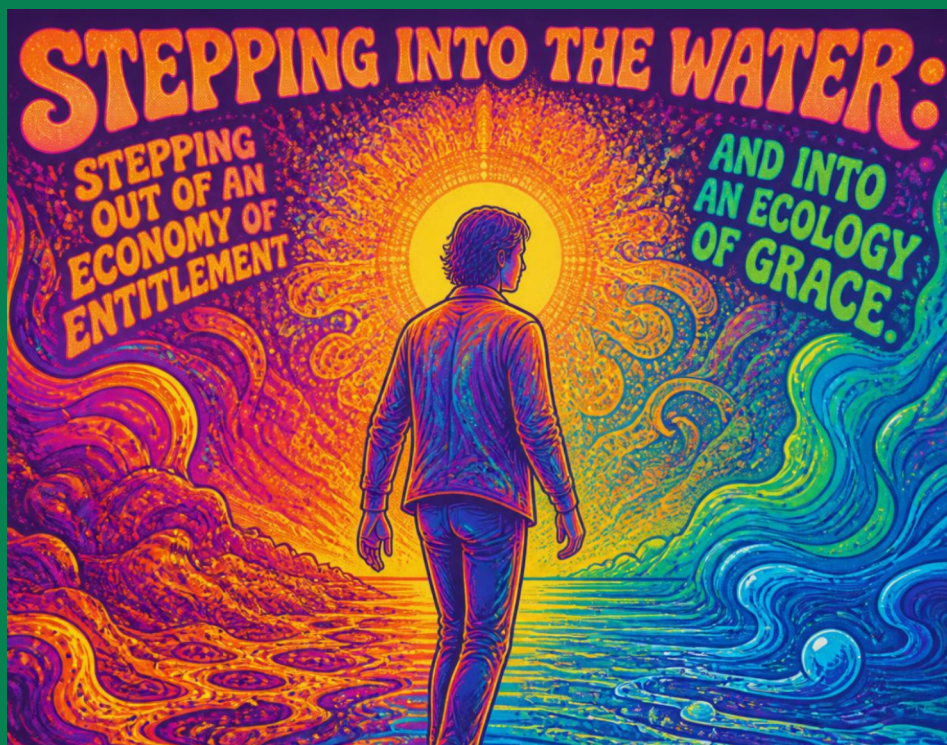


SCRIPTURE STUDY, SERMON & WEEKLY DEVOTIONS



PENTECOST 17 A

20th September 2026

Dennis Webster

INTRODUCTION

Revised Common Lectionary Related

Pentecosts 17A

Jonah 3.10-4.11

Psalm 145.1-8

Philippians 1

Matthew 20.1-16



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Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collects

Lord,
we beseech thee,
let thy continual pity cleanse
and defend thy Church;
and,
because it cannot continue in safety without thy succour,
preserve it evermore by thy help and goodness:
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The article asks us not just to stare at God's grace but to actually sink into it (like the young man who stepped into the lake). Passive faith is what we are called away from: let our lives be defined by belonging to Christ, not by "owning the car" without taking the journey.

The parable of the vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16) confronts our entitlement. God's generosity is not based on how many hours we work but on faithfulness. Each worker received their promised day's wages — righteousness isn't in what we earn but in the giver's grace. Jonah also shows us the dangers of entitlement and "half-hearted" faith. Jonah refused to go to Nineveh because he valued judgment over mercy; he was angry at a withered plant instead of showing compassion for 120,000 people. That's why God is slow to anger and rich in goodness (Psalm 145:8).

Paul's words in Philippians 1 are also important here. He says that our worldly privileges are nothing compared to God's mercy; we should live for Christ (not for personal gain or status). The article asks us to give up entitlement and grace; turn from our failings so we can see the world anew; let go of burdens (things we think we are owed) and trust God day by day, even when the journey feels unsettled.

True "mindful discipleship" is caring for creation, our communities and each other actively because all abundance comes from God (John F. Kennedy said we should not ask what the "country" (or our world) can do for us but "what we can do for our country"). We are stewards of God's grace.

Baptism isn't just standing around
and looking at the Living Water;
it's getting wet.



IMMERSION IN LIVING WATER
Ezekiel 47:9, 12

Baptism isn't standing by Living Water admiring it. We get wet.

