

SCRIPTURE STUDY, SERMON & WEEKLY DEVOTIONS



PENTECOST 15 A
6TH SEPTEMBER 2026

Ring the Bell.
Carry the Water.
Let the Tears fall.
Dennis Webster

Revised Common Lectionary Related

Pentecosts 15A

Ezekiel 33.7-11

Psalms 119.33-40

Romans 13.1-10

Matthew 18.10-20

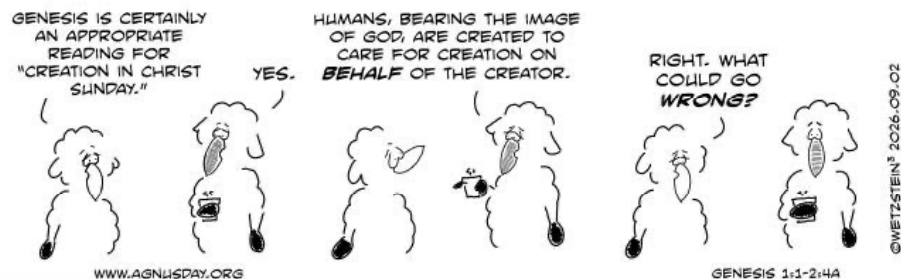


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Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collects

Almighty and everlasting God,
give unto us the increase of faith,
hope, and charity;
and, that we may obtain that which thou dost promise,
make us to love that which thou dost command:
through Jesus Christ our Lord.



INTRODUCTION

With such great suffering, as in recent natural disasters such as the collapse of a glacier in the Himalayas, this Sermon urges the Church to adopt a threefold attitude: ring the bell, carry the water, and let the tears flow. It asks us to go beyond debate or despair and to accept our role as sentinel, servant and mourner for a suffering creation and community.

The key point is to achieve reconciliation—with ourselves, with one another and with the earth. “Ringing the bell” is like sounding the alarm, as the prophet Ezekiel used to be a watchman (Ezekiel 33), recognizing pain and warning of danger—whether that danger is a disaster or fragmentation of relationships. It means not turning our backs on a wound, even if it hurts. And “carrying the water” is a very real, active love and service, too.

As Paul says in Romans 13:8, “We owe no one anything except to love one another, for love is the fulfilment of the law.” That means helping the displaced, soothing those grieving and caring for the earth. Reconciliation in this sense includes “heavy lifting” and joint effort: Jesus does not want us to exclude but to look after, lift others, share, guide and love.

Finally, the idea of “letting the tears flow” acknowledges grief is a key aspect of our vocation. We are encouraged to lament with creation, mourning both what we have lost and what might still be lost, and not hurry to give a quick comfort or immediate solution. The Sermon contrasts the destructive “death disguised as a flood” seen in Nepal with the “Living Water,” a symbol of healing that flows from the temple as described in Ezekiel 47.

The Church is called to embrace both of these realities—the warning signal and the healing river—to neither escape from suffering nor neglect Christ’s work of bringing all things to new life. In doing so, we honor the gift of creation and we carry the burden of reconciliation with our presence in the watchman, servant and mourner.



Ring the Bell.
Carry the Water.
Let the tears flow.

This week we continued to watch the Himalayas weep. A glacier collapsed, and a wall of water, mud and stone ripped through villages along the Nepal-Tibet border. Hundreds are dead. Thousands are missing. And if you are like me, you have felt the peculiar grief of watching a disaster unfold on a screen while you pour a glass of clean water and wonder what to do with your hands. This is one of the faces of the tears of creation.

The ancient texts we hear today were not written for peaceful times. They were written for those who needed to know what to do when the world was falling apart.

It is tempting, already, to turn this disaster into an argument - to assign blame before we have even counted the dead. But this week is not a debate. It is a wound. Creation floods, tears through valleys, and leaves behind new ground, but always at a human cost. This has happened before. It will happen again. Some villages were caught unprepared. Others heard the sentinel's warning.

