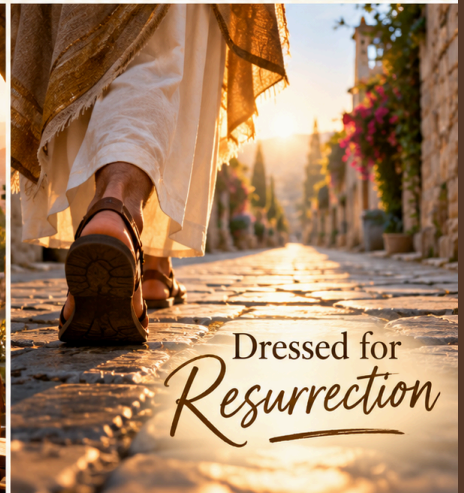


SCRIPTURE STUDY, SERMON & WEEKLY DEVOTIONS



PENTECOST 20A

11th October, 2026

Dennis Webster

Revised Common Lectionary Related

Isaiah 25.1-9

Psalm 23

Philippians 4.1-9

Matthew 22.1-14



Tatungalung Totem

This is produced on
GunaiKurnai Country and
our respects are paid to the
First Nations people
everywhere.

Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collects

O God, forasmuch as without thee we are not
able to please thee: Mercifully grant, that
thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and
rule our hearts: through Jesus Christ our Lord.



IMMERSION IN LIVING WATER
Ezekiel 47:9, 12



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INTRODUCTION

Refrain

Shepherd of my journey, you are with me

Along the banks of the calmest of streams

I have all that I could ever need.

Even in my time of rest, the path is well trod.

Looking through the dark, I feel ill at ease,
until, Lord, I recognise that you are with me.

You lead me gently; I need not be afraid. (Refrain)

Even when the times are tough

and others may try to bring me down

it is in your strength, presence and assurance
that I find my deepest comfort. (Refrain)

(Bridge) Goodness and mercy follow close behind,
companions upon the road I travel;
wherever this journey may take me,
your presence remains my home. (Refrain)

Your table is prepared before me,
your cup is filled and running over.
The Shepherd who walked beside me
welcomes me home.

(Refrain)

(Coda) The shepherd who walked beside me
welcomes me home.

Dressed for Resurrection

It is easy to let the language of banquets and catering distract us from what really is happening here. Some will try to decide who's worthy or insist that joy be a requirement but the invitation is deeper.

The lectionary takes us on a journey. Not to the banquet at the end of time but to slow change within us as we move toward resurrection's fullness.

Psalm 23 is the thread that runs through these readings. Its words are familiar but the journey it describes isn't just about safety. It takes us through the valley of shadow, beyond this life to a promise still waiting for us.

I have paraphrased the psalm and set it to an Irish ballad so that hopefully there's some movement and gratitude in it. I wish we had live music but even this simple reflection can help us move forward together.

Isaiah 25 starts with a personal statement from the prophet: it is "my God" (not Abraham, Isaac and Jacob but the God of Isaiah). If you are not sure, then "I give thanks." That was right there in the seam running through the readings. In Eucharist they come alive. Destination Wedding Banquet of the Lamb shapes our idea of Holy Communion as foretaste of that banquet.

Here is the seam: not only do we know where we are going but we are already there. The shepherd leads us beside still waters and through green pastures, protecting and nurturing us. These are plans faithful and sure engraved long ago.

The journey is hardly easy. The shepherd walks with us, rod and staff in hand. Behind us the ruined city fades away — empty place. We walk and see those who need shelter; shade from the heat; the shepherd gives shade to every pilgrim.

As we walk through the dark valley our companion, guide, shepherd is with us. There is no promise to the pilgrim that the road will be free of storms or hazards. As often in psalms it is the shepherd who shelters, shades and provides sanctuary. Isaiah 25.5 refers perhaps to the pillar of cloud by day that guided the Israelites but also gave them respite from the heat: "In this respite the song of the ruthless is stopped and the bully is stopped in full voice."

The shepherd does not go ahead or behind us; he goes beside us. Sometimes we forget that God is with us. We are not always alone on this

road.

