

SCRIPTURE STUDY, SERMON & WEEKLY DEVOTIONS



PENTECOST 8A
17 JULY 2026

Dennis Webster

Revised Common Lectionary Related

Pentecost 8A

Isaiah 44.6-8

Psalms 86.11-17

Romans 8.12-25

Matthew 13.24-30, 36-43



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Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collects

Lord of all power and might, who art the
author and giver of all good things;
Graft in our hearts the love of thy Name,
increase in us true religion,
nourish us with all goodness,
and of thy great mercy keep us in the same;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

WHEN ISAIAH
CALLS GOD
ISRAEL'S
REDEEMER, IS
HE TALKING
ABOUT **JESUS**?



WWW.AGNUSDAY.ORG

WELL, WE CAN READ
IT AS POINTING TO
JESUS, BUT IT'S AN
OLDER IDEA...



IF SOMEONE BECAME
ENSLAVED DUE TO POVERTY,
THEIR CLOSEST RELATIVE WAS
DUTY-BOUND TO BUY THEM OUT
OF SLAVERY.*



*LEVITICUS 25:47-54

WOW, THAT'S
INTENSE! I
WOULD FEEL LIKE
I OWE THEM MY
WHOLE LIFE!



EXACTLY.



ISAIAH 44:6-8

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INTRODUCTION

What if everything you thought you knew about fear—especially the fear of God—was shaped more by history and politics than by Scripture itself?

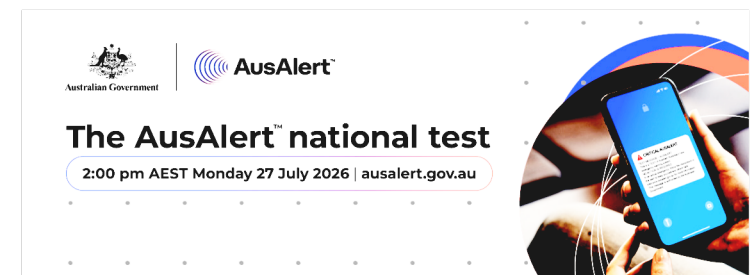
Reflecting deeply during the final days with his dying father, we are invited into one of faith's most misunderstood truths: that "the fear of the Lord" has never meant terror before an angry judge.

Drawing from the covenant thread woven through Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, and culminating in Christ's raising of Lazarus, Pastor Dennis reveals that Godly fear is reverent awe before the One who gives life—and raises the dead.

His unique pastoral lens, forged through years beside the bedsides of the dying, cuts through centuries of theological drift—from Reformation politics to Puritan retribution—to recover something ancient and freeing.

This is not a faith that excludes the marginalised or hoards grace; it is a Church that functions, as Pope Francis affirmed, as a hospital for the broken. And in the parable of the weeds, Jesus speaks directly to us: *you are not the Judge—keep sowing, keep tending, keep loving.*

This week, lay down the burden of deciding who belongs. Open your hands to grace. The harvest belongs to God



- Ask God to help you live with reverence and awe for His holiness and power.
- Pray for strength to trust in God's wisdom and love as you try to live faithfully.
- Seek guidance in forming right relationships with your neighbours, grounded in love and humility.

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.

Teach me your ways, O Lord.

In these last days with my father, I have found myself reflecting on what Scripture means by "the fear of the Lord."

I prepare, I change, I repent—not out of fear, but out of love. Love for God, for my neighbour, for myself. When the time comes, it is my whole self, made in God's image, a child of the Father, who will answer for my life. Others may see it differently. Still, fear is not what moves me.

The phrase 'fear of the Lord' is complicated when it comes to translation, how we use it, and what it means spiritually. Some biblical and early Church writers describe fear as something terrifying, but over time, people have come to see Godly fear more as reverence and awe for the giver of life. (Fear of the Lord, n.d.) (Matthew 10:28)

At the heart of it all is this: right relationship with God, with neighbour, with ourselves, is born from reverence and awe before the One who gives life.

Waiting beside the bed of someone you love has a way of clarifying what you truly believe. The raising of Lazarus has long shaped my understanding of death—not as Christ's final enemy to be feared, but as the place where resurrection first declares its promise.

If we look at where the word 'fear' comes from, we can see how its meaning has changed over time. (Fear - Etymology, Origin & Meaning, 2026) 'The fear of the Lord' does not mean being scared of God. Instead, it means living with a constant awareness of God's holiness, goodness, and power, so that our lives are formed by humble trust, love, and faithful obedience.

