SCRIPTURE STUDY, SERMON & WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

BREAKING OPEN
Scripture Study



therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

PENTECOST 25A

15th November, 2026

Dennis Webster

Revised Common Lectionary Related

Zephaniah 1.7, 12-end
Psalm 90.1-8 [9-11] 12*
1 Thessalonians 5.1-11
Matthew 25.14-30

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 Lord, we beseech thee,
absolve thy people from their offences:
that through thy bountiful goodness we may
all be delivered from the bands of those sins,
which by our frailty we have committed:
Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake,
our blessed Lord and Saviour.

IMMERSION IN LIVING WATER
Ezekiel 47:9, 12

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

INTRODUCTION

To quote local comedian Tom Gleeson, I have been thinking a lot about herpes zoster this week. I now have a personal encounter with this virus of the third kind, and unfortunately, it has targeted an optic nerve. This has left me slightly 'marked', sore, light-sensitive, and feverish. I am on antivirals, but like most, it is a matter of following the course of the infection and letting things be.

Another year is added, and with it, the quiet burden of time.

It is also the season of Annual Meetings in this part of Victoria. Reports are gathered, words assembled, and in the calmer moments, I find myself shaping what must be said.

The lectionary, as if by providence, offers a treasury of words for such a gathering. This week, I offer my Annual Report, formed by these readings, not as presider, but as one who is called to speak and to listen.

In a place where the years are many and the days are measured by quiet growth, it is a gift to encourage, build up, and receive the bountiful goodness God gives.

What if the annual meeting of the Church is not an audit of holiness, but a summons to see our common life through a completely new lens?

The Annual Meeting is not an audit of holiness.

This year at St Peter's by the Lake has been an experience of encouragement and metanoia, an invitation to see life and faith anew. We have gathered in worship, in music, in care for one another. We have known the realities of ageing, of lassitude, of the pressures that come with change. Yet through it all, gratitude endures: for those who serve, for those who remember, for the gift of community. May we continue to build one another up in faith, hope, and love.



Beware, fossils, like sheep, can bite!

On a day when many parishes will hold their annual meetings, for those who follow the New Revised Lectionary, be it the continuous or related themes, Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 5.11 gives us the perfect framework to create a theme:

> *11 Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.*

Across my desk at the same time floated a thought for the day:

> *The Annual Meeting is not an audit of holiness!*

After a short time of smiling, I accepted the' clickbait' and opted in to see exactly what it was suggesting.

First, Annual Meetings naturally focus on what has been accomplished, what has not, what resources remain, and what responsibilities are ahead. The Church is not a corporation required to demonstrate increasing profits to its shareholders. Nor is it a museum charged with preserving an inheritance untouched.

Couple that with the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25.1-13), and we begin to find ourselves in some challenging reflection!

Throughout the year, my preaching has been particularly focused on common themes throughout Matthew's gospel, with perhaps a more heightened understanding of some old familiar words that, owing because of the complexity and bizarre way the English language has evolved, do not always allow the texts we receive today to be as full of nuance as in the time of Jesus. Frank O'Grady, under the pen name Nino Cullota, was right to realise that while English has a grammar that can be written correctly, listening to local use offers plenty of room for either being critically rigid or damn right confusing!

Each Sunday has evolved to present a consistent theme or teaching point. In thanking our roster coordinator for the vast effort to keep our rosters available and accessible, I have added a 'theme' of the day, together with a 'heading' about the readings. I hope that as the service takes shape, our intercessors, readers and musicians all aim to present a consistent message that encourages us on our private journeys. Our fine musicians largely choose the hymn tunes, although I will sometimes recommend an alternative. We owe them a huge thank you for what they bring to our worship.

If I were to sum up the main teaching point over this past year, it would be one word: _metanoia_. To apply this to a one-word definition of 'repenting' or 'converting' is too narrow. Remorse or regret may be part of the process for some, but the nuance comes alive when we also embrace

seeing things from a different perspective. When we change direction- morally, spiritually, even accepting new ideas- we begin to see the world differently. The following part of the journey stays to take baby steps away as we gain confidence in leaving behind what can hold us back, or, as mentioned before, keep us operating like a museum.

