

SCRIPTURE
STUDY,
SERMON
& WEEKLY
DEVOTIONS



Small Drops of Hope



PENTECOST 16 A

13th September 2026

Dennis Webster

Revised Common Lectionary Related

Pentecosts 16A

Genesis 50:15-21

Psalms 103:8-13

Romans 14:1-14

Matthew 18:21-35

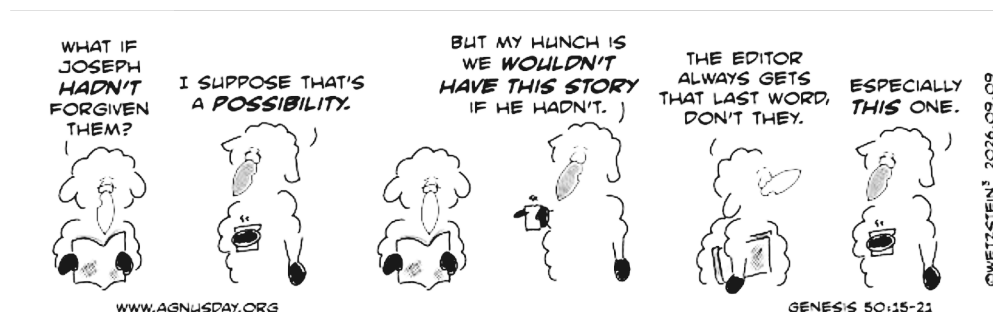


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Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collects

Keep, we beseech thee,
O Lord, thy Church with thy perpetual mercy:
and, because the frailty of man
without thee cannot but fall,
keep us ever by thy help from all things hurtful,
and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation:
through Jesus Christ our Lord.



INTRODUCTION

Small Drops of Hope shows us that true forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration don't happen in big gestures or dramatic statements—but in small acts of mercy over time (like drops of water creating ripples). The article begins by saying we all have guilt and fear because Joseph's brothers were afraid after Jacob died (Genesis 50:15-21), and their past haunted them. Forgiveness takes time and space; often it starts with a “drop” (a word or silent mercy) that slowly heals and restores trust.

Matthew's Gospel challenges Peter's question (Matthew 18:21–22) about how many times we should forgive; forgiveness isn't counted or finished—it begins again. The main principles are “Do not take God's place. Do not keep the ledger. Do not prolong the injury. Choose mercy” (Psalm 103:8; Exodus 34:6–7). Mercy is like creation healing itself — drop by drop (one moment of patience or one relationship mended).

The Sermon takes this one step further to communal life (Romans 14:1–14). Paul warns against judging others for eating habits or sacred observances (these were not trivial matters; communion and shared identity were at stake in the early Christian community). Look out for those who see things differently — that's Paul's message. Modern challenges (like disagreements over faithful creation care) also call us to look out for each other (we can still care for creation together even if we disagree on the best method, but no one is “morally deficient”).

The story of the merciless servant (Matthew 18:23-35) shows what happens when mercy is withheld. Having received great forgiveness, the servant won't even spare a small kindness for a lesser debtor; he “keeps the ledger”. The Sermon shows us that our failure isn't unpaid debt but withheld mercy — we have been given immeasurable gifts (creation and life itself), so let's show mercy as we have been shown mercy.

Respond with gratitude by small faithful acts — plant a tree, tend a garden, be patient, pick up litter, encourage a neighbour and forgive. Each one is a “drop of mercy.” One drop won't make the rain or heal every wound, but the Sermon ends with hope: “the surface changes. The ripple begins.” Slowly, through many drops, change comes, and creation is restored. So this week, challenge yourself to do one small act of mercy — trusting in the cumulative power of these “small drops of hope”



IMMERSION IN LIVING WATER 3
Ezekiel 47:9, 12

Small Drops of Hope

Guilt comes to us all. Sometimes fear leads the way. When Jacob died, Joseph's brothers trembled because they didn't know what would happen next. Their past disturbed them. Did Jacob really say what they said he said? We don't know, but we do know this: Forgiveness takes time. It requires space. Sometimes it comes through tears. It unfolds slowly.

You know this struggle. A harsh word at work. A friend's silence. Forgiveness doesn't come all at once. It begins with a drop — a gentle word, a silent mercy. These are drops of promise. They begin to heal. They begin to restore trust.