At a funeral recently at The Abbey on Raymond Island, a young man asked me how to get from the chapel to the beach. He was the grandson of the deceased, and as this was his first experience of death and funerals, he must have been upset and needed some quiet time, so off he went and came back much happier. I asked him if the lake had helped him. He said, "Yes. Took off my shoes, paddled in the lake. Water soothed me. I can see why gran liked this place so much."

At first these readings seem far away from the water's edge, but they call us out of entitlement into the flow of grace. Gospel doesn't ask us to stand back admiring God's generosity; it asks us to wade in. It is not enough to be saved in name only. We are invited to follow; let our lives be formed by what it means to belong to Christ. Owning the car isn't enough; we have to take the journey.

The readings talk of having and joining in. We linger at the threshold only because grace brought us here. Possession alone is empty if we do not enter in.

The parable of the vineyard makes us ask: what is mine, what is yours, what was earned and what was given? Who is honoured and why? This is not a story of privilege; it's an invitation. The workers in the vineyard may grumble, but the promise remains. Each gets what was offered to him.

If I work all day in the sun, I expect to be paid for that work. But the vineyard owner gives a day's wage, not an hourly rate. Each worker gets what he was promised. Those who worked under the heat may feel wronged, but the promise is kept. Righteousness isn't found in hours but in the faithfulness of the giver.

As we hear these words, we take time to remember what they mean for us and for the story we are given.

In the gospel economy, work has new meanings. Liturgy is not just words on a page; it's the work of the people. Ecology is what we do with what God has given us. Righteousness is when all things are set right, when books are balanced by grace.

The readings show how God meets us: slow to anger and rich in goodness. The psalmist praises God's grace. Righteousness makes all things whole. Grace allows us to join in creation's work; when we fail, God shows compassion. Love balances all on the cross, where Christ gathers

our debts—to each other, our communities, the world.

Jonah, a four-act biblical comic book, tells of Jonah hearing God's word and refusing to go to Nineveh, a large walled city near modern Mosul, on the Tigris and Khosr Rivers. In the Assyrian Empire, it was lively but unruly. God, patient and merciful, gave them a chance to change before Babylon destroyed it.

Poor Jonah knew going there with an assurance of destruction wouldn't be a good journey. He preferred other places and headed nowhere else. Then, God changes the weather, the crew sacrifices Jonah, and a sea beast swallows him. For three days, Jonah reflects and finally vomits onto a beach near Turkey, beginning a three-day trek across the city.

The attitude of Jonah could be called "half-hearted" and "disinterested". After three days of repentance and fasting, the message had been given. Jonah went off to the hill country to watch God destroy the detestable evil place (but God noticed the change in the people and animals of Nineveh). He was very pleased. But a covenant or contract was being played out here. Jonah had done his bit. He told them God's news. And then gleefully went off to watch it all happen.

A smiling God made sure Jonah was comfortable, enjoying shade, cocktails, and a tan. That's life. The worker deserves wages. But overnight, God tells a worm to destroy paradise and causes weather to trouble Jonah. He was angry about the worm and the tree. The story ends with God saying Jonah had no right to care for his privilege under a shady tree, but was sent to save 120,000 people. God's compassion and mercy were obvious; Jonah's entitlement was clear.

Paul reminds us in Philippians that our life and privileges are minor compared to God's mercy. We can't hide anything from God, who grants grace to all. We won't take worldly gains after death; all face judgment. Privilege doesn't buy a bigger mansion in heaven. God's wish is for us to follow His divine plan of eternal life, not based on wealth or status. Heaven isn't about luxury mansions. Our blessings now are for God's glory, not just in the afterlife.

All abundance comes from God, who is infinitely generous beyond creation's limits. We're called to abandon entitlement and embrace grace, caring for all life—earth, others, community—and living our faith. Like the young man at the water's edge, we're invited to step in, to be immersed and become true disciples.

We turn to Christ. We repent of our failings and turn to perceive the world

anew. We leave behind and renounce all that destroys or harms; follow Christ; take up our burdens; move on daily. When we cling to something we think we are owed, it can become a burden we would be better off leaving behind.

We might wonder, “Why give up entitlements for people we may never meet?” Every change costs something. Following Christ shifts us from the familiar shoreline into the water. Though unsteady, grace teaches us balance. Moments of unease are normal; letting go isn’t easy, but we’re not alone. God walks with us, steadying our steps and inviting us to trust each day, even if we hesitate or are unsure.

We go as far as we choose to be immersed, or we turn back to dry land.

