SCRIPTURE STUDY, SERMON & WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

BREAKING OPEN
Scripture Study



THE REIGN OF CHRIST

22nd November, 2026

Dennis Webster

Revised Common Lectionary Related

Ezekiel 34:11-16; 20-24

Psalm 100 or 97.1-7

Ephesians 1.15-23

Matthew 25:31-46



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

Stir up,
we beseech thee, O Lord,
the wills of thy faithful people:
that they, plenteously bringing forth
the fruit of good works,
may of thee be plenteously rewarded:
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

IMMERSION IN LIVING WATER

Ezekiel 47:9, 12



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INTRODUCTION

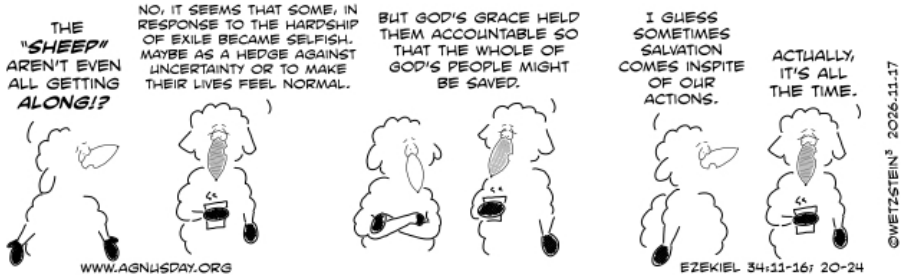
Dennis led us through the end of Matthew's liturgical year and reminded us that Jesus doesn't ask what we have heard or professed; he asks what we have done with what we have been given. When we think about the final separation of sheep and goats we are challenged to see Christ's kingdom made visible in concrete care for the vulnerable, poor and marginalised — it is not enough to just hold beliefs quietly or recall and recite the truths we have learned, our faith comes alive and finds meaning when expressed compassionately.

Our calling as part of the body of Christ is not passive — we are called to be active. We're not called to sit around waiting for something to happen or repeat what we have learned but rather let the good news of Jesus Christ take root in our hearts and overflow into our daily lives. When we show the Shepherd's heart in a broken world (kindness, generosity, attentive listening or sacrificial service) we make Christ's kingdom real for others.

Sometimes it looks like stepping outside of our comfort zone to serve those who are unseen or forgotten; other times it looks like encouraging someone struggling or helping them; standing alongside those on the margins of society.

So when we think of Dennis's message and the words of Jesus we are asked not only whose life may have been made bearable today because we belong to the Shepherd but also how can we continue to bring Christ's compassion, hope and healing to those around us?

Each little act of love — each moment of care matters. In them the Shepherd is visible and tangible in our world. May we always seek to be instruments of this care so that God works through us for others and so make the Shepherd's love evident in the lives of all we meet.



Through Him, With Him, In Him

Just 12 months ago, we began Matthew's liturgical year. Our first reading today was Isaiah 2. Son of Amoz begins with a vision for the future of God's people, Israel.

> *He shall judge between the nations*
> *and arbitrate for many peoples;*
> *they shall beat their swords into ploughshares*
> *and their spears into pruning hooks;*
> *nations shall not lift sword against nation;*
> *nor shall they learn war any more.*
> *O house of Jacob,*
> *come, let us walk*
> *in the light of the Lord!*

Isaiah 2.4-5

When we first started Matthew, it was at the end of the Gospel, warning us that

> *'as to that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven nor the Son but only the Father. (Matthew 24.36) Be on your guard! For you do not know on what day your Lord will come. So then be ready, or else you never know when the Master of the house is coming. The Son of Man will come at an hour you do not expect*

Matthew 24:42, 44

Looking back at my notes from that time, I wrote, "Happy New Church Year." Next week we move on to Mark a change of gear, and we start our new Church Year again with some very direct words.

On Friday at Ecumenical Conversation at The Abbey, our Bishop Richard was very clear about the coming again of Jesus: 'Look busy!' Matthew's warning is very simple: don't sit around waiting for it to happen. That won't protect you and may well be what prevents you at judgment day.

Now we turn the page and enter Matthew's final chapter. The kingdom of God is before us— not only as sovereignty but presence. We have walked through life, ministry, death, resurrection and Christ's abiding presence.

We went out in hope and found a child. We followed the teacher and saw restoration. We walked to Jerusalem and stood before the cross. Mary of Magdala, the unlikely apostle, heard the news of the resurrection. Like

those first disciples, we are sent to meet the risen Lord. We have received the Spirit. Now the King does not ask what we have seen or heard but what we have done with what we have been given.

We are not asked to believe or repeat what we have heard. We are called to let the good news take root; become real in us.

Ezekiel saw a shepherd for God's people. Matthew shows us that Jesus, among the outcasts, served the poor. Paul says the Church is the body of Christ — called to do this work. The Shepherd leads us home and calls us to lead others. Our journey isn't about being good or bad. It's learning to love as He loves.

