

## LENT 1

6/3/22

### CAVES BEACH

#### CALL TO WORSHIP

Lead us, O God, as we enter the Lenten season.

**Give us the courage of Jesus, courage of those  
who did not hang back from confronting evil.**

Lead us, O God, as we enter the Lenten season.

**Give us the dedication of Jesus, dedication of those  
who was not diverted from preaching the Gospel.**

Lead us, O God, as we enter the Lenten season.

**Give us the compassion of Jesus, compassion of those  
who saw the suffering ones and was moved to help them.**

Lead us, O God, as we enter the Lenten season.

**Give us the faithfulness of Jesus, faithfulness of those  
who saw the cross but did not turn back.**

#### Opening Prayer

In moments of reflection,

**May we know the peace of your presence, O God, presence of  
God, voice of God.**

In the offering of prayer,

**May we hear your still small voice, still small voice, O God.**

In the quiet places of our life,

**May we be aware of your gentle leading, O God.**

In the sacred church moments,

**May we sense your Holy Spirit, O God,  
bringing us together for service in the Way of Jesus.  
Amen.**

**HYMN 233** I will sing the wondrous story

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAcpYr9l6Tk>

## **PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION**

We give thanks to you God, for the guidance you offer to us,  
for the legacies and stories of those who have travelled this road before us,  
who point to ways in which we can find strength when facing troubles,  
and wisdom when faced with dilemmas that are difficult to resolve.

We thank you for the Spirit, living amongst us full of confidence that good  
will overcome evil, insisting that we believe that your kingdom will come.

We are grateful for the many ways we encounter the divine, that they  
happen unexpectedly and often at the time we need them most.

We are glad to be your people, we are glad to walk your way.

Let's speak of what tempts us,  
beside chocolate cake and potato chips,  
binging on Netflix and sleeping in on cold mornings.

Let's speak of wanting the next shiny new things,  
of our aspiration to keep up with the Joneses,  
and the accumulation of wealth.

Let's speak of longing to run with the in-crowd,  
to not be the odd one out,  
to not speak out and open ourselves to ridicule.

Let's speak of our yearning for adulation and praise,  
to always win and always be right,

to have everyone's attention focused on us.

Let's speak of choosing to be uninformed,

to step away from what's hard,

to choose the clichéd over the good.

Let's speak of what tempts us

and then ask if those things have the touch of the divine.

*(Hold a period of silence)*

## **WORDS OF ASSURANCE**

Temptations will always be around, just as surely the divine is always around. When we hold on to what is divine, we manage the things that tempt us differently, for God fills our hearts, we find ourselves immersed in abundant, overflowing grace, and this becomes more than enough.

## **READINGS**

- **Romans 10:8b-13**

"The word is near you,  
on your lips and in your heart"

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); <sup>9</sup> because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. <sup>11</sup> The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." <sup>12</sup> For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. <sup>13</sup> For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

- **Luke 4:1-13**

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, <sup>2</sup> where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. <sup>3</sup> The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." 8 Jesus answered him, "It is written,

'Worship the Lord your God,

and serve only him.'"

9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you,

to protect you,'

11 and

'On their hands they will bear you up,

so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

12 Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

**HYMN 231** At the name of Jesus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7w-tDjlpqk>

## **SERMON**

Well, who managed to get through the week without getting wet?

I am sure that our prayers are with everyone caught up in the 'rain Bomb' as they have called it. It has caused devastation and loss of life all along the east coast.

At the same time our thoughts and prayers are also with all those people caught up in the war in the Ukraine.

As we face increasing uncertainty and disruption in our world we need to constantly be re-examining our faith and how we look at the world around us. Things like the angels and the devil keep coming to mind.

I like to think that I am a product of the enlightenment which brought us modern thinking and science. This has caused me to be naturally sceptical about simplistic spiritualisation of things and encouraged me to look for the real reasons behind an event.

When I hear people saying things like: 'The devil made me do it,' I have doubts about this sort of personification. It is too often used as a cop-out when people don't want to take responsibility for their own actions.