Museums are necessary, and so is history. I like exploring museums and local history. I do enjoy looking at the exhibits, and I find fossils particularly interesting. The last thing I would like people outside the community to do is look into St Peter's by the Lake and commend us on all the living fossils we have! As the teaching took us from Resurrection through to All Saints and Souls, and now, as we approach the zenith of the Year, the Reign of Christ, I have encouraged people to see things anew.

At recent pastoral events, I was delighted to hear many of you share the story of our windows. Even more pleasing was hearing people point to the window at the "East" end of the Church and note that it was the best window in the building. Not only was I hearing that it reminded us of our creation care, but also that we are to look outside and know that, whilst we pray, commune, and exemplify community, the world still awaits us outside.

And it does, and it still requires us to build upon what we are doing. This is where Paul's encouragement is most essential to what we present. "Encourage one another to build up..." And in terms of the living fossils, as Sarai was to find out, and indeed Mary's cousin Elizabeth, age is not a reason for newness in life, but for God, an opportunity and gift freely given and sanctified. And whilst we might laugh, like Sarai, the heavenly messengers from God remind us that in God, all things are possible.

Of late, our readings have been focused on 'end times'. Nearly all funerals that I have taken over the past year have been of people over 90 years of age. Again, the Psalm set for today, Psalm 90, reminds us of the great achievement of the length of our days being either three score and ten (70) or, with strength, four score (80). In our community here on the Lakes, we celebrate and enable participation for those who have moved from working life into retirement. This is unique to this area, and jokes aside about it being "God's waiting room," sometimes waiting rooms and preparation for heavenly flight can be wonderful opportunities.

I encourage you not to worry about who is what age, and who is not 'travelling too well.' Our community is founded on compassion, love, friendship, enthusiasm, but also not tireless energy. The talents that are employed within the life of this Parish are what we both celebrate and continue to encourage.

There are times, though, when I worry we do ourselves a disservice

because of the demands of our times. There must be a realistic and honest look at how all our events come together, and which groups are at risk when both financial and physical activity are required. Health – mental and physical- when in decline, creates both difficulties and prospects. How are we supporting, encouraging, enabling, and including? How do we survive in a world that requires more and more control and oversight from membership, even when such legal processes seem at odds with the basic evangelical imperative of making Christ fully known?

As the Body of Christ, we are entrusted with participating in God's continuing work of reconciliation, compassion, hospitality and resurrection. At times, we fail to see that our growing congregation and membership make faithfulness look like an extraordinary achievement. Sometimes, that faithfulness looks as simple as keeping the doors open, the lights on, and always having a place at the table for someone with nowhere to go. All of this is participation. It asks us to see things in a new light, even when there is so much to do!

As the world economy is under stress, so are many on pensions or on limited incomes. Despite the affluence we see around us, we know the year ahead brings many challenges. This is true of our Parish financially. Stewardship does not mean that, for the incoming Parish Council, nothing should happen or that money should not be spent. Our mission focus is strong. At times, our volunteer base is more willing than our flesh allows. We could bury our talents, but then we gain nothing.

Yes, some days we are tired. Don't be ashamed to acknowledge that. See it as a way to view things differently. The past year has asked much of us, and to be honest, it will continue to ask more of us in the year to come. Paul says we are already people of light. We're not called to invent the light. We are called to live in it. We are not called to guarantee the future; we are called to participate in it fully, and immediately. The metaphor of burying in this town has other connotations, but reserving our gifts of faith, hope, and love is not an option. We are called to offer this and see what God might do through our willingness.

And as we do so, I return to my word of the year: metanoia. Please do not hear Paul's words, or the outer darkness, as a reason to work harder. It is a word of grace. "Encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed YOU ARE DOING."

As the other reports are tabled, I would like each of you to receive them in the spirit of appreciation and opportunity. Many in the Parish should be acknowledged for all they do. Our reports today testify to that. On your behalf, I thank the outreach and mission that is uniquely"Bric-a-Brac."

I am grateful to my colleagues in ministry for their support not only here at St Peter's but across the wider Diocese; we are indeed blessed.

I also acknowledge the passing of our dear friend and pastor, Fr. James "Jim" Reeves; his sixty years of faithful priestly ministry; and the continued prayerful support of Fr. Michael Fox.

And to everyone who graces our door and table, in all wonderful moments of fellowship, strengthening, support and love, thank you.

