

SCRIPTURE STUDY, SERMON & WEEKLY DEVOTIONS



Photo: from ABC TV

PENTECOST 14 A
30TH AUGUST, 2026

Facing the Right Way
Dennis Webster

Revised Common Lectionary Related

Pentecosts 14A

Jeremiah 15.15-21

Psalms 26.1-8

Romans 12.9-end

Matthew 16.21-end



Made with the assistance of AI,
including Grammarly® and ChatAtlas GTP5
Canva – Affinity Publisher and
Ulysses, Grok, and
church.tech(gloo.us)



Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collects

Almighty and merciful God,
of whose only gift it cometh that thy faithful people
do unto thee true and laudable service:
Grant, we beseech thee,
that we may so faithfully serve thee in this life,
that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly promises;
through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord



INTRODUCTION

The sermon “Facing the Right Way” prompts us to think about what actually flows out of our lives and compares this with the state of Lake Eyre in the desert, which at certain times comes to life, and Ezekiel’s vision of water which brings about healing and fertility flowing from God’s sanctuary. Just as the sanctuary brings about healing and fertility, so too our lives— since we are ‘temples of the living God’— should be filled with the renewing presence of God, that is to say, with water.

The course of the river is shown in Romans 12: true love, the free giving of oneself that waits, generosity that extends our hands, hospitality that welcomes, compassion that listens, peace that conquers evil. The way we act shows where our hearts lie: honour, hope that lasts, and patience.

To Peter, Jesus says, “Get behind me.” This is not a rejection but an invitation; it is not a sign of lack of love, but a call to see things as the mind is concerned with what is close at hand, not what is holy. If we are to follow Jesus, we must turn, go behind him, give up what we hold on to and take up the cross. Repentance is more than feeling sorry; it is the change of light in his eyes. Peter’s turning to face Christ and let Him renew and change us.

The Sermon calls us to ask: What perspective must we drop in order to follow Jesus? We must turn away from the habits of this world, to change our ways and to listen to God’s will. And our choices with regard to creation— our choices in our own lives— can carry the life of Christ into the world. Just as water brings life to the desert, so Christ brings healing through us. What flows from us— our words, our actions— can be a source of optimism and revival for others.

Go forth into the world in peace;
be of good courage;
hold fast that which is good;
render to no one evil for evil;
strengthen the faint hearted;
support the weak;
help the afflicted;
give honour to all;
love and serve the Lord,
rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit;
and the blessing of God almighty,
✠ the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be upon you and remain with you always. Amen.

It is a bit difficult to think of writing about parched waters and overflowing sanctuaries in the light of the Nepalese humanitarian and geographical disaster. This reflection was written prior to the 26th August, but I am persevering, because, what the world needs to see now, especially the good people of Nepal and beyond, our love of God flooding out from our hearts, bringing healing, bringing peace.

Facing the Right Way

In Marree, in the heart of the desert, there is a yacht club. The water is missing. This great basin stretches across a sixth of the continent, yet most days it is Jeremiah's failed stream—a dry river, a lifeless wetland. To gaze across the salt pans is to see creation itself echo Jeremiah's sorrow. But sometimes, the Commodore stands and watches as water arrives like an inland wave, bringing new life to the land. It is as if the river becomes, as Ezekiel saw, God's blessing flowing over what was barren. God's life moving, deepening, healing, making fruitfulness possible.

Crustaceans appear. The desert fills with life. Fish are carried in the flood. If you have ever wondered where pelicans go, Marree is their holiday. Kati Thanda, at the heart of the Dreaming for the Arabana and Dieiri people, is what Ezekiel saw.

“9 Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live. 10 Fishermen will stand along the shore; from En Gedi to En Eglaim there will be places for spreading nets. The fish will be of many kinds—like the fish of the Mediterranean Sea. 11 But the swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt. 12 Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.”

Ezekiel 47:9, 12

Ezekiel's river is a more pleasant image. God's life flowing outward, deepening, healing, making fruitfulness possible again. Soon, the Lake Eyre Yacht Club will host its regatta, as the Season of Creation ends and World Animal Day arrives. The birdlife, the fish, the creatures—life at the lowest place—continue to change and grow.