One of the principles that underlie this continued excursus into a new Torah in Matthew's gospel is probably pretty well summed up by Paul in Romans — who are you to judge the servant of another? (I paraphrase). That could also be translated as "Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister?"

Matthew tells us a story. Peter asks, "How many times must I forgive?" Is there a limit? Seventy-seven times. Seems generous, but Jesus sets the tally aside. Forgiveness is never counted. It's not finished. It's a way of life, always beginning again.

If we summed up all the readings today, it would be this:

Do not take God's place.

Do not keep the ledger.

Do not prolong the injury.

Choose mercy.

Today the image is a drop of water. Not a flood. Not a torrent. Just one drop. Reconciliation doesn't start with big gestures. It starts with small things. A moment. A beginning.

Imagine with your mind's eye a drop of water. It may be like the one on the front cover today. If it falls into a larger pool of water, it usually splashes, and you can see the displacement; when it settles, concentric circles ripple away. From then on, something changes.

We could talk of butterfly wings and far-away storms. But maybe that's too much. A drop falls into a pond. The surface has changed. Ripples move out. Water is no longer still. Sometimes the drop falls into a wave and is

lost. Change is real even if unseen.

Creation heals quietly. Drought doesn't stop with one downpour. Earth is restored drop by drop—slowly the ground softens, seeds stir, roots awaken; what was dead begins to live again.

The Lord is merciful. Slow to anger. Abundant in goodness. Slow is the word. Mercy doesn't always come with a show. It comes quietly. One forgiveness. One moment of patience. One relationship mended. One patch of earth restored. One creature sheltered. One habit turned.

No act alone saves the world. But drops become rain.

At the Abbey on Wednesday, someone said Romans 14 is a section about vegetarianism. Some smile, some say, "What?" Paul was writing to a divided community then. Think Roman community mindset now. Paul reviews these differences throughout Romans—between Jewish exiles and Roman proselytes and converts (Romans 2–3). Jews think about following Jesus through purity laws (what is clean or unclean), so food choices are affected by that. Kosher laws also played a big historical role.

In Romans 14, Paul tells people not to judge others because of their eating habits or sacred observances. These weren't trivial lifestyle preferences. Food determined whether people could sit at the same table. This is not so much a question of dietary choice; it is at the heart of being in communion.

For a Gentile community, these laws are foreign and hard to understand. Hospitality was how the Christian community met. Can I share a table with somebody whose faithful response to God differs from mine? Paul was going to Rome — meetings, at first, were in houses. Paul is confronting the practical question: how does this strange new community eat together when its members carry quite different understandings of faithful living?

So the big question is: how do we look out for those who see things differently? Should we become just first? Should we become Gentiles? Should we follow dietary regulations? Should we even think about buying food from the markets if there has been a pagan offering immediately afterwards? What we find is distinctions being made and judgments being passed about who is in and who is out. Not once in this letter does Paul justify who is in and who is out. "Let us therefore no longer judge one another."

Now, if we want to think along those lines (how our ecological doorway is

working), strap yourself in, fasten your seatbelt, and get ready for the state election. How do we care for the same creation together when we disagree about what faithful care looks like? Do we subscribe to people who want to generate power without resorting to arguments over which technology is right? Can people still genuinely care for creation and yet disagree about how best that care is expressed without resorting to declaring others 'morally deficient'?

Choices do matter, as do discretion, evidence and consequences. Some will agree to disagree. Some will judge. Does that make us better? No. But if one drop helps us find a way forward together, then so be it.

We respond to creation's need in many ways. Diet. Transport. Recycling. Advocacy. It is easy to let good practice become pride. Paul calls us to gentler ground. Not am I better? But what modest act of faithfulness can I offer?

And that's where the uncomfortable world of the merciless servant begins. The servant has received something very large indeed — remission, a chance to start again — but he cannot translate it into small things like forgiving a lesser servant. He chooses to keep the ledger.

We have received creation. Life. Water. Soil. Food. Beauty. Neighbour. Creature. The gift is too great to measure, but our response is simple: show mercy as we have been shown mercy. The failure isn't unpaid debt—it's withheld mercy.

In this season we ask: does this gift change us? In response to the gift, we respond with gratitude. In time, gratitude becomes our default practice. Plant a tree. Tend a garden. Show patience. Pick up litter. Encourage a neighbour. Forgive. Every deed is a drop of mercy given and received.

We receive a gift. Mercy is slow and good. We show our thanks in small ways. One drop is not rain, but many drops nourish the earth. Slowly, change comes. Creation is restored.

