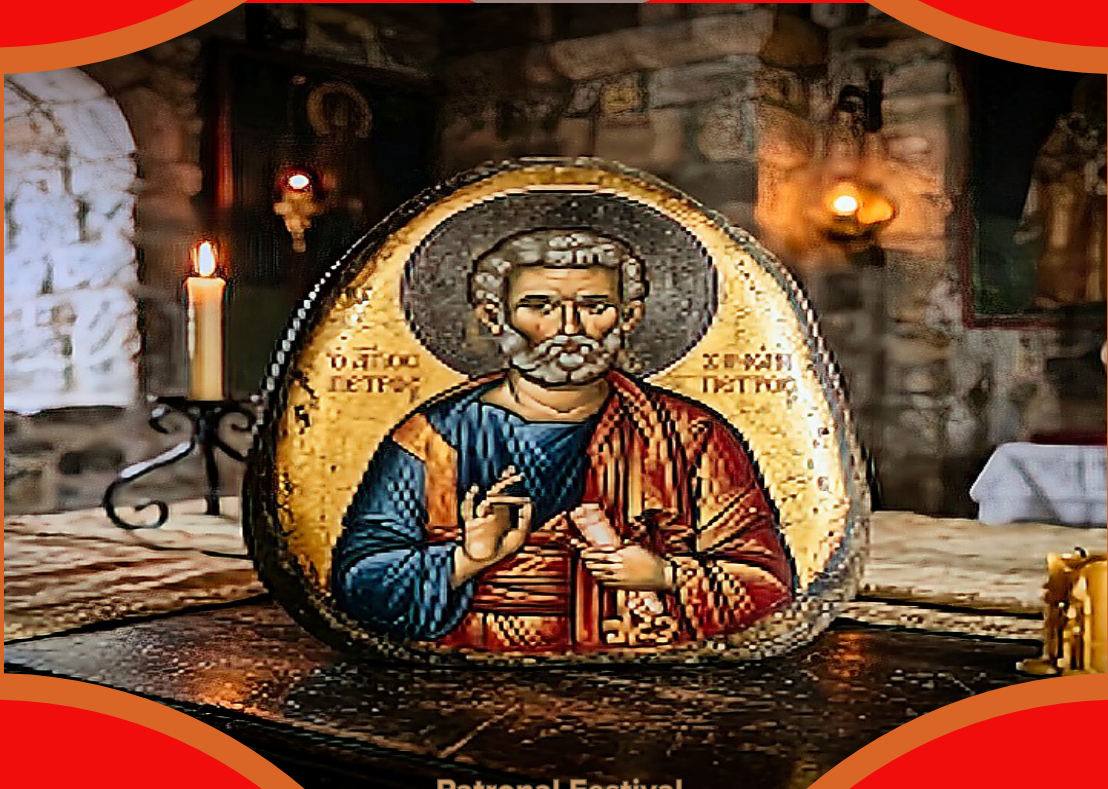




## BREAKING OPEN

Scripture Study



**Patronal Festival**  
28 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

### Peter, Apostle and Martyr

Acts 12.1-11

Psalm 125

1 Peter 2.19-end

Matthew 16.13-19



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Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collects

**A**lmighty God,  
who by thy Son Jesus Christ  
didst give to thy Apostle Saint Peter  
many excellent gifts,  
and commandedst him earnestly to feed thy flock:  
Make, we beseech thee,  
all Bishops and Pastors diligently  
to preach thy holy Word,  
and the people obediently to follow the same,  
that they may receive  
the crown of everlasting glory;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## INTRODUCTION

What if the very cracks in your character are exactly what God is looking for?

This is a question that cuts to the heart of faith:

“Who do you say Jesus is?”

Drawing from Matthew 16, we trace Simon Peter’s remarkable journey—from trembling fisherman to foundation stone—revealing that Christ’s Church is built not on perfection, but on grace-shaped, broken people.

Weaving together the Canaanite woman’s desperate cry, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!”, and Peter’s bold confession, both speak from the same raw, vulnerable place of faith. His unique insight lands gently but powerfully: Peter was simultaneously called the Rock and a stumbling block—and so are we. We know these moments too—at work, at home, in our hearts.

Like Peter, we falter, close ourselves off, and yet are called again. The keys of the kingdom are not given for power, but to set people free. So hear your name spoken over you today: You are Peter.

