

EPIPHANY 6

13/2/22

CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

We come before you, our Sustainer and our Source.

Praise be to you, O God. You hold us and the world in your hands.

We worship you, our hope throughout the years and generations.

Praise be to you, O God. You are eternally to be trusted.

We adore you, O God: Your Way is revealed by the prophets: revealing God's way and made clear in Jesus.

Praise be to you, O God. Your justice never fails, your compassion goes beyond our understanding.

Opening Prayer

O God: Creator, great Creator,

**Show us how to thank you
for the sustaining power of your creation.**

O God: Teacher, great Teacher,

**Give us the insight and grace to respond to your
challenging Word.**

O God: presence of, compassionate One,

**Enable us to sense your caring presence in the testing
times and to feel secure.**

O God, eternal Hope,

**Grant us the wisdom to believe that your love is for us in
life, and beyond life. Amen.**

HYMN 560 All my hope on God is founded

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3LCGh02Vew&t=14s>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

We look around us God and see miracles and blessings.

We see the earth in all its beauty,

the glory of cloudy days and starry nights,

trees so tall their canopy is out of sight,

microorganisms and minute plants that make a forest in the crevice of a rock.

There are creatures with feathers and armour, and scales and fur,

that sing a multitude of songs and play in every corner of the world.

We see people with inexhaustible potential

who invent and create and calculate and care.

We feel our interconnectedness with the land and the water,

with all things that breath and all things that are part of the cycle that sustains and nourishes us.

We know we are blessed.

We give thanks for each miracle and mystery we encounter.

We seem to be living in a time when there are big questions about who and what we can trust. When sorting through these questions we are often influenced by whatever crowd we find ourselves in, what crowd we follow.

When we choose an intolerant, narrow-minded crowd,

when we choose a fickle, changeable crowd,

when we choose a suspicious, fear mongering crowd,

when we choose a callous, uncaring crowd,

come spirit,

when we choose self-centered, thoughtless crowd -

give us a shake and bring us to our senses,
direct us toward a better gathering of people.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Based on Psalm 1

Happiness and contentment come to us when we don't follow the advice of those who ridicule, scoff and deceive;

it comes to us when we delight in the decrees of God, when we meditate on God's goodness day and night.

We become like trees planted by streams of water, prospering, and yielding fruit in season,

the malicious will not be our judge, their words will not hold sway, they are like chaff that the wind drives away.

God watches over us. In God's care we are safe and secure.

READINGS

- **Jeremiah 17:5-10**

Thus says the Lord:

Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals

and make mere flesh their strength,

whose hearts turn away from the Lord.

6 They shall be like a shrub in the desert,

and shall not see when relief comes.

They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.

7 Blessed are those who trust in the Lord,

whose trust is the Lord.

8 They shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.

It shall not fear when heat comes,
and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious,
and it does not cease to bear fruit.

9 The heart is devious above all else;
it is perverse—
who can understand it?

10 I the Lord test the mind
and search the heart,
to give to all according to their ways,
according to the fruit of their doings.

- **Luke 6:17-26**

He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. 18 They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. 19 And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them. 20 Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

21 “Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

“Blessed are you who weep now,

for you will laugh.

22 “Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. 23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

24 “But woe to you who are rich,

for you have received your consolation.

25 “Woe to you who are full now,

for you will be hungry.

“Woe to you who are laughing now,

for you will mourn and weep.

26 “Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

SERMON

This week we will have a shorter time for the service as we be completing the National Church Life Survey forms after the service.

How many of you have heard of the Sermon on the Mount?

How about the Sermon on the Plain?

The Sermon on the Mount it a very well know passage from Matthew’s Gospel. The parallel in Luke’s Gospel is the ‘Sermon of the Plain.’ Part of that passage from Luke is what we have today in our Gospel reading. Along with this we have a statement from Jeremiah which might simply be described as his version of blessings and curses.

Both Matthew and Luke have a series of statements which are known as Beatitudes. Matthew has nine statements in his version. Luke’s version of the Beatitudes is shorter and very much more to the point. These statements from Luke can seem shocking as they seem to attach difficult outcomes to things which we aspire to and like:

- Being financially secure,
- being well fed,

- feeling happy, and
- being well liked by those around us.

I doubt that Jesus would suggest that the children of our area should grow up malnourished, living in poverty, suffering with grief and not liked by other people. This is just the opposite of what Jesus taught us. Jesus was in fact trying to get rid of those systems which produce winners and losers.

When Jesus first shared His teachings with the audience on the flat land, or plain, His words shook the traditional religious and social systems. The traditional belief was that those who were prosperous deserved it because they had blessings from God.

This success mentality is still preached in some churches today. A few years ago there was a very wealthy prosperity preacher in Melbourne who had allegations made against him for sexually abusing some members of his congregation. All the publicity around him focused on his sexual impropriety, nothing was said about the millions that he has ripped off from his congregation to support a wanton lifestyle while many in his congregation struggled to get enough to eat in order to pay their tithes to him.

We live in a culture where the trappings of success are still seen as rewards from God. These words in Jesus' time were a real jolt to the people listening. 'Blessed are the poor and woe to the rich' was bewildering to His audience. It was a bit like me suggesting that Donald Trump and a drug lord like Tony Mokbel were models for us to follow. Not that I would ever suggest that.

We can so easily confuse God's expectations of us with the social construct that society promotes regularly on TV. We can tend to blame those who don't measure up and blame them for their 'failure.' If they can't conform to our social norms then that is why they are failures, misfits and just plain the wrong people.