Some alarms are familiar: the two-tone sirens that sound from wars past or the warnings that sound before tsunamis, lahars, or storms. But the same sirens also call us back and let us know that it is safe to return, but we return differently, with a different view of what we have seen and what is now.

The Church is called to be sentinel, servant and mourner for a suffering creation. When the little ones suffer, we do not fall into despair or easy comfort. We are called to sound the alarm, to serve, to grieve. Grief is our calling.

Ring the bell. Carry the water. Let the tears flow.

Reconciliation is not only sorrow for what it has been but strength to do what is needed. The sentinel sounds the alarm, and we are called to carry water to those who are in need. Sometimes, love is not enough. More is asked of us.

The little ones are children, families, homes and the earth itself. And we will sometimes join creation in lament, mourning what we lost and what we might yet lose. We cannot turn away — even when our eyes sting with tears for the one for whom the bell now tolls.

At the centre of our readings is reconciliation— with ourselves, with each other, with the community. That is the heart of our common life. Some are hurting, are separated from the community, are hurt by pain, by illness, by others' acts of kindness. If the community is out of step with you, the bell is ringing already.

Forgiveness starts where it originates. Grief is personal and unpredictable. Jesus reminds us that reconciliation may require heavy lifting. If the first step does not heal, we share the task. If healing still does not come, it is work for the whole community. Never are we called to shun or cast out. Sometimes separation comes from within, but it is not Jesus' intention to exclude us to ease our pain.

We call. We tend. We lift, share, guide and love. If space must be created for safety, then so be it. As long as we are happy or grieving, we are all bearers of tears. The grief, the joy, the laughter—these are the layers of reconciliation. Jesus does not give up on us. He wants all of us to be one in him and for him to be one in us.

If our pain comes from the very ground we inhabit, then we should ask ourselves as the sentinel rings the bell: how much water will we carry? How much work will we do to restore a connection built on love, respect and care for all that has been entrusted to us?

When someone is hurt—whether by their own actions or someone else’s—we are called by love to respond. Paul writes to the Romans that we owe no one anything except to love one another, for love is the fulfilment of the law.

In a week like this, love looks like carrying water: to the displaced, to the grieving, to the earth itself. In this world, whether community, creation or society, we are servants, members of one body and each with our own gifts. There are more tears ahead. What matters now is bearing the burden of reconciliation and moving forward together.

This season, we are surrounded by the image of Living Water - the river flowing from the temple, healing the Dead Sea. But the water that crashed through Nepal this week was not living water. It was death dressed as flood.

The prophet Ezekiel knew both. In chapter 33, he is the watchman on the wall, ringing the bell for danger. In chapter 47, he sees the river of healing. The Church has to hold both. We cannot rush to the river without hearing the bell.

Ring the bell. Let the tears flow. Carry the Water.

In our community and in ourselves, there is much to celebrate and much to mourn, to repair, to prepare for. This is the heart of reconciliation. It is not about restoring what was, but about responding with Christ to make all things new. Even in the act that reconciled us to our Creator, Jesus’ body bore the scars. An indication of what was, an assurance of what could be.

We carry the water. So we ring the bell. And we let the tears come - not because we have solved the grief of creation, but because we refuse to look away from it. This is what the Church looks like when it is faithful: watchman, servant, mourner. And this is how we honour the gift of creation entrusted to us - not by pretending the river is already here, but by keeping watch, and carrying water, and weeping, until it is.

Discussion

Passages: Jeremiah 8:18–9:1 | Luke 13:34–35 | John 11:32–36
Season: Season of Creation / International Day of Peace

Passage and Theme

Three texts. One aching thread: the willingness of God — and God's people — to weep. Jeremiah weeps for a broken people. Jesus weeps over a city he loves. Mary falls at his feet, and something in him breaks open.

- This session asks: what does it mean to grieve faithfully?
- And what does our grief have to do with justice?