When our lives are shaped by humble trust, by love, by obedience, we grow. We become more hospitable, more whole, more rooted in purpose. Fear, in this sense, is not about shrinking back, but about opening our hands to grace. It is covenant.

It is important to consider the different meanings of the word 'fear.' If we use today's dictionary definition and consider how fear shows up in our relationships and communities, we do not find a clear answer but rather a question.

The Oxford Dictionary says 'fear' is an unpleasant feeling caused by the threat of danger, pain, or harm. It can also mean anxiety about what might happen or concern for others' safety. The dictionary also includes an older meaning in which fear is a blend of dread and reverence, as in the phrase 'love and fear of God.' This raises a question: how does reverence form our understanding of fear?

In English, we use 'fear' to talk about being afraid of danger, feeling

anxious, or having regrets. In older times, it also meant 'regard and awe.' This older meaning helps us understand how 'fear' was used in the Bible and in the times of Jesus, Daniel, and Ezra. (Fear of the Lord, n.d.) Does the meaning of fear change when we look at it today? Should we use a different word if our language changes the meaning of ancient manuscripts? means to live in right relationship with God and neighbour, not to be frightened.

At the heart of the Pentateuch is the understanding that God is resetting the relationship between the divine and the created realms. All agreements are based on mutual obligations. (Just, 2022) Each covenant deepens rather than replaces the previous one. Noah, Abraham, Moses and David are not isolated agreements but stages in God's persistent work of restoring relationship with humanity.

In Hebrew, fear in the context of the covenant means living faithfully before the holy God. Godly fear is a key part of faith, shaping how believers relate to God and live. It brings wisdom, protection, and blessing, drawing people closer to God. (See https://biblehub.com/topical/g/godly_fear.htm for more on different understandings of fear.)

As the idea of fear developed, in Aramaic it came to mean recognising God's majesty. Later translations introduced some changes in meaning. In Greek, the word is 'phobos,' from which we get the modern word 'phobia.' In the New Testament, Φόβος still carries the Hebrew sense of the word, because the Septuagint had already given it that meaning. (Phobos Meaning - Greek Lexicon | New Testament (NAS), n.d.)

When Paul urges the Philippians to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling," his hearers are not thinking of panic attacks. They are hearing the wisdom tradition of Proverbs. The narrowing of "fear" into anxiety comes much later, particularly in modern English, psychology and some forms of popular preaching.

In early Christian and medieval writings, thinkers such as Jerome, Augustine, and Aquinas argued that even as 'fear' became linked to dread, its true meaning concerned mutual respect and reverence. This was the accepted way to understand the relationship between God and people. (Geest, 2012)

During the Reformation, people focused on fear as a substitute for reverence, awe, and mutual esteem. The language also began to reflect ideas of liability and the politics of the time. (Giles & Goldis, 2018) Thomas Cranmer's view of fear is perhaps best shown in the Prayer of Humble Access (BCP 1537 ff):

We do not presume to come to this thy table
(O merciful Lord)
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in thy manifold and great mercies:
**we be not worthy so much
as to gather up the crumbs under thy table:**

**but thou art the same Lord,
whose property is always to have mercy:**
grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ,
and to drink his blood, [in these holy Mysteries,]
that we may continually dwell in him, and he in us,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body,
and our souls washed through his most precious blood. Amen
(Order for Communion, 1648-49)

Awe lives in our sense of unworthiness. Grace lives in God's heart. To abide with God, to walk in covenant, is to receive the grace that comes with holy fear.

Knox, by contrast, spoke during a time of political unrest. If you stand outside St Mungo's Cathedral in Glasgow and look up at the Necropolis, you see a large statue of Knox pointing at the Cathedral, which can seem harsh or judgmental. Still, Knox also called for a right relationship with God, even though there could be serious consequences if that relationship was not mutual.

Later, the Puritans focused more on retribution. As language changed, fear became less about God's majesty and grace, and more about what could be lost if someone was outside the covenant. Punishment became the main idea. (Pronk, 1997)

I do not fear a God who makes me anxious or suspicious. I do not see the Church as an exclusive club that keeps out marginalised or 'forbidden' people. I welcome anyone seeking God's love, and I believe the real requirements are the resurrection and the restoration of creation with God. As Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV said, the local church is a hospital for those in need, not a resort for the chosen. (Watkins, 2019)

Above all, I believe this: every life is sacred, every face reflects God's image. I give thanks for the wonder and mystery of resurrection. I try to stand in grace, to remain in God's presence. I fear God with awe that never leaves me. But I also fear a world that turns people away, that chooses power over mercy.