With our companion on the way is the shepherd who walked beside me. He welcomes me home. Isaiah's joy is so clear.

"He will swallow up death forever; then the Lord God will wipe away all tears from all faces, and he will remove the disgrace of his people from under the whole earth for the Lord has spoken."

On that day it will be said, Lo, this is our God; we waited for him so he might save us.

This is the Lord for whom we have waited; be glad and rejoice in his salvation (Isaiah 25.6-9).

The destination is in sight. The shepherd who walks with us sets the table — rich, abundant feast where nothing is withheld. Everyone is invited (even those we call enemies). The table is set and the shepherd is still beside us.

More imagery is implied as death is swallowed up and the veil of death (the temple Holy of Holies curtain) is drawn back over all nations. (Isaiah 25.7). In Luke's account of Jesus' death, it is this veil that is ripped at the time of his death — when death "is swallowed up in victory." (Isaiah 25:8; 1 Corinthians 15:54). Paul understands this not as metaphor but reality of resurrection because the tomb is empty.

God our Shepherd is tender. He wipes away every tear. We're not going somewhere; we're meeting our creator face to face. The same God who walks beside us now invites us in.

Even though we see in a dim light (1 Corinthians 13, 2 Corinthians 4), the revealing of the very face of the Shepherd who now invites us requires that we accept with good grace what has been prepared for us. But that invitation comes with conditions and we don't choose who else is invited. Nor can we assume that you or I or anyone else has the right to be there either. That is where Matthew tells us about the invitation.

As Matthew 22 begins this is a parable of the Kingdom.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a wedding banquet that a king prepared for his son." (Matthew 22.2)

Note that while this is no doubt based on Q but care should be taken not to add things from Luke 14 into Matthew's presentation of the parable. Tempting as it may be old scriptural songs about marrying a cow and buying a wife are not acceptable behaviour.

Matthew sends the invitation twice: first he sends it after food and wine have been prepared (back in Isaiah those who refuse to come are the aritzim, the ruthless). Everyone is invited — or as Isaiah says "All people". The invitation also carries urgency. Fields and business can wait but when food is prepared feast cannot be delayed.

It would be easy to think that this invitation to all excuses the man who turns up from the street without putting on clothing suitable for such an invitation. Paul talks about putting on armour or dressing for the kingdom. We are called to be clothed in righteousness. The garment expected is not earned entry; it is received entry (Isaiah 61.10). Isaiah 61.10 is receiving of the garments of salvation. Paul builds on Galatians 3.27 and Romans 13.14. Coming to the banquet takes action by the individual, not distorted righteousness or distorted view of privilege.

In Philippians 4 Paul calls us to rejoice and reminds us of what the garments represent. They are the seam in today's readings — the metanoia moment calling us to see how we relate to those around us. It is as if Paul is saying 'think differently'.

"⁵ Let your gentleness be known to all people. The Lord is near."

"⁸ Finally beloved whatever is true whatsoever is honourable whatsoever is just whatsoever is pure whatsoever is pleasing whatsoever is commendable if there is any excellence if anything worthy of praise think about these things. ⁹ Keep doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me and the God of peace will be with you".

Metanoia is not a ticket in, it is turning toward what God asks. Leave the ruined city behind. Walk with the Shepherd. When the invitation comes put on what the King gives. The journey alone changes us. We live well not because we earn a place but because a place is already prepared for us. We are dressed for resurrection. The tomb is empty. Now we see God

face to face.

Isaiah tells us these plans were made before our road began. Storms will come. Darkness will fall. We may sit at the table with those who want to hurt us but still the Shepherd invites us in. All we have to do is put on Christ. The table is set for all. In the joy of entering every tear is wiped away. Only what are you wearing?

The Shepherd who leads us is the Host who welcomes us home. Turn and come in; be clothed in him.

Here the table of the Lord becomes the centre of our thanksgiving, our personal Eucharistic acclamation as we add our voice to Isaiah: My LORD God I give thanks.