Background and Context

Jeremiah 8–9 shows the prophet at his most desolate. Jerusalem is collapsing politically, spiritually, and morally. The powerful deceive the vulnerable, and false healers offer cheap comfort: “Peace, peace,” though there is no peace (Jeremiah 8:11). Jeremiah refuses easy optimism and weeps without resolution.

Jesus’s lament over Jerusalem in Luke 13 echoes that prophetic grief: anguished love for people unable to receive what they need. His image of a hen gathering her brood is tender, maternal, and heartbroken.

In John 11, Mary’s tears draw Jesus into grief. “Jesus wept” (John 11:35) reveals a God not distant from suffering, but present within it.

Key Themes and Theological Questions

- Lament as spiritual practice — Is grief a failure of faith, or an act of it?
- The prophetic refusal of false comfort — What does it cost to tell the truth about suffering?
- Divine pathos — What does it mean that God weeps? How does this shape our image of God?
- Solidarity over solutions — When Mary weeps, Jesus doesn't immediately fix things. He first joins her. What does that tell us?

Discussion Questions

1. When have you witnessed or experienced someone refusing to offer false comfort — saying "it's okay" when it wasn't? What did their honesty cost them? What did it give you?

2. Jeremiah is sometimes called "the weeping prophet." In many communities, public grief — especially in men — is stigmatized. How does your faith tradition make space (or not) for communal lament?

3. The phrase "Peace, peace, when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 8:11) feels painfully contemporary. Where do you hear that false peace being proclaimed today — in our politics, our churches, our own hearts?

4. Jesus uses a maternal image for himself in Luke 13:34 — a hen gathering her chicks. What does this image stir in you? Does it expand or challenge your picture of God?

5. "Jesus wept" is often quoted for its brevity. But sit with it longer: what does it mean to you that Jesus did not bypass grief to get to resurrection? What might that mean for how we accompany one another through loss?

6. The Season of Creation asks us to grieve ecological loss — species extinction, poisoned waters, a warming world. Can you hold this as grief, not just a political problem? What would lament look like for the earth?

7. Where in our community — Paynesville, our diocese, our world — do the bells need to ring, the water need to be carried, the tears need to flow right now?

This five-day Devotional is an invitation to faithful presence when creation and community weep. We will practice three holy responses: watchfulness, service, and lament. All is grounded in reconciliation and a love that does not turn away. Each day is a step: ring the bell, carry the water, let the tears flow, and trust the quiet work of God making all things new.



Day 1

Ezekiel 33:7

When disaster comes, suffering can feel distant and unreal. Our hands do not know what to do. God's word to Ezekiel names a first calling: to be a watchman. A sentinel does not argue or assign blame. A sentinel stays awake, pays attention, and tells the truth, so that no one is left in the dark.

Watchfulness isn't panic. It's love that stays alert, and courage that speaks with humility when danger approaches.

Ring the bell can be learning, praying with detail, sharing what is true, and standing up for the "little ones": children, families, the displaced, and the earth alone. The goal is not control, but readiness. We become a people who hear warning, respond quickly, and return changed—more tender, more wise, more committed to life.

- Where have you been tempted to turn suffering into an argument rather than treating it as a wound that needs care?
- What is one place in your community or world where you sense a "bell" should be rung—an issue you can no longer ignore?
- How can you practice watchfulness this week through prayer, learning, or listening to those most affected?
- What does truthful speech look like for you—clear, compassionate, and free from blame or exaggeration?
- Who could you invite into shared attentiveness so you are not carrying the burden of watchfulness alone?

Day 2

Romans 13:8

After the bell rings, love moves from seeing to doing. Paul's words are simple: we owe one another love. In days of sorrow, love is not a feeling. It becomes real, costly, sometimes heavy. The Sermon calls this carrying water—bringing help to the displaced, the grieving, and even to the land itself.

Carrying water begins small. Sometimes it means joining the longer work: supporting relief, preparing together, learning how to care for creation. Love fulfils the law not by perfect feeling, but by steady devotion to our neighbour's good.