As I lay my father to rest, I find that this is the fear of the Lord that remains—not terror before an angry judge, but reverent trust before the God who raises the dead. My calling is not to separate wheat from weeds. It is to keep sowing, keep tending, and keep loving until the Lord of the harvest comes.

This week's gospel is the parable of the weeds. Christ says, "Leave them." Leave them. Not because the weeds are good, but because you are not the Judge.

A street-corner prophet stands at a distance and tells us what we must do before the world ends. He feels he must point out the weeds.

Jesus tells his disciples to keep working in the field. For me, this connects what we learn from history with real life. I have spent years

with people near death, and I know how tempting it is to judge who is wheat and who is weeds. But Jesus says, "Leave that to me. Keep sowing. Keep tending. Keep loving."

It is the quiet conviction that fear is transformed by the resurrection into reverent trust.

There is a real freedom in that.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

'The fear of the Lord' is not being scared of God, but living with a constant awareness of God's holiness and goodness — a kind of reverence and awe. How does this idea challenge or change the way you normally think about what it means to 'fear' God?

- The word 'fear' has changed in meaning over time — from the Hebrew sense of a faithful, reverent relationship with God to the modern English sense of being frightened or anxious. He argues that true Godly fear is closer to awe and humble trust than to dread.
- Is there an area of your own faith life where fear — whether anxiety about God's judgment or something else — has gotten in the way of simply trusting and loving God? What might it look like to replace that fear with reverence?

In the Parable of the Weeds, Jesus tells his disciples to leave the weeds alone and not try to pull them up — because that judgment belongs to God alone. Reflecting on years spent with people near death, saying it's tempting to decide who is 'wheat' and who is 'weeds.' Why do you think Jesus gives this instruction, and what does it mean for how we treat people around us?

- Matthew's parable of the weeds says his calling is not to separate wheat from weeds, but to 'keep sowing, keep tending, and keep loving until the Lord of the harvest comes.' He contrasts this with the street-corner prophet who feels compelled to point out who doesn't belong.
- Think of a relationship or situation in your own life where you've been tempted to write someone off or label them as a 'weed.' How might Jesus' instruction — 'Leave them. You are not the Judge' — change how you approach that person or situation?

When our lives are shaped by humble trust, love, and obedience, we become 'more hospitable, more whole, more rooted in purpose.' How does living in reverent relationship with

God actually change the way we relate to the people around us?

- Tying 'the fear of the Lord' directly to how we treat our neighbours and ourselves. He describes it as a covenant — a mutual relationship with God that opens our hands to grace rather than causing us to shrink back in terror.
- In your own relationships — with family, friends, or your community — where do you notice the difference between acting out of genuine love and reverence versus acting out of obligation, guilt, or fear of what others think?

Drawing on Philippians 4, where Paul urges believers to 'work out your salvation with fear and trembling,' and argues that Paul's audience wasn't thinking of panic or anxiety — they were hearing the wisdom tradition of Proverbs. How does understanding the original meaning behind a biblical phrase change the way you read and apply Scripture?

- The word 'fear' shifted meaning across Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and modern English — and how that shift can cause us to misunderstand what biblical writers actually meant. He suggests the narrowing of 'fear' into anxiety is a much later development, not what Paul or the Hebrew writers intended.
- Is there a verse or Bible passage that has always confused or even troubled you? How might looking into its original language or historical context give you a fresh or more freeing understanding of what it means?

Sitting beside his dying father clarified what he truly believes — and that resurrection transforms fear into reverent trust. He says he does not fear an angry God, but he does fear 'a world that turns people away, that chooses power over mercy.' What does it mean for resurrection hope to shape how we face both death and injustice in the world today?

- The raising of Lazarus and his own experience of watching a loved one near death. He connects resurrection not just to life after death, but to the way it reframes fear itself — turning terror before a judge into trust before a God who raises the dead.
- When you think about your own mortality, or about injustice and suffering in the world, what fears come up for you? How does the promise of resurrection — that God has the final word — speak to those fears personally?