Back to the image: a raindrop, a vibration. A drop is small, but water changes when it happens. In each little promise, mercy comes. Mercy goes forth. Creation is tended.

What happens next for us? Does the world around us change? Is that change for the better?

Make one small change this week. A simple act of mercy. Care for creation. Kindness to another. What drop can you offer?

One drop will not make the rain.
One act will not heal creation.
One moment of mercy will not mend every wound.

But the surface changes.
The ripple begins.

Only time will tell.

Discussion

How does the sermon's image of a 'drop of water' illuminate your understanding of how forgiveness and reconciliation actually happen in real life?

- The sermon emphasises that reconciliation doesn't start with grand gestures but with 'small things' — a gentle word or a silent mercy. Just as a drop creates ripples and changes the surface of water, small acts of forgiveness initiate a process of healing and restoring trust over time, even if the full change is unseen or slow.

The sermon highlights Paul's challenge in Romans 14 about not judging others over differences in 'faithful living,' such as food choices or care for creation. What specific areas in your life or community do you find it challenging to extend mercy or avoid judgement towards those who hold different convictions, and why is that difficult?

- Paul addressed divisions over practices like dietary laws, which affected communion, and the sermon extends this to modern disagreements. Reflect on situations where differing views on 'faithful response to God' lead to judgement. Consider how choosing mercy over judgement can foster unity and allow for shared purpose, as Paul encouraged.

Jesus tells Peter that forgiveness is 'never counted' and is 'a way of life, always beginning again,' contrasting with the merciless servant who keeps a ledger. What does it mean for you to approach forgiveness as 'always beginning again,' especially when dealing with past hurts or ongoing relational struggles, rather than seeing it as a finished transaction?

- The sermon emphasises that forgiveness takes time and unfolds slowly, much like creation heals drop by drop. It's not about a tally but about a posture of life, choosing mercy even when it's difficult and not prolonging injury by withholding it.

Celebrating Australian Saints

15 September John Oliver Feetham

Bishop and Bush Brother

John Oliver Feetham (1873-1947) was born in England and educated at Marlborough and Cambridge. He served as bishop of North Queensland from 1913 to 1947, supporting the Allied cause in both World Wars and advancing the Bush Brotherhood. Feetham's legacy, including the founding of schools such as All Souls and St Gabriel's, continues to influence the region.

18 September John Ramsden Wollaston

Priest and Missionary of Western Australia

John Wollaston, (1791 -1856) an Anglican priest, played a key role in establishing the Church of England in Western Australia. He built St Mark's Church in Bunbury and was appointed Archdeacon of Western Australia. Wollaston campaigned for a Bishopric in Perth, which was established in 1857, one year after Wollaston's death.

As Archdeacon of Western Australia, Wollaston extensively visited the Diocese, always on horseback. At the age of 65, he died due to stroke, brought on by exhaustion.

The Bush Brotherhood

Bush Brotherhoods were Anglican religious orders providing itinerant priests to rural Australia. They declined by the 1960s, with one group still operating in New South Wales.

The Bush Brothers, a religious order, lived a monastic life with vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. They provided religious instruction, held services, and administered sacraments, often recruiting from England. Although the Bush Brothers originally rode horses, they drove vehicles in later years.

Notable Bush Brothers:

John Hazlewood, Bishop of Ballarat

Hamish Jamieson, Bishop of Carpentaria and Bunbury

Ken Mason, Bishop of the Northern Territory, Chairman of the Australian Board of Missions

Richard Thomas, Bishop of Willochra

Graham Howard Walden, Bishop of The Murray

Arnold Wylde, Bishop of Bathurst

Robin Warsop, Brother of the Brotherhood of St. Barnabas,
"The last Bush Brother"



5 Day Devotional

Hope rarely arrives as a flood. It begins as a drop—quiet, almost hidden. In these five days, you are invited to receive God's mercy and let it move outward: through forgiveness, humility, and love that takes shape in how you treat others and the world around you.

Day 1

Genesis 50:19-20

Fear and guilt can keep old stories alive in our minds—especially when the people who once protected us are no longer there. Joseph's brothers assumed the worst after Jacob died, because unresolved shame makes us expect punishment. Yet Joseph refuses to take God's place, choosing mercy over revenge.

Joseph's answer is the first drop of trust. He names God's power to bring good from what was meant for harm. The pain of the past remains, but it no longer writes the ending. When you resist the urge to punish or replay old wounds, you make room for God's healing to begin—quietly, honestly, in its own time.

