

PENTECOST 18

1/10/23

CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

Come to the water's edge!

Love is gently flowing, it's God's wondrous stream;

senses are on fire, touching thought and dream,

love is gently flowing, joy is unrestrained,

hearts are bursting, spirits thirsting,

we and God are one, in the river of time.

Opening Prayer

You are our friend, O God, and we rejoice.

As a friend, you invite us into your special place, and make us welcome.

You are our friend, O God, and we are thankful.

As a friend, you make us feel at home with your other friends; you encourage fellowship.

You are our friend, O God, and we celebrate.

As a friend, you laugh and smile with us, and encourage us when we feel low.

You are our friend, O God, and we praise you.

**As our Eternal Friend, your grace overwhelms us and your promises in time, and beyond time leave us breathless.
Amen.**

HYMN 147 To God be the glory

<https://youtu.be/3vbGFupxwu0>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

God of all time and space, we worship and adore you. You could have remained far beyond our understanding, yet you chose to reveal yourself in the person of Jesus, your Son, our Saviour. He widened the horizons of minds and hearts when he made your love and your wisdom known through his gentleness, compassion and humility. And you empower us with your Holy Spirit so that we can live with Christ's mind in us, giving shape to all our words and actions, making us gentle, compassionate and humble. We offer our thanks and praise, in response to all your gifts to us O God, especially the gift of Jesus.

Merciful God, when we fail to work towards establishing conditions which allow justice to flower and mercy to flourish in people's lives;
forgive us.

When our satisfaction with the status quo dulls our capacity to grieve over the injustices suffered by so many people in our society;
forgive us.

When we collaborate with those who exploit workers in sweatshops by buying their products;
forgive us.

When we become so deeply attached to the quest for wealth and power that we do not hear Jesus' words about the impossibility of serving both God and wealth addressed to us;
forgive us.

When achieving prosperity becomes a higher priority than tackling the causes of poverty;
forgive us

Strengthen us, O God, to withstand the seduction of a society which seems obsessed with the acquisition of wealth and power, too often at the expense of the poor and powerless. Help us to live as Jesus did, in solidarity with those who have lost hope of anything good or just happening in their lives. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

We believe that Jesus was sent by God into the world not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him.

Those who believe in him are not condemned. (John 3:17,18)
Thanks be to God!

READINGS

- **Exodus 17:1-7**

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. 2 The people quarrelled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" 3 But the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" 4 So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do for this people? They are almost ready to stone me." 5 The Lord said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go. 6 I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

- **Matthew 21:23–32**

23 When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" 24 Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why, then, did you not believe him?' 26 But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd, for all regard John as a prophet." 27 So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

28 "What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' 29 He answered, 'I will not,' but later he changed his mind and went. 30 The father went to the second and said the same, and he answered, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him, and even after you saw it you did not change your minds and believe him.

HYMN 569 Guide me O though great Redeemer

<https://youtu.be/5j48TLIRb4Q>

SERMON

I thought that this week I would explore an Old Testament passage and reflect on ancient methods used by some preachers in the early years of Christianity.

Among the great early era Christian preachers there was a style of preaching called 'typological.' This approach only lasted a few centuries. This approach is largely sidelined these days as it mainly ignores the obvious meanings of a passage and goes to great lengths to look at everything symbolically and looks for some type of allegory in each passage.

One of the reasons why this approach fell from popularity was that it ignored the actual message in a passage and turns itself inside out to look at each element symbolically. In this case the former slaves life in the desert would have been sin. The mana from heaven could have represented the scriptures and the quail mentioned in a previous passage was the flesh of Christ.

I was raised to look at things differently and this sort of thing was not accepted in my theological training. When looking back at that approach we might consider some of the analogies used by those pioneers almost reached a ridiculous point. At the same time there are some passages which do lend themselves to this approach. The early apostles would possibly have used this approach and possibly Jesus also used some of these ideas in His parables. Especially when we come to the Old Testament texts, we should also recognise that these passages were passed down verbally with this idea sometimes in mind.

The reading from Exodus, with water coming out of a solid rock, could have been seen as one of these passages. If we simply look at the passage without the surrounding story there is very little meat in the message.

Once upon a time, several thousand years ago, the Israelite people got thirsty and disgruntled in the desert and, on instruction from God, Moses whacked a rock with a stick and fresh water came gushing out and the people lived happily ever after.

So what!

If we simplistically look at this passage as some demonstration of what faith can achieve then it is simply left as a question of whether we believe the event actually happened. Simply put this approach to the passage does not

challenge me into to build my faith and spirituality and draw me into mission.