Rise, reach out, forgive, and become the bridge your community desperately needs.

The Church still opens doors—will you help hold them open?

The Church stands, not by our strength, but because God is faithful. God works through hands that tremble, through hearts that falter. The wonder is not in our perfection, but in the grace that finds us as we are.

You are Peter

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.

## You are Peter

Questions shape us. They come quietly, like dawn breaking. Who are we? What do we believe? The answers matter. In the gospels, the question waits at the heart of everything that follows.

The question is simple. Who am I? It waits, patient and quiet, for an answer that comes from the heart.

When Jesus asks, 'Who am I?', it is not a test. It is the question at the centre of faith. Our answer shapes us, quietly, deeply. It is not about cleverness, but about seeing with the heart.

What happened next was not a spectacle. It was as if the world held its breath. Simon, a fisherman, spoke first: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Jesus looked at Simon and saw what God sees. Remember, David, the youngest, called in from the fields while others were passed by. What is in the heart matters more than what is seen.

*Matthew 16.<sup>17</sup> Jesus replied, Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'*

Simon names Jesus, and Jesus names Simon. A new beginning. On this rock, a community will be built. Trust is given, not because Simon is perfect, but because grace chooses him.

Many leads to this moment. In Matthew's story, pressure builds, questions gather. The disciples face confusion and expectation before they see who Jesus truly is. We know these moments too—at work, at home, in our hearts. The story is ancient, but the experience is ours. The Pharisees, who taught the faith, criticised Jesus and his disciples for not following the eating rituals. Jesus reminded them that God doesn't want empty words or rules made by people. Instead, it's our actions—

what comes from us—that show our relationship with God.

*Matthew 15.<sup>17</sup> "Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach and goes out into the sewer?" <sup>18</sup> But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. <sup>19</sup> For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. <sup>20</sup> These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."*

We are known by what we do. Our lives speak from our hearts. After this, Jesus walked north, toward Tyre.

*Matthew 15.<sup>21</sup> Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." <sup>23</sup> But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us."*

The woman's words became a prayer for generations. She spoke from the heart. Her faith moved Jesus, and her daughter was healed.

It's interesting to compare this story with the story of the woman at Jacob's well. But notice how this woman calls out to Jesus. Simon was there too.

*15<sup>22</sup> "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!"*

Stories spread. Crowds gathered, hungry for more than bread. Jesus fed them, but questions lingered. Simon wondered. On the road to Caesarea Philippi, leaders asked for a sign, though signs had already come. The disciples struggled. The question returned, quiet and insistent.

Remember the Canaanite woman's cry: "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Now Simon answers the question.

*16<sup>15</sup> "But who do you say that I am?" <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*

Jesus blessed Simon and called him Peter. On this rock, the scattered would be gathered. Not perfect, the rock is not perfect. Every stone bears its cracks. Peter, trusted with the keys, wavered when Jesus spoke of suffering. Once more, he is named.

*16<sup>22</sup> Peter rebuked Jesus saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." <sup>23</sup> But he turned and said to Peter, "Get*

*behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”*

The words sting.

You are Peter. You are a stumbling block. The foundation becomes a stone in the path. Jesus speaks of losing life for the sake of the Son of Man. The cross gathers the Church.

The rock is human, imperfect. Six days after being called both Rock and stumbling block, Peter climbs the mountain with James and John. There, Jesus is transfigured. Peter sees as God sees, if only for a moment. God’s voice is heard. The three are told to wait, to keep silence until after the Resurrection. Then, Jesus tests Simon again about the temple tax.

Simon Peter answered wisely. Jesus sent him to the water. The first fish held a coin, enough to pay the tax. The only sign given was Jonah’s sign.

You are Peter.  
I am Peter.  
We are all Peter.

The wonder of the Church is not in stone or ceremony. It is in people. We are Peter. The foundation is lives shaped by grace. Peter failed, preached, gathered the scattered, and welcomed all.

When his chains fell away, Peter became a bridge. The Gospel is for all. He welcomed Saul, who was called Paul and was named Cephas, the rock. In the end, Peter gave his life in Rome.