I am not sure how many of you have experiences with people with a mental illness. I can recall one particular single mother with bi-polar issues sharing with me about how Jesus kept speaking to her. In time I discovered that she would not let anyone past her front door. She had two children, one a boy with physical and intellectual problems. One day I was called to help the police to catch her and transport her for treatment. When the woman's mother let us into her house it was covered with rubbish and took several trailer loads to the tip to get any sort of order restored. When I helped her talk to the very sympathetic police officers she was having delusions about the devil chasing her. People with some conditions have recurring religious delusions.

How often have you heard that the devil tripped people up on the street? It is not uncommon for people with problems coping with society. Or they might say that Satan knocked a coffee cup out of their hands. This sort of comment has made me less open to personalising the devil and recognising that at times psycho-social projections are used by some people to avoid personal responsibility for events. There is one fact to remember in a discussion like this, the devil cannot be in different places at the same time, unlike God!

However as things develop in the world I am increasingly thinking about evil being present in our world. I am not looking for a little red man with horns and a spear. In fact I cannot find any description of such a being in the Bible. In my opinion there is no such being.

What I do believe is that the powers of evil does exist in our world and this is more than just the culmination of human failings like pride and selfishness. Evil does not develop from bad experiences in toilet training and absent fathers or childhood trauma. It is not that those sort of things don't impact on some people enough to destabilize their lives but they are not evil.

Given the events in Europe at the moment and also in other places like Myanmar there are situations that are not just able to be passed off as the consequences of historical events. There is evil in our world.

Some things seem to me to be beyond simplistic theories. There is cosmic evil that seems to be far more effective than our human systems could ever strive to stop. To try and pass these things off as psycho-social outcomes leaves us powerless in this world. We need to give this some sort of name so that we can address it and focus our opposition on resistance to it.

Jon Leveson raises the question as to whether Dietrich Bonhoeffer would have been half as clear and courageous in his resistance to the Nazis if he had believed Hitler and his followers to be just the unknowing victims of psychological traumas. No! Bonhoeffer saw evil as having a face, having a name, and therefore being something that could be unmasked, denounced and resisted. Perhaps belief in evil may actually inspire deeds of heroic good, and not just be a way to cop out of our responsibility.

One of the ways that evil can disguise itself so effectively is by the fact that it does not have a specific physical presence or a name. For instance:

- if we were trying to stop pollution in a river system, or
- trying to prevent black deaths in custody, or
- employers putting unreasonable demands on their employee's family time,

who do we specifically address these concerns to?

It is hard to target one specific entity in these instances. As you dig deeper and deeper into trying to identify specific people you meet with blurry and indistinct identities as there is no one person or company to target specifically. There can be very powerful yet non-specific market forces driving these issues and it can be part of economic imperatives. It is not like there is one specific person or company where the buck stops for every problem.

Let's be clear here I am not suggesting that it is Satan's fault. Demonic effects don't have some persona which we can target. We are up against the nameless and the faceless which makes it hard to specifically aim our efforts at one point.

Perhaps our use of intellect and rationalist explanations can play right into the hands of evil as it can be concealed behind the old primitive myths and superstitions as we look for a specific persona.

When we come up against things like racism and genocidal political movements or if we are confronting blocks in our own prayer life we do

come up against distractions and diversions which can make our best efforts dissipate.

Have you noticed that when you commit to a specific time and place for your daily prayers that there so often is an outside obstruction which interrupts your best efforts?

Let me bring you a reflection from Nathan Nettleton from a few years ago:

“When I began committing myself to a regular discipline of daily prayer about eighteen months ago, I noticed some strange reactions within myself. First there was just the resistance I have always had to any form of discipline, but I managed, for the first time in my life to persevere beyond that, to break through that barrier. When I got beyond that all sorts of things began to go haywire in my life, most of them things I would still see primarily in terms of my own psychological baggage. But then as I began to cope with that some things began to happen that convinced me that there were also some profound spiritual forces involved seeking to derail the train I was beginning to get rolling before the journey went too far.

I started finding appetites growing for things that pulled me in the opposite direction. They were numerous, but I’ll relate just one, not because it was the worst by any means but because it is the simplest to explain. An appetite for pornography. Desires to drop into the X-rated book shops and pick up a few magazines, or surf the sleaze sites on the internet. I hadn’t experienced such a pull towards porn since I was a hormone infested nineteen year old, and I’d gotten over it reasonably quickly then.