Our faith journey requires decisions impacting God’s children or creation. Paul highlights ‘what bears fruit?’ over personal gain. The vineyard owner honours his covenant, paying each worker exactly what was due — a day’s wage, regardless of start time.

Such is God’s generosity. ‘Mindful discipleship’ requires us to get our feet wet. We have all we need. As disciples, we are also called to care for what is given. Pray before we act, and remember our choices go beyond us. Sometimes what appears wise now may cause trouble later. True discipleship is attentive.

Today’s gospel questions our economy of living. Don’t hold on to your present entitlement, but let grace give way to the present. If we live, we live to the Lord. If we die, we die to the Lord. Live or die, we are the Lord’s. All that is required is for us to be living in Christ (for in Christ all things are sustained). To live in Christ, Philippians 1 tells us, is the ground of all life.

A young man stands by the edge of the lake thinking about life and death, family and love — grieves. He takes off his shoes and steps into the lake naked. His feet are in the water. Now grief at losing an entitlement is an ecological movement into God’s grace.

As part of God’s grace, we are given a wonderful environment. We can do better. At his inauguration as president of the United States, John F. Kennedy asked his countrymen to think carefully about what entitlement they have and ecology they are to explore: “...ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country.” Here in this place today, maybe that question is still being asked, but the country isn’t a geopolitical reality of a state anymore; it’s the state of the world. Dear people, while we abide in GunaiKurnai country, keep asking ourselves:

what can we do for our country? Only time will tell.

Discussion

Stepping into the Living Water

The sermon emphasises that true discipleship means more than just admiring God’s generosity; it’s about actively wading into His grace and letting our lives be formed by Christ.

How does this invitation to "get wet" challenge your understanding of what it means to truly belong to Christ, and what might it look like for you to move from the "shoreline" into deeper immersion this week?

Entitlement vs. God's Compassion

The stories of the vineyard workers and Jonah highlight a tension between human expectations of what is "owed" and God’s boundless mercy and faithfulness.

Reflect on a time when your sense of entitlement clashed with God’s broader compassion or an unexpected act of grace. What did you learn about God’s character and your own heart in that experience?

Releasing Burdens of What We Are Owed

The sermon suggests that clinging to what we think we are owed can become a burden we would be better off leaving behind.

What specific "entitlements" or perceived rights might God be inviting you to release in order to embrace a more unburdened, grace-filled life in Christ?

How might letting go of these things allow you to perceive the world anew, as the sermon encourages?



5 Day Devotional

This five-day Devotional is an invitation: leave the shoreline, step into the living water of grace. Scripture and reflection become the current that carries you from entitlement to mercy, from self-concern to fruitfulness. Each day draws you deeper—toward a life immersed, attentive to Christ, open to others, faithful with what has been given.

Day 1

Matthew 20:1-16

God's kingdom unsettles our habit of measuring and comparing—who worked longest, who deserves more, who should be honoured. In Jesus' parable, the vineyard owner gives each worker a full day's wage. Not because they all did the same, but because generosity is the heart of the story. Gratitude, left untended, can sour into grumbling when we start counting what others receive.

The invitation is simple, but it asks everything: do not only watch grace from the shore—step in. The shoreline heart asks, "What do I get?" but immersion asks, "What has God promised, and can I trust Him?" God's faithfulness is not judged by hours, but by covenant love. When grace sets the terms, entitlement loosens its hold, and joy finds room to grow.

Today, notice where your heart keeps score. Sometimes, beneath resentment, there is fear—the fear that if God is generous to others, there will not be enough for you. But the parable whispers a different truth: the Giver is good, and His mercy for another does not diminish His goodness to you. Entering the water begins with trust in the One who waits for you there.

- Where do you most often compare your "hours in the sun" to someone else's story or reward?
- What phrase best describes your default view of God: employer, judge, Father, or generous vineyard owner? Why?
- Name one entitlement you've been carrying (time, recognition, comfort, being right). What would it look like to release it to God today?
- How might gratitude change if you focused on God's promise rather than other people's outcomes?
- Take one concrete step of generosity this week that you cannot justify as "earned" by the other person.

Day 2

Jonah 4:1-11

Jonah holds up a mirror to the part of us that longs for mercy for ourselves and justice for others. When Nineveh repents, Jonah is not relieved; he is angry. He clings to being right, choosing comfort beneath a plant over thousands of lives. Entitlement, the story shows, is a sickness of the soul—it shrinks compassion and makes comfort seem larger than God's heart.