- Where do you feel tempted to assume the worst about someone's motives right now, and what fear is underneath that assumption?
- What would it look like for you to "not take God's place" in a specific relationship this week?
- Name one past hurt you persist in replaying like a ledger—what are you afraid would happen if you let it go?
- How have you seen God bring some good out of something that was meant for harm, even if the situation was still painful?
- Choose one small "drop" today: a gentle word, a prayer for someone who hurt you, or a pause before reacting. What will you do?

Day 2

Psalms 103:8-12

Mercy does not rush. Scripture calls the Lord slow to anger, rich in steadfast love. God is not searching for reasons to condemn. When you imagine God as impatient or harsh, patience with others grows thin, and keeping score comes easily.

God's mercy changes the air inside you. Shame loosens its grip. Gratitude begins to grow. As you receive mercy, you need less to shield yourself with blame or control. Forgiveness starts here—not with your strength, but with God's kindness that keeps coming toward you.

- When you think about God's posture toward you today, do you picture warmth, disappointment, distance, or welcome—and why?
- What is one way shame has shaped how you treat others (or yourself) when conflict arises?
- Where do you need to slow down before responding so you can act from mercy rather than reactivity?
- Write a short prayer of thanks for a specific mercy God has shown you recently—how does gratitude reshape your perspective?
- Practice a “drop” of mercy toward yourself today: what healthy, truthful statement can you replace self-accusation with?

Day 3

Matthew 18:21-22

Peter asks a practical question: how many times must I forgive? Jesus answers by turning forgiveness from a number into a way of life. The goal is not to count offences, but to let mercy shape who you are.

Forgiveness does not forget wisdom or boundaries. It simply refuses to let resentment rule. Each act of forgiveness is a drop that changes the surface—quiet, sometimes unseen, but real. Over time, these drops form a pattern, and the pattern becomes a way of life. Relationships are no longer shaped by the worst moment.

- Where have you been trying to decide what someone “deserves” rather than what mercy might look like?
- What's the difference, in your situation, between forgiving and pretending nothing happened?
- What boundary or following step might be necessary to pursue peace without returning to harm?
- Who is one person you can bless in prayer today, even if reconciliation is not yet possible?
- Identify one repeating irritation or offence you face—what would it look like to practice forgiveness as a habit rather than a tally?

Day 4

Matthew 18:27-30

In the parable of the unmerciful servant, the tragedy is not the debt itself. It is the refusal to let received mercy become offered mercy. The servant is freed from a burden he could never repay, but he turns at once to pressure and punishment over a smaller debt. Holding the ledger, he forgets the gift.

This story warns us: when mercy stops with us, it hardens us. God's

forgiveness is meant to renew our instincts—how we speak, how we see others, how we respond in conflict, how we use what power we hold. Even a small act of mercy is not small. It shows that grace is taking root in daily life.

- Where do you feel most tempted to “collect payment” from someone—through coldness, sarcasm, withdrawal, or rehashing the offence?
- What mercy have you received from God or others that you sometimes take for granted?
- How might your relationship change if you focused less on what is owed and more on what restores?
- What is one concrete act of repair you can offer—an apology, a clarifying conversation, or a step toward making something right?
- Ask yourself honestly: what do you gain by holding the ledger, and what do you lose?

Day 5

Romans 14:10-13

Paul writes to a divided community. Faithful people disagree about practices that shape their shared table. He does not ask them to set aside conviction, but to refuse judgment that pushes others away. When we label others as less worthy, we break communion and take a place that belongs to God.

Here, too, small drops can renew a community, and even our creation care. Humility chooses gentler ground: listening, making space, offering quiet acts of faithfulness without pride. One patient conversation. One shared meal. One insult left unspoken. One wise choice to care for what God has given. These are drops that ripple outward, making restoration possible.

- Where are you most likely to judge other believers—politics, habits, worship style, parenting, diet, or environmental choices?
- What would it look like to “pursue what makes for peace” in one disagreement without damaging your integrity?
- Name one way pride can attach itself to good practices—how can you practice the same good with more humility?
- Choose one “drop” of creation care this week that feels realistic (reduce waste, pick up litter, conserve energy, plant something, advocate respectfully). What will you do?
- Who could you move toward in hospitality—a offered coffee, a kind message, or a caring conversation—to keep the table open?

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

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