God is revealed in Christ, who calls us into life and gives us courage to participate and remain faithful, even when we feel exhausted. My AI thing, which is now part of every computer operating system, has also flagged something interesting. It concerns the burying of talent and the weeping and gnashing of teeth that may follow.

It simply reads, "I would recommend making certain that any required teeth are included on the diocesan insurance policy." Any outer darkness is most definitely a misinterpretation of what is probably Navy Blue. This next year is not for weeping, and as for gnashing, give us today good umpires and forgive us any breaches in the rules.

Knowing that our godly and much-loved Bishop, Richard, will read that, I return to the beginning passage:

> *Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.*

Discussion

Reframing the Annual Meeting

- The Sermon suggests that the annual meeting is not an audit of holiness, contrasting the Church with corporations or museums.
- How can your group view Church accomplishments, resources, and responsibilities through the lens of grace rather than corporate pressure or historical preservation?

Embracing Metanoia

- The preacher highlighted *metanoia* as a key word for the past year, defining it as more than just repentance—moving toward a new perspective and changing direction morally and spiritually.
- What area of your life might God be inviting you to see anew and take baby steps away from what holds you back?

Stewardship and Tiredness

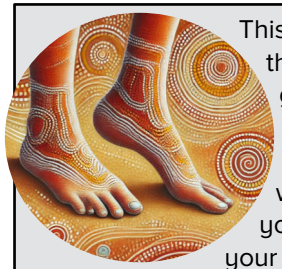
- Drawing on the Parable of the Talents and the realities of an aging or tired congregation, the

message notes that burying our gifts is not an option, even when our flesh feels exhausted.

- How does your group balance acknowledging personal limitations and fatigue with the call to actively participate in God's work?

Faithfulness in Simple Things

- The sermon reminds us that faithfulness sometimes looks as simple as keeping the doors open, keeping the lights on, and always having a place at the table.
- What are some practical ways our parish can continue to build up one another and practice hospitality in the year ahead?



This 5-day Devotional is an invitation to step beyond the annual meeting and into the quiet posture of grace, gratitude, and shared purpose. Each day gently moves you toward encouragement, metanoia, and the faithfulness that grows even when energy, resources, or confidence run thin. As you read, pray that God would open your eyes to see your Church, your neighbours, and your own life as places where the light has already appeared, waiting to be received and lived in together.

Day 1
1 Thessalonians 5:11

Paul's words are simple and clear: encourage one another, build one another up. The health of the Church is not measured by achievement, but by whether hope is growing, burdens are shared, and faith is made lighter because we do not carry it alone. A yearly meeting can so easily become a scorecard, but the Sermon calls us to something deeper. It is not an audit of holiness, but a chance to name the grace quietly at work in the ordinary lives of ordinary people.

Encouragement is not pretending all is well. It is the quiet courage to speak truth in love, to name what is, to affirm what is good, and to call upon God's presence even in exhaustion and doubt. When you encourage someone, you help them remember who they are in Christ, and the quiet significance of their small faithfulness. A community of light is formed when its members give each other words that steady the heart and make belonging possible.

- Who has encouraged you in the past year and what exactly has that encouragement enabled you to do?
- Is there a place where you've been treating Church life as a performance review (either of yourself or of others)? What would happen if you just saw it as grace at work?
- Name one person who might be feeling a bit tired, a bit overlooked, a bit unsure. What's one tangible thing you can do this week to lift them up?
- What words are you most in need of from God at this very moment? Comfort? Direction? Forgiveness? Courage? Hope?
- Before you go to bed tonight, thank God for three signs of faithfulness you've seen in your community (big or small).

Day 2
Romans 12:2

Metanoia is more than just feeling sorry. It is a new mind, a changed perspective that changes direction. The Sermon makes it clear that repentance isn't meant to be about shame or pressure, but about grace: God coming to you and saying, 'Look at this, look at that, see it differently,' and inviting you to take the next step. That kind of transformation often doesn't start with a dramatic change of heart; it starts with a simple, honest recognition that you've been stuck in some old pattern or some old fear.

A Church can slip quietly into 'museum mode,' preserving what was instead of joining what God is doing now. The same is true of our own lives. We cling to roles, assumptions, and limitations, calling it faithfulness, when it may be a gentle form of avoidance. Metanoia does not despise the past; it honours it, but will not be held captive by it. Ask God for fresh eyes, so that gratitude for yesterday becomes courage for today.