Jonah's posture is half-hearted discipleship: doing the least, then stepping back to see what others will receive. God's question is not only a rebuke, but an offer—an opening into God's own heart. If God is slow to anger and rich in goodness, then mature faith does not stop at obedience; it learns compassion and begins to desire what God desires.

Today, notice where you have built a small shade tree of privilege—something you guard, even when it keeps you from loving well. Perhaps God is not taking something from you, but freeing you from a shelter that has become a prison. Going into the water may feel like exposure, but it is also where the heart learns to expand.

- What "Nineveh" (a person, group, or situation) do you struggle to imagine receiving mercy?
- Where are you tempted to do the minimum required—then emotionally "check out" from God's concern for others?
- Identify one comfort or privilege you guard tightly. How might it be limiting your compassion?
- When have you experienced mercy you didn't deserve? How does that memory change how you view others?
- Pray Jonah's honest emotions to God, then ask for one specific way to share God's compassion this week.

Day 3

Psalms 145.8

The Psalmist anchors faith in God's character: gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, rich in love. Entitlement tells a story of scarcity, as if God were stingy or unfair. Psalm 145 sings a truer song: God's heart is generous, and His patience is no weakness, but mercy at work—giving space to return, to heal, to begin again.

This truth meets us in daily discipleship: we stand upon the threshold because grace has led us there. The aim is not only to agree that God is good, but to let His goodness shape how we meet others, how we hold disappointment, how we carry sorrow. Just like stepping into cool water,

resting in God's compassion quiets what is frantic within.

Today, let God's character become the lens for your life. When you feel the urge to demand what you are owed—time, recognition, certainty—pause and remember who God is. His compassion does not excuse, but opens a path for repentance and renewal. Trusting His heart, you can step further into the water, unafraid.

- What circumstances make it hardest for you to believe God is “slow to anger” with you?
- How does believing God is “rich in love” challenge your scarcity mindset or fear of lack?
- Where do you feel disappointed with God right now, and what would it look like to bring that honestly to Him?
- Who needs to experience God's compassion through you this week, even in a small way?
- Practice a one-minute pause today: breathe, repeat Psalm 145:8 silently, and release one demand you've been carrying.

Day 4 Philippians 1.21.22

Paul sees life through union with Christ: to live is Christ, and even death cannot take what matters most. Entitlement grows when we root our identity in what we possess or control. Paul's anchor is elsewhere—Christ is the ground beneath his life, the meaning in his suffering, the aim of his choices. From this place, he asks not, “What do I get?” but, “What bears fruit?”

We do not carry worldly gains beyond death, and privilege does not buy eternity. This is not shame, but freedom. If Christ holds you, you can let go of what you thought would keep you safe. A fruitful life receives grace deeply, then lets it flow outward—love, courage, service, faithful presence.

Today, wonder what fruit might look like in this season. Fruit is not performance, but the gentle result of abiding in Christ. Entering into the water, you find that discipleship costs—pride, comfort, control—but grace steadies you. In Christ, you have enough to live generously and pay attention.

- 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 14:8

Belonging changes everything: if we live, we live to the Lord; if we die, we die to the Lord. This is the final step into the water—no longer occasional moments, but a life turned toward Christ. When you belong to the Lord, your choices spread outward—into community, into creation, into the lives of the vulnerable. Discipleship becomes a way of being: mindful, attentive, embodied.

Immersion becomes stewardship: ecology is what we do with what God has given, and liturgy is not only words, but the work of the people. Grace does not leave us passive; it forms us as caretakers. We repent not only of personal sins, but of the ways entitlement has justified harm or neglect. We learn to pray before we act, to notice who our ordinary choices touch.

Today, see yourself at the shoreline again. God does not press with shame, yet invites with love. You may go as far as you choose, and every step into the water constitutes a step toward freedom. To live to the Lord is to let your life become a grateful yes—to mercy, to humility, to neighbour, to the care of the world God calls good.

- What would change if you truly believed, in practice, that you belong to the Lord in both life and death?
- Where do your daily habits affect others or creation more than you usually notice?
- What is one act of stewardship you can take this week (waste reduction, generosity, advocacy, care for a neighbour)?
- When you feel unsteady as you enter change, what helps you trust that God is with you?
- Write a brief commitment prayer: one sentence of repentance and one sentence of willingness to follow Christ more fully?

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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everywhere.

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