I can see no reason to conclude that that reaction was simply drawing on unresolved issues in my psyche. Rather it was as though the opposition had conceded that I was going to pray so the next best strategy was to try to balance out the impact with a counter input. Meet an increase in prayer with an increase in sleaze and at the end of the day the balance is roughly the same as it always was. Mission accomplished. I’m over that one now and I can’t tell you what the next stage was because I haven’t detected it yet, but I’m bracing myself.”

When you have to address your own personal struggles it helps to reflect on whether it comes from a manifestation of evil or a quirky flaw in your own psychological make up. If I simply approach such a situation as a quirk of my personal psychological style then it might not be a big deal. We are all broken in some ways and, as we heard in the letter to the faithful in Rome, Paul points out that we are all saved by faith, not good works.

At the same time if I was to consider that this sort of situation might be as part of a sustained and concerted effort to divert my ministry and diffuse its effectiveness then the situation is very different. The issue becomes more about confronting the issues 'head-on' or trying to simply adapt to the distractions. If we are honest there are three main distractions used by 'evil': money, power and sex. These things can so easily shatter any attempt to live a fulfilled Christian life.

I am sure that in the congregation today there are people who have had to face the challenges of one of those three temptations. Sometimes people might have failed to resist and they have had to rebuild their lives. At times they might have had to adapt to living with part of their life not fitting in with the values underlying the rest of their lives. If evil can get at you in one area, and you have not fully healed the wound, then the resulting issues will gradually tear your life apart.

If you think that you have never attracted the attention of evil then it is probably because it has not found anything in you which might challenge it. If you think that you have such a pure and unchallenged spiritual life then you might be able to explain the fundamentals of today's Gospel message differently.

Jesus clearly experienced the attacks of evil very specifically. Of the three issues money, sex and power, I think that power is the most destructive. Power is no doubt the most subtle and potent of the issues to deal with. Of particular interest here is the fact that evil does not concede defeat as it departs from Jesus in the desert, rather we are told that it awaited an opportune time.

Whether you prefer to try and personify evil by giving it a name like Satan or not, what is clear is that there was organized cosmic resistance to Jesus. As we are told in today's passage, even quoted scripture to Jesus to try and justify its actions.

But let us be clear about at least one point, evil can't force us to do anything. The excuse 'the devil made me do it' is simply trying to deflect our own responsibility for our actions. Evil can tempt us, distract us, confuse our good intentions and try and lure us away from our objectives



but it can't force us to make bad decisions. Let us remember that God has given us free choice.

Next we need to acknowledge that each of us are made in the image of God and included in our creation is a basic instinct to be able to tell good from evil. As Christians we are redeemed bearers of the Holy Spirit which can guide us when we allow God into our lives. This gives us more than enough courage, wisdom and strength to decide what we need to do in situations where we might be tempted.

Also we are not left to face the temptations alone. We are part of a community which has the gathered wisdom and support which enables us to discern and overcome threats to our serenity.

Lastly we need to acknowledge that we are on the winning side. In Christ the powers of evil were defeated and all that it has left is some sort of haphazard rear-guard action. Even when the temptations are at their strongest we will never run out of resources to enable us to stay with God.

The Lenten season of the church year is about more than just hanging on and resisting evil temptations. It is a journey which reaffirms our ongoing presence with the living God who never abandons us, no matter what the challenge.

As we come to share communion at the open table before us today let us acknowledge that in these elements is the all strength and support we need in life.

We are not alone and vulnerable. We are a people who live in the power of love.

**HYMN 459** In Christ there is no east or west

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TpITJOShix0&t=15s>

## **PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING**

Kind and wise Spirit, travel with the gifts we offer as they find places and people in need. May they bring relief to those who need a break and make a difference in how they go about their days.

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Lead us, kindly Light

when gloom encircles us

and troubles seek to have their way,  
when the night is dark  
and we're far from home,  
step by step, lead us on.