- Where do you sense God saying, 'Come and have a different way of looking at things' rather than 'Come and have a lot more to do'?
- What is one belief or assumption you've been carrying that may in fact be false or no longer valid?
- What is a 'museum habit' in your spiritual life (something you preserve but don't live)? What would a first 'baby step' away from it look like?
- How do you normally respond to change? Control, withdrawal, criticism or curiosity? What would repentance look like in that particular response?
- Pick one routine today (a conversation, a task, a prayer) and ask God to help you to see it through the lens of renewal rather than obligation.

Day 3
Matthew 25:14-30

Jesus' parable of the talents is all about the temptation to bury what you have because you're afraid, because you're tired, because you think it won't make any difference. It's a call to faithful participation. God isn't asking you to guarantee anything. God is asking you to give what you have (your time, your care, your skills, your presence, your generosity) and to simply trust that God will multiply willing obedience.

Stewardship, in a parish and in a life, means setting honest boundaries. Some seasons are simply harder—physically, financially, emotionally. The question is not, 'How can I impress God?' but, 'How can I love with what I have today?' Burying a talent can look like self-protection: keeping faith private, hiding a gift, avoiding risk, stepping back when things are hard. Unburying begins with one open-handed yes: 'Lord, I am here.'

- What 'talent' (gift, resource, influence, compassion, skill) have you been most tempted to bury recently and why?
- What is one small, realistic thing you can offer this week that's in line with your present energy and capacity?
- Where might fear be masquerading as prudence in your decisions or in your involvement in the Church?
- Who benefits when you're engaged in some small way (a neighbour, a newcomer, a volunteer team, a friend)?
- Pray honestly: "God, here's what I've got and here's what I don't. Help me to give what I have with freedom." What does God draw your attention to?

Day 4
Psalm 90:12

Psalm 90 faces reality without despair. Our days are brief, our strength is small, and we are all passing through. Wisdom is learning to number our days. The Sermon speaks to a community of many older hearts, many worn out by time. Ageing, decline, and grief are not reasons to give up on the new. They are reasons to be compassionate, to be patient, to remain together. Sometimes, success is simply a seat at the table and the lights on for those who need shelter.

When life feels like you're in a waiting room, God can still be about making you holy in readiness (readiness toWhen life feels like a waiting room, God is still at work, making you holy in readiness—to love, to bless, to reconcile, to pass on courage. Faithfulness does not need to be loud. It can be quiet endurance, steady prayer, simply showing up, letting others help you without shame. Today's wisdom is not about doing more, but about living with purpose, with gentleness toward your own limits, and with attentiveness to others.

- Like to bring that limitation honestly before God?
- Where do you see the quiet exemplification of faithfulness in your community that would warrant thanks and respect? Give at least two examples.
- Is there someone you could actually bring in more deliberately? Someone who might be right on the edge of the table? What's one thing you can do?
- What is one thing that helps you to 'number your days' (prayer, Sabbath, walking, journaling, speaking with a friend)? Just schedule it for this week.
- How might God be inviting you to accept help as an act of humility and as a way of building community rather than as a means of working independently?

Day 5
1 Thessalonians 5:5

Paul calls us children of light. The Church does not have to manufacture hope. The Sermon is clear: this year is not about working harder to keep out the dark. It is about walking together in the light of Christ, with honesty, courage, and encouragement. When pressure comes—financial, emotional, organisational—the natural response is to retreat into anxiety and control. But being people of light means choosing trust, clarity, and shared responsibility.

Participation in God's reconciling work is often very ordinary: keeping doors open, making space at the table, offering hospitality, refusing to let the wear and tear of life lead to isolation. Light is communal; it spreads when we encourage, speak with grace, and choose creative faithfulness over fear.

- Where do you find yourself most prone to anxiety or a desire for control over the future? What would it mean to be living 'in the light' in that particular area?
- What's one relationship that you could work on this week through some encouragement, some honesty and/or some forgiveness?
- What does 'keeping a place at the table' mean in your context? Who is missing and who needs to be welcomed?
- Pick one practical act of involvement that you're going to do in the next seven days (serve, give, invite, pray, visit, listen). Write it down and commit to it.
- How can you help someone else remember: "You are already doing it"—already participating, already faithful, already growing? What words will you say?

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 cartoonCopyright © 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.

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

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