5 Day Devotional

This five-day Devotional will take a deeper dive into the Sermon from this weekend, guiding us to explore the profound theme of 'the fear of the Lord' as reverence and awe. Join us in understanding how these spiritual concepts can enrich our daily lives and fortify our faith journey.



Day 1

Proverbs 9:10

Today we delve into the heart of wisdom, beginning with the foundational principle that “the fear of the Lord” is not about living in fright but acknowledging God’s boundless holiness and supremacy. This type of fear is a reverent trust, a surrender empowered by love and awe, not dread. It’s in this posture that we become aligned with God’s intentions, opening ourselves to a desired transformation.

Our relationship with God, therefore, evolves beyond mere compliance to a dynamic of love-driven reverence. It’s essential to recognise fear as both awe and respect, guiding us to live in humility, love, and faithful obedience, fostering growth and purpose in God’s covenant. This understanding shifts our focus from punitive anxiety to an embrace of divine grace.

- How do you understand 'the fear of the Lord' in your personal faith journey?
- In what ways does reverent trust influence your actions and decisions?
- How do you balance fear with love in your relationship with God?
- Pray for a deeper understanding of God’s holiness and love.
- Ask for the wisdom to live in reverence and awe of God’s majesty.

Day 2

Philippians 2:12

Today we’re invited to understand “working out our salvation with fear and trembling” as an adventure, not a chore. Fear is identified as an acknowledgment of God’s omnipotence and goodness, not a source of anxiety. As we engage with this truth, we realise the call to faithfully emulate Christ, exercising humility and extending grace in our

relationships.

Through this, we are reminded that God's presence is transformative, extending beyond fear to foster faith-based trust and reinforcing that our actions, rooted in grace, align with God's will. This process isn't about proving ourselves but about growing into believers who continue to sow, tend, and love through grace's power.

- How can you actively 'work out your salvation' today?
- What fears hinder you from fully trusting God's process in your life?
- How do you experience growth through obedience and love in your faith journey?
- Pray for courage to embrace God's unfolding work in your life.
- Seek guidance in balancing action and faith in your walk with God.

Day 3

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Today we explore the concept of fear as a respectful reverence, a spiritual key to recognising God's enduring majesty. This reverence invites us into a right relationship, transcending mere obligation and stepping into a sacred space of mutual respect and adoration.

The path to knowing God begins here, in awe that fuels our pursuit of a life steeped in holiness and admiration for our Creator. Through this reverent fear, we cultivate a fulfilling life, enriched with wisdom, protection, and divine blessing. It's the awe of God that shapes our identity and aligns our hearts with purpose.

- How can you foster a deeper reverence for God in your daily life?
- What aspects of God's character instil awe and wonder within you?
- How does reverent fear guide you toward obedience?
- Seek a renewed sense of awe in perceiving God's greatness.
- Pray for the wisdom to live faithfully, honouring God in all ways.

Day 4

Isaiah 11:3

Isaiah prophesies a Messiah who delights in the fear of the Lord, a fear that is not terror but profound insight into God's sovereignty. An insight is offered into how this understanding of fear cultivates joy and fulfilment, aligning believers with divine love and purpose.

As we reflect on this revelation, we're encouraged to shift from focusing solely on fear as dread to understanding it as a gateway to profound joy and enlightenment. Reimagining fear in this way is a process of embracing God's fidelity and goodness—one that reshapes our spiritual lives into a tapestry of grace and understanding.

- What new insights do you gain from the understanding of godly fear?
- How does this affect your perception of judgment?
- In what ways can fear lead to joy in your spiritual journey?
- Ask God for the grace to embrace fear as a source of joy and wisdom.
- Pray for clarity and understanding in your relationship with God.

Day 5

Matthew 13:24-30

In the parable of the weeds, Jesus encourages us to leave judgment to God, illustrating a profound trust and patience in divine timing. The teaching goes on, connecting it to life's decisions without fear of judgment, but rooted in love and unfaltering trust in God's righteous judgment.

This closing reflection encapsulates the transformation of fear into a reliance on God's timing and wisdom, emphasising our responsibility to sow seeds of love without presuming to categorise others. The journey of faith invites us to open our hearts, leaving space for God's divine intervention through mercy and grace.

- How do you embrace patience in waiting for God's judgment?
- What role does trust play when you face uncertainty?
- How does this parable influence your view on judging others?
- Pray for the patience to trust in God's perfect timing.
- Seek understanding and compassion in viewing others with grace.

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

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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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