

## EPIPHANY 7

20/2/22

### CAVES BEACH

#### CALL TO WORSHIP

Trust in God!

**Our trust is well founded.**

Trust in God and give thanks to the Gracious One!

**Our thanks is wholehearted, and full of joy.**

Trust in God in the company of the faithful!

**Our friends in Christ support and nurture us.**

Trust in God and serve God generously!

**Our aim is to reach the powerless, and work with justice.**

Trust in God!

**Our trust is well founded.**

#### Opening Prayer

God does amazing things for us.

**God: revealed - God: Creator is revealed as Creator and encourages us to create.**

God surprises us all the time.

**God is revealed in the downtrodden and suffering, and calls us to respond.**

God inspires us day by day.

**God is revealed when hope is found, and temptations are overcome.**

God has come to us in Jesus Christ.

**Jesus is revealed as the evil ones are confronted,  
and the faithful way is taken. Amen.**

**HYMN 560** All my hope on God is founded

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YaP7CNrqF\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YaP7CNrqF_k)

## **PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION**

*(Based on Psalm 37)*

We hold on to the promise that we are loved beyond measure and always held in God's care.

God urges us not to fret when we encounter evil,

or be envious of those who seem to gain wealth and acclaim by doing what's wrong.

They are mortal and will wither and die just as all living things do.

God calls us to trust, to do good

and enjoy the safe haven of God's company.

When we walk God's way,

God's light shines on us like the golden light of dawn.

When we come quietly before God and patiently await God's word

we are released from envy, from anger, and all that diminishes us,

and we receive gifts so much more valuable than those gotten through dishonest means -

peace and prosperity, joy and hope are ours.

For all this we are grateful.

Ok, God, let's talk about this loving your enemies thing. Is it one of those all-in commitments – a deal breaker? Or is there some wiggle room here? Because if there's not, there may be a lot of us who won't make the muster - this is complex, hard and heavy stuff. There are tons of books and papers chronicling how badly we behave towards people we feel animosity toward. Conflict after conflict litters the pages of history as neighbor sets against

neighbor, wars have been waged at the merest slight and we know it still happens - war goes on. And then, there are people who do terrible harm, to us, to our children, to our community and to our world. Are you talking about these people when you say love your enemies? Don't they deserve to pay for what they do? What is it that you are actually wanting us to do? To give into bullies and tyrants?

## **WORDS OF ASSURANCE**

Yes, it's complex, as complex as a cross on a Calvary hill. Loving our enemies is not about disregarding the past, or not holding people to account, forgetting wrongs or harm done, nor passively backing down from disputes or fighting injustices. It's about stepping into the heart of God to find healing and freedom. It's a journey. Be assured, we don't need to travel this tricky territory alone, the Spirit accompanies us and with patience, wisdom and compassion teaches us the steps we need to take.

## **READINGS**

- **1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50**

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?"<sup>36</sup> Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.<sup>37</sup> And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.<sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable.<sup>43</sup> It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.<sup>44</sup> It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.<sup>45</sup> Thus it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.<sup>46</sup> But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual.<sup>47</sup> The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.<sup>48</sup> As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven.<sup>49</sup> Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

<sup>50</sup> What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

- **Luke 6:27-38**

“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 29 If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. 30 Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

32 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. 35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

37 “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; 38 give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

**HYMN 607** Make me a channel of your peace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EikRxx5-8NE>

## **SERMON**

The passage from Luke’s Gospel today follows on from last week’s Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Plain. Contained in this passage is one of the most profound yet also most abused of Jesus sayings.

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.

This passage is easily manipulated by people abusing others. I can’t tell you how often it has been used against a woman seeking to escape a physically abusive marriage. Then there are children who are forced back into an abusive home.

If we look carefully at the passage in its context we can perhaps understand the fuller meaning of what Jesus was sharing with us. It was an accepted custom in Jesus’ time that an employer could strike a

servant/slave on the cheek for some failure. However if they struck the other cheek as well the hitter was guilty of assault.

To be clear, Jesus is not condoning violence, rather He is challenging people to be able to stand up for themselves in a non-violent and loving way. Rather than cowering from an abusive employer, the employee could be challenging the boss to face the consequences of bad behaviour.

This passage is in fact not focussed on violence but on active generosity. It starts out with how we cope with people who are hostile towards us. Losing a shirt in those days was better than suffering the pain of violence. However we need to listen carefully to the balance of the passage which focusses us on taking up a way of life which we learn about from the way that God treats us.

Let's start with looking at how God treats us and use this as the guideline for how we should behave. Jesus is straight to the point when he says that God is merciful and generous with everyone, no matter how they have behaved, and He does not take even consider whether people are grateful for what they receive.

It is so easy to float over these words without taking a full grasp of their implications. We so quickly revert to God being a person of justice where the good are rewarded and the bad suffer. It can be an excuse sometimes for us not to take things into our own hands. After all we have often heard the phrase 'vengeance is mine says the Lord.' We look to God to extract justice on our behalf.

In the same way we think that those who have not received justice will eventually be rewarded and those who oppress, exploit and abuse people will suffer in the end.

However this is not the way that Jesus explained it to His followers. His kind of justice is not what we are used to thinking about. Jesus told us that God is merciful, generous and kind to everyone. Jesus does not say "Love your enemies and do good to them because what you'd really like to do to them can be safely left to God." Instead he says, "Love your enemies and do good to them because that's the way God treats enemies. God loves and does good to those who hate and curse and abuse God."

Hold on!