**Lead us, kindly Light,  
to encounter the divine.**

Lead us, kindly Light,  
as we seek to walk your way,  
to set aside our garish pride  
to face our anxiety and fears,  
to leave what's past in the past  
and look ahead to you.

**Lead us, kindly Light,  
to encounter the divine.**

Lead us, kindly Light,  
through storms and rugged seas  
until we reach safe haven,  
where those who've known  
that we've been lost  
welcome us with loving arms.

**Lead us, kindly Light,  
to encounter the divine.**

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours

now and for ever. Amen.

**HYMN 540** Christians lift your hearts and voices (Sorry no video for this one)

## **COMMUNION**

This is the table, not of the Church, but of the Lord. It is provided for those who love him and who want to love him more.

So, come, those who have much faith and those who have little, those who have been here often and those who have not been for a long time, those who have tried to follow and those who have failed.

Come, not because I invite you: it is our Lord. It is His will that those who follow Him should meet him here.

Now let us hear the story of how this sacrament began:

On the night when he was betrayed,

He sat at supper with his disciples.

When they were eating

He took a piece of bread,

Said the blessing, broke it  
And gave it to them with the words,  
“This is my body. It is broken for you.  
Do this to remember me.”

Later he took a cup of wine, saying,  
“This cup is God’s new covenant,  
Sealed with my blood.  
Drink from it, all of you.  
Do this to remember me.”

So now, following Jesus’ example and command, we take this bread and this wine, the ordinary things of the world which Christ will make special. And as he said a prayer before sharing, let us do so too.

### ***Prayer of Thanksgiving***

The Lord be with you.

### ***And also with you.***

Lift up your hearts.

### ***We lift them to the Lord.***

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

### ***It is right to give our thanks and praise.***

Gratitude, praise, hearts lifted high, voices strong and joyful, lives reflecting your glory... these you deserve.

For when we were nothing, you made us something; when we had no name and no faith and no future, you called us your children; when we lost our way or turned aside, you did not abandon us; when we came back to you, your arms opened wide in welcome.

And, more than that, you prepare a table for us, offering not just bread, not just wine, but your very self, so that we may be filled, forgiven, healed,

blessed, and made new again. You are worth all our pain and all our praise.

So we join our voices to those of the Church on earth and in heaven:

***Holy, holy, holy, God of power and might,***

***Heaven and earth are full of your glory.***

***Hosanna in the highest.***

***Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.***

***Hosanna in the highest!***

### ***Prayer of Consecration***

Lord Jesus Christ, present with us now, for all that you have done and all that you have promised, what have we to offer?

Our hands are empty, our voices are sometimes full of wrong things. We are not fit to gather up the crumbs from under your table. But with you is mercy and the power to change us.

So as we do in this place what you did in an upstairs room, send down your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts of bread and wine, that they may become for us your body, healing, forgiving, and making us whole; and that we may become for you, your body, loving and caring in the world until your Kingdom come.

### ***Taking and Breaking the Bread***

Among friends, gathered around a table,

Jesus took bread, broke it and said:

“This is my body, it is broken for you.”

### ***Taking the Cup of Wine***

Later, he took the cup of wine and said:

“This is the new relationship with God made possible because of my death. Take this—all of you.”

Our Lord is here, coming to us in bread and wine.

The gifts of God for the people of God.

***The bread and wine are shared.***

***Prayer of Dedication***

*Lord Jesus Christ, you have put your life in our hands, now we put our lives in yours.*

*Take us, redeem us, renew us.*

*Irrespective of what we have been, it is what, with you, we can be, starting now. Amen.*

**HYMN 537** Let us talents and tongues employ

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYnF86ZzHH8&list=RDnYnF86ZzHH8&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYnF86ZzHH8&list=RDnYnF86ZzHH8&start_radio=1)

***The Commissioning***

The cross

***We shall take it.***

The bread

***We shall break it.***

The pain

***We shall bear it.***

The joy

***We shall share it.***

The Gospel

***We shall live it.***

The love

***We shall give it.***

The light

***We shall cherish it.***

The darkness

***God shall perish it.***

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH\\_HdkWs74](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH_HdkWs74)