In time, the waters recede. Fish, crustaceans, birds diminish. The great lake evaporates. Kati Thanda returns to salt and desert. This is not creation failing. It is the rhythm of this ancient land.

Ezekiel sees water flowing from the sanctuary and bringing life wherever it goes. Paul sees something remarkably similar flowing from lives immersed in Christ: genuine love, generosity, hospitality, compassion, peace; evil overcome not by greater evil, but by good.

This is Ezekiel's vision: water flowing from the temple, deepening until it becomes a river that cannot be crossed, only entered. Wherever that water flows, there is life.

Trees grow beside it. Their leaves do not wither. Their fruit does not fail. What they produce nourishes, and even their leaves are healing. There is also room for patches of dryness and barrenness. It is all part of God's word in creation.

It is a vision of creation alive.

It could also be a vision of ourselves.

If we call ourselves temples of the living God, what flows from us? What follows downstream from our choices, our words, the creatures we share this place with, and the way we care for the earth?

Romans 12 answers the question:

Let love be genuine.
What flows from the temple?
Love without pretence.
Honour.
Hope.
Patience.
Generosity.
Hospitality.
Compassion.
Peace.
Refusing vengeance.
Good overcoming evil.
The river reveals the temple.

What flows from us reveals where our heart and mind have been set.

Jesus' rebuke shifts from 'Get behind me, Peter!'; the issue is strikingly one of orientation. Jesus does not accuse Peter of lacking affection, loyalty, or even faith. Peter's problem is where his mind is facing:

“you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

And then comes the extraordinary sequence:

Get behind me → deny yourself → take up your cross → follow me.

“Behind me” is precisely where a disciple belongs. If we take the Good Shepherd imagery, it is the sheep who follow the shepherd.

So “Get behind me, Satan” can be heard not simply as “Go away!” but with a rather sharper irony: Peter, stop standing in front of me, trying to determine where this road ought to go. Get back into the place of the disciple. Follow.

When we repent, we turn around and see the world differently. Repentance is not primarily staring backwards at what I have done with remorse. It is turning so that what was behind me is now ahead of me. The landscape hasn’t changed; my orientation within it has.

Then, the words of Paul begin to crystallise into something even more extraordinary. We are called to “be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what the will of God is...”

The transformed Christian isn’t simply someone whose account has been settled. The transformed Christian sees anew and therefore walks differently.

Don’t be conformed to this age’s way of seeing.
Be transformed.
Have your mind renewed.
Discern the difference.
Live differently.
What flows from us shows where our heart and mind rest.

We come through the water facing another direction.

Repentance is not spending our lives looking back at what we have left behind. It is turning around, discovering Christ before us, and walking on.

Renounce.

Turn.

Take up.

Follow.

Today we close with the blessing of baptism. It is the commission we share, because the water of life in which we were immersed still flows from our hearts. It could defile us, or define us. We are sent people. We are an apostolic gathering, pushed out the door with work to do.

Ezekiel sees water flowing from the temple. Soon, we will be immersed in the season of creation. In these weeks, we remember the water of our baptism. This is a time to contemplate what flows from our lives.

We are called to be immersed in the life of Christ, so that his life may flow through us for the healing of God’s world.

And with them, and everything else we do and see, we might continue to praise God together with the psalmist

6 I will immerse my hands into your innocence, O Lord,
that I may serve what is flowing from your sanctuary;
7 To make heard the voice of thanksgiving
and proclaim to all your wonderful deeds.
8 Lord, I love the house of your habitation
and the place where your glory abides.

Psalm 26.6-8 alt

Caring for our own temples as a living sacrifice calls on us to realise that where we are is not always where we wish to be. I no longer belong to that. Turning to Christ, I give the past no more of my allegiance. And when I renounce all that is evil, know this: I am going somewhere else.

Renounce.

Turn towards Jesus.

Take up the cross.

Follow.

The true position of a disciple. Then there remains one question that I cannot instruct you on, nor give you an easy solution to. That question is, “What way of seeing the world do I need to leave behind in order to be a disciple of Jesus?” How can I resist being conformed to this age’s way of seeing, but rather, be transformed, renewing our mind, discerning and living differently?