You are Peter. Made in God’s image. We are called to be bridges: quiet, steady, open. Every so often, it is a simple act—reaching out, encouraging, forgiving. Occasionally, it is listening, welcoming, and standing with the unheard. We do not always succeed. We falter, we close ourselves off. Yet, each time we fail, we can return, begin again, and offer grace. We grow as bridges when we choose kindness, heal what is broken, and keep praying, even when it is hard. The keys are still given. The Church still opens doors.

The keys are not for power. They are given to set people free, so love and service can flourish.

Peter is not the rock because he is perfect. He is vulnerable, impulsive, and often failing. Still, Christ calls him, names him, trusts him.

At baptism, you are named. In Christ’s eyes, you are called. You are Peter. I am Peter. The Church is Peter. The rock is not our strength, but trust in the One who calls. Keep walking. Like Peter, anyone can be forgiven. He was a pilgrim, always moving forward. The Church stands, not on our strength, but on God’s faithfulness through imperfect people.

Let us pray.

Gracious God, you call us, like Peter,  
to be bridges of your love and builders of your Church.  
Strengthen us in our journey, forgive us when we fail,  
and fill us with faith to follow where you lead.  
As we go from here, may we carry your peace  
and serve as vessels of compassion in the world,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Discussion Questions

When Jesus asks, ‘Who do you say I am?’, it’s not a test — it’s the question at the centre of faith. How would you answer that question today, and how has your answer changed over time?

- In the Sermon, Simon Peter answered from the heart — not from cleverness or religious knowledge, but from a deep recognition of who Jesus truly was. Jesus responded by blessing him and giving him a new name and purpose.
- Is there a moment in your own life when your understanding of who Jesus is shifted in a meaningful way? What caused that shift?

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus says to Simon, ‘You are Peter, and on this Rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the realm of the dead will not overcome it.’ Yet Peter was far from perfect — he wavered, denied Jesus, and was even called a stumbling block. What does it mean to you that Jesus chose someone so imperfect to be the foundation of the Church?

- Peter was vulnerable, impulsive, and often failing — yet Christ still called him, named him, and trusted him. The Sermon reminds us that ‘the Rock is not our strength, but trust in the One who calls.’
- In what areas of your own life do you feel disqualified or too imperfect to be used by God? How does Peter’s story speak to that feeling?

Peter — and all of us — are being called to be ‘bridges’: quiet, steady, and open to others. What does being a bridge look like

in your everyday relationships, and where do you find it most difficult?

- The Sermon describes bridge-building as simple, practical acts — reaching out, encouraging, forgiving, listening, welcoming, and standing with those who are unheard. Pastor Dennis acknowledges that we don't always succeed, but that we can return, begin again, and offer grace.
- Think of someone in your life who has acted as a bridge for you. What did they do, and how did it affect your faith or your sense of belonging?

The Canaanite woman in the Sermon cried out, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!' — and her persistent, heartfelt faith moved Jesus to heal her daughter. This connects her cry to Simon Peter's confession. What can we learn from her example about the kind of faith that breaks through barriers?

- There is a parallel between the Canaanite woman's bold, heart-driven prayer and Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah. Both spoke from the heart rather than from religious status or social standing, and both received a profound response from Jesus.
- Is there a situation in your own life — or in your community — where you feel called to cry out to God with that same kind of persistent, undeterred faith? What's holding you back?

The keys given to Peter are 'not for power' but 'to set people free, so love and service can flourish.' How does your Church or small group reflect that purpose — and where might there be room to open more doors?

- The Sermon revisits the promise in Matthew 16:19 — 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven' — and reframes it not as an authority to control, but as a calling to welcome, release, and serve. He points to Peter's later life as an example: welcoming Saul, becoming a bridge for the Gospel to all people.
- Is there a person or a group of people in your community who might feel like the doors of the Church are closed to them? What is one practical step you could take to change that?

This five-day Devotional will take a deeper dive into the Sermon from this weekend. Together, we will explore how God's grace is the foundation of the Church and our lives, and how we are all called to be bridges of His love. Each day will guide you through reflection, prayer, and personal introspection grounded in scripture.



## Day 1

### Scripture: Matthew 16:18

The journey of faith begins with recognising the power of grace. When Jesus calls Simon Peter the rock upon which the Church will be built, He acknowledges the strength that comes not from human perfection, but from divine grace working through us. Like Peter, we may falter, but God's faithfulness constantly supports us. Through grace, we are given a foundational role in building community and extending love.