This service is not a way around grief. It is what we do while grief is still with us. When your hands do not know what to do, God gives you a holy next step: lift what brings life, and trust that presence matters more than perfect answers.

- What does "carrying water" look like in your life right now—what specific need is closest to you?
- Name one resource you can share this week (time, money, skills, attention, space, influence). How will you offer it?
- Where have you wavered to help because you felt your contribution was too small? What would faithful "small" look like?

- Who are the “little ones” in your context (at work, school, neighbourhood, Church) who may be overlooked in a crisis?
- What is one sustainable action you can take that supports both people and creation care over the long term?

Day 3

Psalm 119:33-34

Sometimes carrying water is not enough to hold all you feel. The Sermon makes space for another calling: to mourn with a suffering creation and a wounded community. Scripture does not hurry us past sorrow. It teaches us to pray our anguish into God’s presence, so our hearts stay soft and do not close.

In Psalm 119, the psalmist asks God for teaching and understanding, because faithful living needs direction when emotions run high. Lament is not losing faith. It is faith telling the truth. Tears can be love—a refusal to call suffering normal, a way to stay close to those who hurt instead of pulling away for comfort.

Grief that is not named can leak out as blame, cynicism, or withdrawal. When we bring sorrow to God, we are made steadier, able to serve without bitterness and speak without cruelty.

- What grief have you been carrying silently—about the world, your community, or your own life? Name it before God.
- When you feel overwhelmed, do you tend to numb out, lash out, or withdraw? What might it look like to lament instead?
- Write a short prayer of lament that includes: what happened, what it cost, and what you are asking God to do.
- Who is a safe person or community where you can share grief free of being rushed into “silver linings”?
- How might making space for tears assist you to serve with greater tenderness and endurance?

Day 4

Matthew 18:15-17

Reconciliation is not only sorrow for what has been. It is strength to do what is needed now. Jesus describes reconciliation as patient, shared work: first one-to-one, then with a few, then with the whole community if needed.

In crisis and grief, relationships strain. Misunderstandings grow, tempers shorten, and disagreements over what should be done can diminish trust. Jesus’ way invites honesty without humiliation.

Sometimes safety needs space, boundaries, or time. The goal is always love and connection, not exclusion for convenience. Reconciliation keeps

the Church from becoming another place where wounds deepen.

- Is there a relationship where the “bell is ringing”—a sign that something needs honest attention rather than avoidance?
- What is one humble, concrete first step you can take toward repair (a conversation, an apology, a request for clarity)?
- How can you seek reconciliation without rushing, pressuring, or tcontrol the outcome?
- Where might boundaries be necessary for safety and health, and how can they be held without contempt or coldness?
- Who could help you carry this work—someone wise who can pray, listen, and guide you toward peace?

Day 5

Ezekiel 47:9

God does not leave us with alarms and ashes. Ezekiel’s river from the temple pictures healing that flows outward, bringing life where death once ruled. We do not pretend the river is here in full, nor rush past lament. We keep watch, carry water, and trust God’s steady renewal.

Some floods destroy, but God’s river gives life. This does not lessen tragedy; it grounds our hope in God, not in our power to fix. As sentinels, servants, and mourners, we join a future we cannot make ourselves. Even Christ’s risen scars show that healing transforms history rather than erasing it.

Today calls us to hopeful endurance: truth-telling, practical care, and tenderness that can hold tears without giving up. Hope is not denial. It is love that stays until life returns.

- Where do you most need God’s “living water” today—personally, relationally, or in your view of the world?
- What is one sign of healing you have seen before that helps you trust God can bring life again?
- How can you hold grief and hope together without rushing either one?
- Identify one ongoing practice that helps you endure in love (weekly service, giving, prayer, creation care habit, reconciliation step)
- Who can you encourage this week with steady hope—without minimising their pain—through presence, prayer, or practical help?

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

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