Paul helpfully provides us with a list to take on board.

Humility. Different gifts. Genuine love. Abhor evil, hold fast to good; give honour, practice patience, be hospitable, bless those who are against you, let the vengeance be God’s, and never overcome evil with evil.

Romans 12

I’m not sure about you; I think that is more than enough to get on with.

Soon, the burgee will fly again over Kati Thanda, Lake Eyre. The Commodore will review the program for next month’s regatta. The integrity of creation, as we name in our Marks of Mission, is as important as the integrity of our relationships to God, to ourselves, to our neighbours. What flows out of us is what matters.

Dear friends, where do we belong? Are we facing the right direction, following Christ? Individually, as a Parish, as a people, we always need to

look at where we are facing. And if we need to change, to repent in the truest sense of the word, think differently. There is still a road to walk. May e all have the courage to walk the path ahead.

Discussion

he sermon describes repentance not as looking back with remorse, but as a turning around so that "what was behind me is now ahead of me," aligning our minds with divine things. What "way of seeing the world" (as the sermon asks) do you feel you most need to leave behind or reorient yourself from in order to truly follow Christ today?

- Consider how your perspectives on success, security, or relationships might need reorientation to align with Jesus' call to "deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow."

Paul calls us to "be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what the will of God is." In what practical ways can we actively resist being "conformed to this age's way of seeing" and instead cultivate a renewed mind that enables us to live out the virtues Paul lists in Romans 12?

- This involves intentionally choosing humility, practicing genuine love, and actively overcoming evil with good, rather than adopting the world's patterns of thought and action.

The sermon uses the image of water flowing from God's sanctuary, bringing life and fruitfulness. If our lives are meant to be like this river, what specific "life-giving waters" from Romans 12—such as genuine love, generosity, or compassion—do you feel are most present in your life right now? What areas, conversely, feel more like "swamps and marshes" (Ezekiel 47:11) that need more of God's transforming flow?



5 Day Devotional

This five-day Devotional invites you to step into the river of life. Life moves, sometimes into places that feel dry, bitter, or still. As you reflect, let your heart turn toward Christ. Let your mind find rest. Practise the kind of love that brings healing to the world God loves.

Day 1 Ezekiel 47:9-12

Ezekiel sees water flowing from God's sanctuary. It deepens, becoming a river you cannot manage from the edge. You can only step in. Wherever this river moves, life appears: fish multiply, trees flourish, even the leaves bring healing. The Sermon gives us a picture of a desert lake, sometimes filled with living water. This is not only a metaphor. It is God's way of bringing new life where we live.

If you are a temple of God's presence, what flows from you into the world? Some places downstream may be refreshed and healed. Others may still taste of salt and resistance. Today, notice this without turning away. Ask God for a deeper current of grace within you, so that fruitfulness can return.

- In which area of your life does it currently feel most like a dry salt pan—whether that be emotionally, spiritually, in your relationships, or physically?
- What downstream effects might the words, habits, and choices you have this week be having on other people?
- Give an example of a place in which you have witnessed God giving new life following a period of barrenness.
- How might it be for you to cease watching from the shore and instead enter the river by means of prayer, worship, or obedience today.
- Do something small today which is in accord with God's life-giving flow (such as encouragement, generosity, care for creation, or reconciliation).

Day 2 Matthew 16:23-24

Jesus' words to Peter show that you can love him deeply and still hold on to the wrong way of thinking. Peter wants to lead, to choose the path that feels safe. But Jesus calls him to be a disciple. When Jesus says, "Get behind me," it is not only a rebuke. This is an invitation to follow, not to go back to the place of a disciple's control.

Repentance is not about staring at the past. It is turning so that Christ stands before you. This turning costs something: you let go of yourself and take up your cross. Yet it brings freedom. When you stop trying to map the road ahead, you can walk with Jesus, trusting that his way leads to life.

- Where in your life do you most want to stand in front of Jesus, to shape the result or to avoid discomfort?
- What is it that most readily takes hold of your mind among the 'human things' (such as status, comfort, being right, or self-protection)?
- What would it mean for you to be behind Jesus in a practical way today, for instance by making one decision which showed a willingness to give in?
- What would you be afraid of losing if you genuinely pursued Christ's path during this period?
- Compose a short prayer of repentance aimed at realigning oneself: turn towards Jesus and ask for the courage needed to follow.