The 'typologists' could always try and stretch this story but we need to be mindful of making a simple passage look ridiculous.

- The rock for them could stand for Jesus as often in the Bible Jesus is referred to as the rock.
- Then the striking of that rock with a piece of wood can represent Jesus being struck and wounded on the cross.
- Now the water that followed could represent the outflowing of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

We can see how we can draw a long bow on a passage which predates Christ. *Typologists* argued that these stories only survived the myriad of stories passed down through the ages as they all point to Christ. I can't join this approach as there is so much more to the Bible than this approach allows for. Bible passages are not symbolic elements to be minced up to show up some unrelated symbolism.

As time moved on the approach was refined as people started to look at whether the passage could be a symbol of things which God does for us on an ongoing basis. Did the story contain a 'type' or 'pattern' of how God works. If this is the case then by understanding the 'type' or 'pattern' it might have more relevance for those of us who are in danger of being left thirsty looking for relevance in this story.

Tom Wright wrote a book, "Simply Christian." In it is an allegorical story about a place where there used to be lots of natural springs and the people would collect their water from the springs. But occasionally the springs went mad and flooded the town, and occasionally a spring got polluted and someone got sick, so one day the government decided that it would be safer, more efficient, and more orderly if they concreted over all the natural water sources. They created a comprehensive and efficient system of pipes to bring regulated and filtered water to everyone. It all seemed good for a while. Everything was under control and no one got sick and there were no floods. But then one day, the water underneath built up enough pressure to break through the concrete and surge up through the town and all over the place. Once again there was unregulated water available everywhere, and most of the people were delighted.

Typologically this points to human spirituality being a bit like this story. A couple of hundred years ago in the Western world the authorities decided

that everything had to be orderly and rational and scientifically explainable. They concreted over the natural springs of spirituality and dispensed controlled measures of spirituality through the official pipes in the approved places of spirituality for those who still thought they needed it at all.

But in our generation, the pressure from below has broken through, and now spirituality is bubbling up all over the place, often in ways which seem a bit polluted or a bit out of control, and certainly in a far less orderly and sanitised way than the official pipes used to dispense it. However, in reality, the people are delighted. Controlled and measured and sanitised spirituality only ever really pleased those who controlled the pipes, and now the people are delighting in the unruliness and freedom of it.

Now to this story from Exodus. This story of the water coming from the rock, is not making exactly the same point, but it is using some similar symbols to make a similar point. And it is by no means far-fetched to say that we can recognise a pattern here; that the truths about God and us which are evident in this story continue to be true and evident in many situations, and that we can therefore see things here which hold true for us.

I think that we can't cast ourselves as being the people from the Exodus passage. We can't use this passage to criticise leaders from past generations. It is true that the movement of the Spirit cannot be covered in some concrete slab. We can be oblivious to those movements. It is true that God is able to provide life to sustain us but all too often we fail to seek God's guidance, preferring a solid slab over the vagaries of a varying spiritual landscape.

As Christians, we commit ourselves to seeking out God's guidance, even in unexpected places. This can be in something as simple as comments from a stranger, an outcast or even a little child. The guidance of the Holy Spirit might not always come through official channels but it can so often come through 'left field' as we call it. We are called to nurture the faith of those around us and to keep our faith alive and vital.

What we can take from this passage is that even when things seem to be dry and we are seemingly stuck in an inhospitable place the springs of living water can break through from even the most impenetrable places. We need to be ready to prayerfully listen for God's Holy Spirit breaking through into our lives. There is no rock hard enough to stop God's life-giving message from breaking through.

Whether the event described in Exodus actually happened as it is described is of little moment to me. The passage is not so much about the event as it is about our relationship with God and our constant need to be

reminded of God's generosity even in barren places in our life journey. God operates with complete freewill throughout our lives. How we respond to that generosity is the measure of the depth of our faith and discipleship.

And it is to that God that we are called to surrender ourselves, for it is that God who we can trust to hold us, even when we when we cannot hold ourselves in the dry and threatening places.

HYMN 745 Seek ye first the kingdom of God

<https://youtu.be/FFxZeY2D5tc>.

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

Into the River of Life we step, trusting Holy Mystery with our life, our gifts, our all.

Into the deserts, you bring life, Holy One, and we are grateful.

Bless these gifts of money, our gifts of time and expertise and presence in response to your presence with us: may we join with you

in the renewing of life in our world. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

When we bicker with each other,
we can cause such harm.