Discussion

Recognising the Shepherd Beside You

Psalm 23 reminds us that the shepherd walks beside us through the valley of the shadow of death, not from a distance. How does recognising that God is with you in times of storm and hazard change the way you navigate difficult seasons?

Reflect on a recent moment when you felt alone and consider how your perspective might shift knowing the shepherd provides shelter and shade right beside you.

Embracing the Generous, Inclusive Invitation

Isaiah and the wedding banquet parable in Matthew 22 show that God's feast is prepared for all people, even those we might consider enemies or outsiders. Why is it sometimes difficult to accept that God's grace and abundant table are offered freely to everyone without our filtering?

Consider how you can cultivate a more inclusive heart that mirrors the Host's unconditional welcome.

Putting on the Garments of Salvation

Entering the banquet requires wearing the garments the King provides, not relying on self-made righteousness or human privilege. What does it look like in your daily life to take off distorted views of privilege and truly 'put on Christ' as described by Paul?

Think about practical ways you can live out this received righteousness through gentleness and actions worthy of praise.

Practising Metanoia and Gratitude

The article describes a metanoia moment—a call to think differently and leave the ruined city behind as we move toward resurrection fullness. How are you currently challenged to turn away from old patterns and focus on whatever is true, honourable, and pure as outlined in Philippians 4?

Identify one specific area where you can practice intentional gratitude and live well because your place at the table is already prepared.

This five-day Devotional from being guided by the welcomed by the Host. receive God's present future hope, and to "clothed" in what God what you can reflect, let gratitude and thinking—shape how you



follows the article's journey Shepherd to being Each day invites you to companionship and respond by being provides rather than manufacture. As you metanoia—changed walk, worship, and relate to others.

Day 1 Psalm 23:4

The article presents Psalm 23 as a lived path: green pastures and still waters coexist with the valley of deep shadow. God's guidance reframes the hardest terrain; the Shepherd's presence is near companionship when courage falters. God is not at the exit or on a ridge but beside us, rod and staff offering practical comfort. Today, recognise that the most transformative step is knowing you are not alone. If the valley suggests abandonment or delay, retell the story with God's nearness at the centre. Resurrection hope works now—not by denying fear, but by walking through it with the Shepherd who will not let darkness prevail.

- Where are you currently experiencing a "shadowed valley" (stress, grief, uncertainty, conflict), and what would it look like to name it honestly before God?

- What signs of God's presence beside you have you overlooked or discounted recently?
- When you feel afraid, what do you reach for first—control, avoidance, distraction, or prayer—and why?
- Choose one small practice today that expresses trust (a brief prayer walk, journaling a lament, asking for help, resting without guilt).
- Who might need the reassurance of God-with-us through you this week, and what simple act of presence could you offer?

Day 2 Isaiah 25:6

Isaiah's vision is a feast: God prepares abundant nourishment for all peoples. The article warns against treating this imagery as decoration; the banquet reveals God's generosity and intent to gather, not restrict. The invitation exceeds worthiness and performed joy.

This future feast reshapes the present. Holy Communion is a foretaste—an enacted promise that our destination is already present. Gratitude becomes a way of seeing: God has provided what we cannot produce and hosts us with mercy.

Let this challenge assumptions that God's welcome is for "people like us" or those who are sorted. The feast is God's doing; our role is not to manage the guest list but to receive the Host's generosity and release comparison and spiritual earning.

- Where do you tend to assume God's welcome is limited—toward you, toward certain people, or toward certain kinds of failures?
- In what ways has your faith drifted toward "earning" rather than receiving, even subtly?
- What would it look like to treat the Lord's Table (or your next time of worship) as a present foretaste, not just a memory or a ritual?
- Name three specific gifts God has "prepared" for you that you did not achieve (grace, forgiveness, community, daily provision), and give thanks for each.
- Who is one person you find hard to imagine included in God's generosity, and what prayer could soften your heart without excusing harm?