Day 3 Romans 12:2

Paul says transformation comes through a renewed mind. This is a new way of seeing, which leads to a new way of living. The Sermon calls us to resist the patterns of vanity, vengeance, contempt, and consumption, and to learn what God desires. The landscape may not change, but your place in it does. And so your steps change too.

This is not self-improvement. It is the slow shaping of a disciple who learns to see with Christ's eyes. Over time, your life begins to look like the river from the sanctuary. Not flashy, but quietly bringing God's presence into ordinary days. As you practise, notice, repent, and practise again, your judgment grows wise.

- Name one pattern of thinking you've absorbed from "this age" that you want God to renew (cynicism, anxiety, comparison, outrage, scarcity).
- What practice most helps you notice God's presence and will (Scripture, silence, community, confession, creation)? Choose one to prioritise today.
- Where do your thoughts most often go when you are stressed, and what does that reveal about your current orientation?
- Identify one decision you're facing; what would it look like to discern God's will rather than merely your preference?
- Take five minutes to be still, then write one sentence beginning with: "Jesus, help me see ____ the way you see it."

Day 4 Romans 12:9-13

Romans 12 gives the river shape: real love, honour, patience in suffering, steady prayer, generosity, hospitality. These are not ideas. They are the felt movement of God's life in a community. When love is honest, it heals.

It is like trees by the river, offering food and shelter.

Today returns to the question: what flows from the temple? You are invited to let love become real in small ways. You do not need to create a flood. Make space for the current through simple, faithful acts. Over time, these habits shape not just what you do, but what you long for and how you see others.

- Which phrase in Romans 12:9-13 feels most needed in your life right now, and why?
- Who is one person you can honour today through a message, a thank-you, or a public word of appreciation?
- What would genuine love (without pretence) look like in a relationship where you usually perform or protect yourself?
- Choose one act of generosity this week that is specific and realistic (time, money, attention, practical help).
- Practice hospitality: welcome someone, make space for conversation, or include someone who could be overlooked.

Day 5 Romans 12:17-21

Here Paul's vision becomes clear: refuse vengeance, seek peace, overcome evil with good. This is not weakness. It is courage to let God be God, even when you want to strike back. The river image helps. What you release into the stream, whether resentment or mercy, will flow downstream into your relationships, your community, your witness.

Here, baptism becomes a sending. Immersed in Christ, you are sent so that healing can reach the world—creation and community alike. The question is not if something will flow from you, but what. In Christ, you can choose the good that breaks the cycle of evil and opens space for new life.

- Where are you most tempted toward payback, subtle retaliation, or rehearsing arguments in your mind? Name it honestly.
- What would "as far as it depends on you, live at peace" look like in one specific relationship or situation this week?
- Identify one good you can do in response to something hard—an apology, a boundary with kindness, a prayer for an enemy, or a truthful conversation without contempt.
- How might your daily choices affect the downstream wellbeing of creation (waste, consumption, care, gratitude)? Choose one change to practice this week.
- Write a commissioning sentence for yourself: "Because I belong to Christ and follow behind him, I will let this flow from my life: ____."

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

AgnusDay.org cartoon Copyright © 1999 - 2006 James Wetzstein.

All rights reserved. The bible is The New Revised Standard Version, copyright 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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
GunaiKurnai Country and
our respects are paid 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.

Acknowledgement of use appreciated

Subscription to "www.breaking-open-the-word.org" is available.

Also substack: substack.com/@tastigr

Published every weekend, usually on Saturday, AEST.

Biblical Quotes are from The New Revised Standard Version - Anglicised, which is
© 1990 the National Churches of Christ, USA.

Study notes are prepared in conjunction and by subscription of Gloo Content
studio, formerly www.church.tech, an AI open source for pastors. Content is
modified for local use.

Images are either from public domain, theworshipcloud.org, original work or
generate

tastigr.info

is registered to D. M Webster
and all rights are reserved. © 2026

www.breaking-open-the-word.org
Email: dennis-at-breakingopentheword.org