Simon Peter's relationship with Jesus is rocky. He has the Messiah thing going on, but he's always wrong about it. From rock of the Church to 'Satan' for not getting it. Refuses to have his feet washed; can't stay awake at all during betrayal; denies Christ and then runs out of the courtyard.

The parables ('The Kingdom of God is like') weave the kingdom into everyday life, not status or wealth. The Beatitudes show God's heart among the vulnerable. Luke takes this to the spiritual; Matthew finds the kingdom present among the vulnerable here and now.

The poor in spirit inherit the kingdom. The mourners are comforted. The meek inherit all. The hungry are filled. The merciful receive mercy. Pure in heart see God. Peacemakers are children of God. Those who are persecuted for righteousness are rich.

Jesus teaches us to be people of love, mercy and justice. He calls us to walk with Him even when the way is hard. He is the fulfilment of the law and the prophets — He calls us to live it out. Pharisees, scribes, Levites, Sadducees — all spoke well, but they did not walk with us on our journey with our Shepherd.

To preach the kingdom of Christ is to speak of creation renewed. Not the end of time, but the coming of God's rule. Parables of the wedding, bridesmaids, talents — all ask: what have you done with what has been given? Shepherds separate the flock not by worth but by care. So people are divided.

The shepherd divides the flock. Some go one way, some another way. It is a prophetic word against those who trample the pasture (trample God's ground), muddy the waters (mud the waters of justice) and push the weak aside (push the weak out). The question Jesus asks goes to the heart;

both groups ask the same question.

> *"Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you? Naked and clothe you? Sick or in prison and visit you?"*

Matthew 25:35-39; 44-45

St Paul prays that our hearts may be enlightened with hope—the same power that raised Jesus. That power is alive in the Church, the body of Christ. We are called to be the Shepherd's heart, not only the Shepherd's eye. We are called to be present in the world across the ages.

The eyes of our hearts are opened not only to see glory but to see where Christ is now. The King doesn't ask for facts. He asks what we have done. The good shepherd walks with us, enables us, equips us sends us. This is the journey of our pilgrimage with the Lord in Matthew. We are not hearers only. We are doers.

When he defined the Messianic Mission, it was not to overthrow the regime in power in Israel nor to make the present Jerusalem a city of everlasting peace and glory. In the synagogue at Nazareth, he reads from Isaiah the prophet and sets out what is demanded of us as the Body of Christ.

> *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,*
> *because he has anointed me*
> *to bring good news to the poor.*
> *He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives*
> *and recovery of sight to the blind,*
> *to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."*

Luke 4.18-19

This brings us back to the question before the throne. As the Body of Christ, how do we care for the poor? How do we care for the oppressed, marginalised people? How do we care for those who need healing; those in prison; those who need forgiveness? What have we done?

We walk with the Shepherd beside us. We walk through green pastures and dark valleys. We walk provisioned in Spirit and confident. Our life is a pilgrimage— a passage of privilege and responsibility. We walk in faith not because we have seen or heard, but because it is who we are.

Every day the voice of Jesus is heard — in streets and lanes, highways and byways, places where blood has been spilled; institutions that shelter

and divide. It's a walk in the light. It takes us back to where we started.

> *O house of Jacob, come,*
> *let us walk*
> *in the light of the Lord!*

Isaiah 2.5

Maybe the question for this last Sunday isn't

Are we sheep or goats?

The question is:

Whose life has been made bearable
because we belong to the Shepherd?

Discussion

Reflecting on What We Have Been Given

- Thinking about the Sermon's central theme from Matthew 25, consider how you typically measure spiritual maturity—by what you know and hear, or by what you actually do?
- How can you move past simply repeating the good news to letting it take root and become real in your daily life?
- Take time to discuss practical ways your everyday actions mirror the King's priorities.

Embodying the Shepherd's Heart

- The Sermon notes that the Church is called to be the Body of Christ, acting as the Shepherd's heart and hands among the vulnerable.
- In which specific areas of your life or community do you see people who are hungry, thirsty, a stranger, sick, or imprisoned?
- Discuss how your small group or personal ministry can more intentionally engage with those who are marginalised and oppressed.

Living Out a Bearable Life for Others

- Dennis concluded with the searching question: 'Whose life has been made bearable because we belong to the Shepherd?'
- Think about the people God has placed in your path this week, both inside and outside the Church.
- How can you step into their lives to offer tangible comfort, mercy, and justice in Jesus' name?

This week, you are invited to return to the heart of the Sermon. Christ's kingdom is not only confessed with our lips, but lived with our lives. Each day draws us closer to Jesus' searching question—not what we have heard, but what we have done with what we have received. As you reflect, ask God to open the eyes of your heart, so you may see Christ's presence and answer with love that takes shape in the world.