Holy One, into the places of pain
from harsh words, rejected love,
selfish pursuit of the win,
bring healing, bring life.

When we argue with each other,
we can leave another unheard.

Holy One, into the places of pain
from being ignored, silenced,

dismissed and diminished,

bring healing, bring life.

When we quarrel with each other,

we lose sight of you;

Holy One, open our vision,

our insight, our understanding,

to see you in each other and

bring healing, bring life.

For the people and places brought to mind

in our story and reflections today,

we pray now in the silence.

pause

Holy One, hear our spoken and felt

prayers for healing and renewed life

for ourselves and each other, we pray.

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 533 I come with joy to meet my Lord

<https://youtu.be/IK4qST3KkQ8>.

COMMUNION

Christ our Lord invites to his table
all who love him,
who earnestly repent of their sin
and seek to live in peace with one another.

PRAYER OF APPROACH

Be present, risen Lord Jesus,
as you were with your disciples,
and make yourself known to us
in the breaking of the bread;
for you live and reign
with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

GREAT 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.

With all we are, we give you glory,

Trinity of love, the one and Holy God,

sovereign of all time and space.

We bless you for this wide, red land,

for its rugged beauty,

its changing seasons,

for its diverse peoples,

and for all that lives upon this fragile earth.

You have called us to be the Church in this place,

to give voice to every creature under heaven.

We rejoice with all that you have made,

as we join the company of heaven in their song.

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

heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed, the One who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

To Adam and Eve, children of dust,

you gave the world and its wonders,

but we misused your gift of freedom:

we reached out rebel hands to be like you.

We bless you for your mercy,
for you never cease to call our restless hearts
until they find their rest in you.

Again and again,
you raised up men and women to speak your word,
to guide, to challenge and convert.

At the last, Father,
you sent Jesus Christ,
child of your love, God with us.

Born as one of us,
he lived our life and died our death,
offering us, both now and forever,
eternal life with you.

Through him, in him and because of him,
we affirm the Church's faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

Narrative

On the night in which Jesus gave himself up to death,
he took bread, gave you thanks,
broke it and said:

This is my body which is given for you.

Do this for the remembrance of me.

When the meal was ended, he lifted the cup,
and again giving you thanks,
gave it to his friends and said:

This cup is the new covenant
sealed by my blood.

Do this, whenever you drink it,
for the remembrance of me.

And so, in remembrance of all you have done for us,
we take this bread and this cup,
and offer ourselves as a holy and living sacrifice,
made worthy by the perfect offering of Christ
our great high priest.

By your Word and Holy Spirit,
bless these gifts that we may truly share
Christ's body and blood,
and become, by grace, his body given
for the sake of the world.

For through your Spirit,
the whole earth makes its prayer
in sighs too deep for words,
longing for the day of freedom:
for in hope and by faith we were saved.

Accept our thanks and praise, good Father,
through your Son, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ,

with whom and in whom,
and by the Spirit who dwells in us,
we worship you in joyful song.

The minister takes the bread and breaks it in full view of the people, in silence or saying:

Christ is the bread of joy,
who shares food with sinners

The minister lifts the cup in full view of the people, in silence or saying:

Christ is the cup of life,
who revives the faint-hearted.

The minister holds out the bread and the cup to the people and says:

Let us receive what we are;
let us become what we receive.

The body of Christ.

LAMB OF GOD

Jesus, Lamb of God,

have mercy on us.

Jesus, bearer of our sins,

have mercy on us.

Jesus, redeemer of the world,

grant us peace.

Receive this holy sacrament
of the body and blood of Christ,

and feed on him in your hearts

by faith with thanksgiving.

DISTRIBUTION

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Blessed be God who calls us together.

Praise to God who makes us one people.

Blessed be God who has forgiven our sin.

Praise to God who gives hope and freedom.

Blessed be God whose Word is proclaimed.

Praise to God who is revealed as lover.

Blessed be God who alone has called us.

Therefore we offer all that we are

and all we shall become.

Accept, O God, our sacrifice of praise.

Accept our thanks for all that we are.

Our hands were empty, and you filled them.

HYMN 531 Sent forth by God's blessing

<https://youtu.be/JxdhAlhJl6Q>.

BENEDICTION

Put aside your quarrels with God, remember Holy Presence through time with, around, in, and through all that has life.

May the Holy One of Mystery surprise you with Their grace, sustain you with Their presence, and send you with Their love. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrtzej4Al2g>