In the moments when we, like Peter, feel unworthy or inadequate, we must remember that our imperfections are part of the process. God sees into our hearts and understands our struggles. Our lives are not measured by flaws but by the openness to grace and willingness to respond to God's calling. In seeing ourselves through God's eyes, we can embrace our roles as pillars in His Church and community.

- What aspects of your life feel like they are crumbling, and how can grace be a foundation for you?
- In what ways have you felt called to be a bridge for others?
- How has recognising your own vulnerabilities opened growth opportunities?
- Pray for the wisdom to recognise where grace is needed in your life.
- Ask God to guide you in being a foundation for your family or community.

## Day 2

### Scripture: Matthew 15:11

Jesus' message challenges us to look beyond external appearances and focus on the heart. The Pharisees were caught up in rituals, losing sight of what truly mattered. Jesus reminds us that it is not what enters the mouth that defiles us, but what comes from the heart. Our words and actions reflect our inner selves and our relationship with God.

In our daily lives, the question remains: Where does your heart stand? This question beckons us to examine our true intentions and the source of our actions. It is through genuine faith and awareness that we experience transformation. By aligning our hearts with God's will, we express His love in every aspect of our lives.

- How do your daily actions reflect the condition of your heart?
- What steps can you take to bring your heart into greater alignment with God's will?
- When have your intentions not aligned with your actions, and what did you learn from those experiences?
- Seek God's guidance to purify your heart and intentions.
- Ask for strength to act faithfully and compassionately in all interactions.

### Day 3

#### Scripture: Matthew 15:25-28

The faith of the Canaanite woman highlights the power of persistence and the strength found in vulnerability. Despite being overlooked, she calls out to Jesus with unwavering faith, demonstrating that a heart crying for mercy is never silenced. Her story encourages us to find our voice and continue seeking God's presence, even when circumstances seem daunting.

Through her unwavering faith, we learn the importance of calling out to God in sincerity and trust. Our faith should be a relentless pursuit, knowing that God listens and responds to the cries of His children. Her interaction with Jesus teaches us about humility, persistence, and the transformative power of faith.

- Reflect on a time when you had to persist in faith despite apparent obstacles.
- How can vulnerability and persistence coexist in your spiritual journey?
- What does the Canaanite woman's story teach you about prayer and action?
- Ask God for strength and patience in moments of waiting.
- Seek a faith that pushes beyond boundaries and embraces vulnerability.

### Day 4

#### Scripture: Matthew 16:23

The contrast of Peter's role as both the rock and a stumbling block

reflects our human nature. At times, we stand firm in faith; other times, we falter, driven by human concerns. Jesus calls out Peter's misstep, urging him to realign his focus on God's purposes rather than his personal desires. We, too, must be open to correction and growth as we navigate faith's path.

Every step in our journey is an opportunity to reflect, learn, and grow deeper in faith. Accepting vulnerability and imperfection allows us to become more in tune with God's will. It's within these moments of being both rock and stumbling block that we find the balance of humility and strength, where true transformation takes place.

- How do you respond when your understanding of God's plans challenges you?
- In what ways can you turn stumbling blocks into stepping stones of faith?
- When have you experienced growth through correction?
- Pray for a heart open to learning and transformation.
- Lift desires and plans that need alignment with God's will.

### Day 5

#### Scripture: Acts 12:5-7

The image of Peter as a bridge encapsulates the call for each of us to open doors and welcome all to God's love. Even when imprisoned, Peter remained a vessel of hope. His journey from Simon to Peter, from fisherman to leader, is a testament to how divine grace transforms us into channels of God's compassion.

We are called to be bridges—connecting, welcoming, and loving those around us. Our lives can be a beacon of hope, guiding others toward God's promises. In embodying Peter's journey, we understand that change and redemption are always possible, sustained by faith and the courage to embrace God's call.

- How can you act as a bridge in your community today?
- What barriers limit your openness to others?
- How is God calling you to embrace a transformative journey like Peter?
- Pray to remain open to God's call to be a bridge for others.
- Ask for the courage to live out your faith boldly and inclusively.

# End notes and further reading

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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

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



## Tatungalung Totem

This is produced on  
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everywhere.

Prepared by Rev'd Dennis Webster, Rector of the Anglican Parish of Painesville, Diocese of Gippsland for personal or small group use.

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