Day 3 Matthew 22:2

Jesus' parable of the wedding banquet shows an expansive invitation demanding a real response. The feast is ready; ordinary concerns cannot excuse us from the arriving kingdom. The guest without proper clothing exposes self-made righteousness: the garment is received, not earned—not to impress God but to consent to transformation.

Today's call is simple: stop belonging on your own terms. Come as you are, but abandon identities or resentments that reject the Host's gift. Being at the table means letting God clothe you in received grace that reshapes your life.

- What "fields and business" (preoccupations, habits, distractions) most often dull your responsiveness to God's invitation?
- Where might you be tempted to rely on privilege, performance, or spiritual résumé rather than grace?
- What do you think God is offering you to "receive" right now—mercy, correction, healing, reconciliation, endurance?
- Is there a relationship in which you need to show up differently because you are part of God's banquet people? Name one concrete change.
- Pray a simple yes: "Lord, I accept what You provide." What resistance rises in you when you pray that honestly?

Day 4 Romans 13:14

The article's question, "What are you wearing?", concerns formation, not shame. Scripture speaks of being clothed with God's gift: a new identity fitting resurrection life. "Putting on Christ" is a way of being beyond willpower. This is not private virtue signalling; it emerges in how we treat others—metanoia expressed as gentleness, honour, purity and peace. The Shepherd shapes us so our presence offers shelter.

Wearing Christ does not deny storms; it changes our bearing within them. We sit with complex people without bitterness or retaliation. The garment is grace received and worn so others feel its warmth.

- What "old clothing" do you keep reaching for under stress (defensiveness, control, cynicism, people-pleasing, comparison)?
- Which aspect of Christ's character do you most need to "wear" today (gentleness, courage, patience, truthfulness, mercy)?

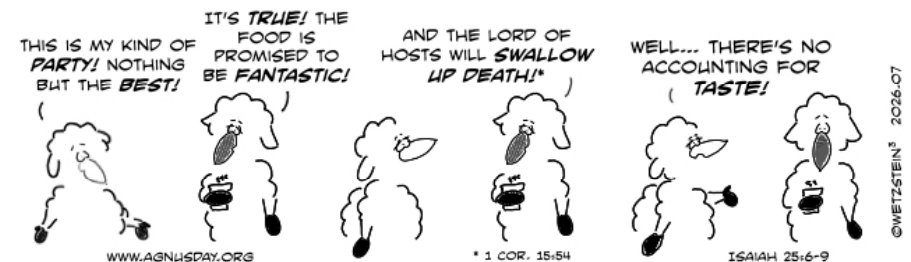
- Identify one conversation this week where you can intentionally "put on Christ" before you speak. What would that change?
- What daily habit could help you receive this garment (brief morning surrender prayer, Scripture meditation, examen, confession)?
- How might your home, workplace, or online presence look different if it were shaped by resurrection clothing rather than self-protection?

Day 5 Isaiah 25:8

The article concludes with resurrection confidence: death swallowed, tears wiped, disgrace removed. This promised future reorients the present; Isaiah's vision reveals God's tenderness and resolve to end harm. This hope anchors grief without despair, linking Isaiah to the torn veil and empty tomb—God undoing what separates and condemns. Even in dim light, the path leads to face-to-face communion.

The final movement is gratitude and trust: the Shepherd becomes Host, the table a centre of thanksgiving. Live today with humble joy and steady hope, as one for whom a place is prepared.

- Where do you most need the promise that God will "swallow up" what feels unbeatable—fear, grief, shame, or hopelessness?
- What tear (past or present) have you assumed God is indifferent to? Name it in prayer and imagine God's tenderness toward it.
- How does resurrection hope change the way you approach an ordinary day—work, conflict, fatigue, uncertainty?
- What is one act of gratitude you can practice today that resists despair (write thanks, pray thanks, speak thanks to someone)?
- If you believed "a place is already prepared" for you, what would you stop proving, and what would you start practising?



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.



Prepared by Rev'd Dennis Webster, Rector of the Anglican Parish of Paynesville, Diocese of Gippsland for personal or small group use.

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www.breaking-open-the-word.org

Email:dennis-at-breakingopentheword.org