Day 1
Isaiah 2:4-5

Isaiah's vision is not an escape, but God's future breaking into now. Swords are shaped into ploughshares. Nations unlearn the ways of war. God's people are called, each day: Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord. To walk in that light is to let peace and justice reshape us, turning us from self-protection toward restoration.

The Sermon opens and closes with this invitation to walk. Through Matthew's telling, we have seen the kingdom is not a doctrine, but a reality lived among the vulnerable, here and now. Today, we begin by seeing—God's world as it is, and as it will be. We choose which light will guide our steps.

- Where do you notice "swords" in your life—habits, words, or defences that harm rather than heal?
- What might it look like for God to reshape one conflict you're currently facing into something that cultivates life?
- Who is most directly affected by your choices, and how might "walking in the light" change how you treat them today?
- Name one place in your community that feels dark or divided. What is one small action you can take this week that moves it toward peace?
- Pray Isaiah's invitation slowly: "Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord." What resistance do you sense in yourself as you pray it?
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Day 2
Matthew 24:42-44

Jesus' call to keep watch is not an invitation to anxiety, but to readiness. The danger is not waiting for signs, but waiting instead of walking. Readiness is a life turned toward Christ's return because it is already turned toward His way.

If the kingdom is God's presence among us, then readiness is availability—open to interruptions, to needs that come uninvited, to the Spirit's quiet urging. The question is not what we can recite, but whether our lives are open when Christ draws near, often hidden in the ordinary, the overlooked, the vulnerable.

- What is one area where you tend to "wait" instead of act—hoping something changes without taking a faithful step?
- When you hear "be ready," do you feel fear, pressure, or invitation? What might God be revealing through that reaction?
- Identify one daily practice (a prayer, a pause, a habit of generosity) that could make you more spiritually attentive this week.
- Who are you most likely to overlook in your routine, and how could you build in space to notice them?
- Ask God for one specific "assignment" for today. What is one concrete act of love you will do before the day ends?

Day 3
Ephesians 1:18-20

Paul prays for the eyes of your heart to be opened, so you may know

hope and see God's power at work. This is the same power that raised Jesus, alive now in the Church. Discipleship is not driven by willpower, but sustained by resurrection life, shaping ordinary people into Christ's body. Enlightened hearts do not only look for glory above; they learn to see Christ here and now. This vision changes what matters, and what we call success. It teaches us to notice where mercy is needed, and to trust that God's power is given not just for comfort, but for love made visible.

- Where do you feel powerless to make a difference right now? Name it honestly before God.
- What would change if you believed resurrection power is available for your next faithful step, not just for "big miracles"?
- Who in your life helps you see with "enlightened" eyes? How can you learn from their attentiveness and compassion?
- What is one situation where your perspective might need to be re-formed by hope rather than cynicism?
- Pray Paul's request in your own words: what do you want God to help you see clearly this week?

Day 4
Luke 4:18-19

Jesus names His mission plainly: good news for the poor, release for captives, sight for the blind, freedom for the oppressed. This is not vague spirituality, but God's favour taking shape in real lives. Christ's mission was not to create spectacle, but to announce and embody God's renewing rule among the burdened.

As Christ's body, the Church is not called to admire this mission, but to share in it. Our part may be small, local, unseen, but it is real. Discipleship becomes visible when our days and choices begin to echo Jesus' words: dignity restored, wounds tended, burdens shared, hope offered.

- Which part of Jesus' mission in Luke 4 feels most urgent in your community right now (poverty, captivity, blindness, oppression)?
- Where are you tempted to keep compassion "general" rather than personal? Who might God be putting in front of you?
- What is one resource you have been given (time, skills, influence, money) that could become "good news" to someone this week?
- Consider your weekly rhythm: where could you make room for mercy without burning out or performing for others?
- Choose one tangible act aligned with Luke 4 (helping, advocating, visiting, listening, giving). Write it down and schedule it.
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Day 5
Matthew 25:35-40

Jesus' final question in Matthew 25 is not about what we claimed to know, but how we loved: feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned. Both groups ask the same question: When did we see you? True mercy often happens quietly, without notice or scorekeeping.

The Sermon moves us beyond sheep or goats to a simple question: whose life is lighter because we belong to the Shepherd? This is not salvation by achievement, but the sign of a kingdom taking root. As we walk with Jesus through our world, we begin to see Him where we once hurried past, and we learn to answer with the Shepherd's heart.

- Think of one person whose life feels heavy right now. What would make it even slightly more bearable this week?
- Which of Jesus' examples in Matthew 25 comes most naturally to you, and which do you avoid? Why?
- Where might Christ be "hidden" in your daily life—in a coworker, neighbour, stranger, or someone you'd rather not engage?
- What is one act of mercy you can do quietly (without announcing it) as an offering to Jesus?
- Review the last five days: what is one next step you will continue for the next month, and who can help you stay faithful to it?

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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