This is not what we want to hear when we are wanting God to sort out that horrible person we think deserves eternal suffering in the fires of hell. At the

same time this could also be very good news as we need to have a very close look at ourselves so that we can equally see our ugly side.

If God was going to treat us as we should be treated, by our own admission, we should be shaking in our boots and crying for mercy. It is here that we can see God's generous mercy when we haven't even shown any mercy to others.

As we follow God we need to remember that God doesn't reciprocate against the world's aggression with equal violence. In Christ's suffering we see Him call out at that last bitter moment "Father forgive them because they don't know what they are doing."

It is the same Christ who offers His broken body back to those who broke Him as a source of wholeness through healing. When we offer our praise and thanksgiving we need to recognise the underserved generous love and mercy that is already there for us.

It is now that we hear the words to: "Go and do likewise." It is something that we need to take home with us every week after worship. It is in this context that we look at Jesus saying that we need to love our enemies and not turn on them with vengeance.

This does not mean that we passively accept abuse and violence, especially against the vulnerable. We are charged with using love and mercy instead of using violence against violence. As Christians, when we are challenged to 'turn the other cheek' we are not there as a frightened child who has no support. We are there as followers of a God who gives us the strength to unmask hostility and who refuses to go down to the same level as the abuser. As we do this we can make the perpetrator look at themselves and have to back down apologising.

It is not the role of a Christian to suggest that a helpless victim should turn the other cheek. We are called to step in and put ourselves in the firing line with them. We are the other cheek in this situation. This is not an individual call but a challenge to all of us as a community.

As a Christian community we are challenged to live out Christ's message to us. We need to unmask evil wherever it is taking place. We need to allow the perpetrators of physical, mental and sexual violence to be challenged and we are the 'other cheek' in this process. We do not need to stoop down to their level, rather we need to allow this behaviour to be exposed and address openly.

As the abuser is exposed we increase the likelihood that the perpetrator can seek help and genuinely look to repent. When this happens and these actions are exposed it reduces the chances of it happening to others.

It sits as an example of the overwhelming power of God's undeserved love and mercy. We have all experienced this love and mercy, why stop others from the same experience by failing to be the 'other cheek?'

**HYMN 635** Forgive our sins as we forgive

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqG\\_iQwqEOE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqG_iQwqEOE)

## **PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING**

We let these gifts go where the Spirit sends them, whether they fall on the kind or the wicked, the grateful and ungrateful, let them be agents of goodness and love. Amen.

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Trusting God

Firstly, greetings from Keith, George and Doreen and their families -they enjoy hearing news about their friends at caves beach church!

Jeff and I have been reading the first books of the old Testament of the Bible— We have found the simplicity and language delightful especially as we learned about Abraham -the patriarch (father of the family) of the Jews, Christians and Muslims Genesis chapter 13 verses 14 and 15 The Lord said to Abraham – look all around you to the North - South -East and West – all this land that you see I will give to you and your descendants forever – I will make your descendants as many as the dust of the earth. Get up – walk through the land.

But it did not happen straight away – Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah 90 years old before their first baby, Isaac, was born and they had experienced many life threatening experiences before settling in Canaan.....

There is a story of a man who found a cocoon of an emperor gum moth and waited for the moth to emerge through a tiny hole in one end of the cocoon – the struggle continued for hours – finally the man intervened and cut restraining threads The moth emerged with a large swollen body but shrivelled wings – and it remained that way The constricting threads and the struggle necessary to pass through the tiny opening had been God's

method of forcing fluids from the body into the wings to enable the wings to develop for flight.

Often God lets us struggle rather than stepping in like a big brother to do our fighting for us – as we struggle, changes occur in us, which could not have happened otherwise – like the moth -the fluids expand our wings and in time we can fly.

Face your struggles courageously and patiently – trust God – talk with God – God never gives up on you.

Look back on your life – remember that Abraham and Sarah had their struggles & numerous problems throughout their lives ..... But these only strengthened their “life wings” because God was there all the time

*Let us pray*

Lord there are many from our church who are elderly and unable to make the effort involved in being present at our church service this morning – please be with them.

There are those who are ill, in pain, or recovering from operations or procedures – some are with us – some are not – we pray for healing, comfort and improving strength as they struggle for normality once again.

We pray for those who are involved in their care – whether it be in a hospital or at home with doctors, nurses, health providers, my aged care groups, family members, friends and neighbours (let us mention these people to God now in our quiet prayers together)

Lord we are thankful

We are thankful for the fact that we are able to worship you together freely despite the existence of the pandemic of COVID.

We thank you for where we live -in our coastal area of Caves Beach and Swansea – for the beaches and lake – the general beauty of the area with an abundance of walkways, parks and bushland.

We thank you for the variety of birdlife and birdsong, little lizards and butterflies – the attractive plants and flowers all in our gardens.

We thank you for the abundance and variety of foods in our supermarkets and shops and we pray for the farmers, truck drivers and industries involved.

We thank you for education - we pray for our preschools, schools, colleges and universities – for both the students and their teachers and lecturers that they will be given wisdom and safety.

We thank you for our leaders in Australia – leaders in churches, in councils, in our states and in our Commonwealth– we pray that they will be wise in their decisions and able to set a good example.

May our lives be strengthened by all our experiences so we may serve you effectively and well.

Let us join in the Lord's prayer together

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 154** Great is your faithfulness

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

## **BENEDICTION**

Love your enemies, be kind to those who appear unworthy of your kindness. It's complex, but as we lean into the compassion of God, we can find our way.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzDdN-5gmuU>