As they tend to fall outside of the normal models of what is socially acceptable then we tend to side-line them and not really care about what happens to them. We can even think of blaming them when things are going wrong.

Included in the mix with drug dependant people and people with mental illness we also tend to lump in asylum seekers and refugees. People from different cultures are targeted when they don't conform to our social norms.

We tend to think that they are suffering because they do not fit our social rules.

This can even extend to looking down on people in nursing homes. I heard the other day that we have politicians who don't want to adequately resource those people's care because it costs too much. I was shocked to hear that people in nursing homes were no longer able to have vitamin supplements.

So here we have referred to people with mental illness, frail older people and refugees and I am sure that we could identify others as well, like our First Nation people. Our society all too often tends to look at them like some second class of humanity. They don't have a place in our comfortable society.

It is here that Jesus' message cuts into our comfortable existence deeply. Here is where Jesus' challenge hits home. Jesus is not an either/or person. Jesus is not trying to reverse our lives by sending the well fed and successful people into a place of shame and humiliation. He doesn't curse the rich. Jesus just says 'woe to the rich.' This echoes with His teachings in other places like when He refers to a fully loaded camel passing through a narrow fortress gate or the rich young man who wanted to join Jesus while hanging on to all the benefits of his privileged life.

This clear challenge is there for everyone but it is too often that only the dispossessed who see the truth. Privilege and ignorance seems to isolate so many of us from recognising the harsh realities of ignoring those in need. There seems to be no real incentive to move to a culture where there is no recognition of our 'special' status as 'good Christians.'

We tend to hold on to the idea that God will send bad people to hell and that we will be recognised as good respectable people. Into this the words of Jesus break through as He describes how the prostitutes and other sinners can get into heaven more easily than the rich and powerful.

So many of us live with the concern that we might easily end up falling through society's cracks and end up needing mental health care or being confined to a nursing home. Jesus brings us to our senses with the simple challenge to see ourselves as one with those who suffer, not the rich and powerful. We all come before God as one. There are no winners or losers, we share the same feast table as Jesus did with His disciples in the end.

So let's look briefly at Jeremiah. His version of blessings and curses is very simple when he basically says trust in God and you will be blessed. When you ignore God and try and do things by yourself then life will dry up like a

shrub in the desert. His challenge very simple as he encourages people to trust in God even when everything else seems to be failing.

One of the things which comes out for me after the years that I was battling cancer was that God is a constant, even when all else seems to fail. People might seem to desert you and you seem to be lost in some impersonal medical system but God keeps breaking through.

Before I had cancer I kept striving harder and harder to achieve what I thought were God's aims in my life. When I became sick I was forced to recognise that politics and climate change and church rules are not the answer to God's simple message in things like Jesus' Sermon on the Plain. Nothing I can do will change the political system or the work needed to halt climate change without having God next to me.

But even now I'm still not finding it easy to let go of my belief in myself as someone who could make a difference, who could achieve something, who could help turn things around. I'm not finding it easy to hear Jesus saying blessed are the unsuccessful; blessed are the despairing; blessed are those whose efforts are dismissed and derided and ultimately futile. That's not the blessing I was seeking.

Jesus knew that even he couldn't always turn things around. He said: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem. How often have I longed to gather you in my arms like a hen gathering her chicks, but you refused, and now you are doomed."

That's not a place I wanted to stand or a cry of despair I wanted to utter either as I strove harder and harder. I wanted to be effective, but actually Jesus has only called me to be faithful, faithful even if it brings only tears.

Blessed are those who can give up trusting in their own strength, their own effectiveness, their own importance. Blessed are they who can surrender all that and leave it to God.

Blessed!

Blessed are they who know that real life is not found in their own effectiveness or success, but in the life of God given to us.

HYMN 629 When I needed a neighbour

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fExR7eOhJO0&t=17s>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

Let your blessing flow through these gifts that they might find the places that are in need of the transformation each gift can bring.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, help me stand,

I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.

Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light.

Take my hand, Precious Lord, lead me home.

When my way grows drear, precious Lord linger near

When my life is almost gone.

Hear my cry hear my call, hold my hand lest I fall.

Take my hand, Precious Lord, lead me home.

Lord, there are times when we try so desperately to cope with the pressures that are on us . We try in our own strength when we should be asking you to help us but our ego gets in the way. And in desperation we cry out to you. If only we remembered that as people of faith, you are feeling the pain with us and you have been there all along. Forgive us for doubting your presence.

Lord, there is unrest in our parliaments, the Federal as well as the State governments. Guide our leaders to trust you and not their own party attitudes, so that our country can be at peace with one another.

Lord, there are also so many groups in our country who seem bent on disrupting the safe transition out of this pandemic which often consumes all our thoughts and activities. Guide the specialist researchers and professors to know how best to rid our world of this insidious threat, this virus. It is dividing families and friends, it is disrupting every walk of life. Help your world Lord.

We also pray for the tension that exists between Russia and Ukraine. Please bring sense to those who seem to want to force conflict. Calm the nations down. We have enough problems with this virus without another world war.

At home we pray for our church family who are unwell or getting to the point where they cannot attend worship now, bless them Lord, bring

healing to those who are ill and help them to keep looking to you as you are their strength in times of trouble.

Finally Lord, we pray for ourselves. May we always look to you as our guide, our strength our helper in times of trouble.

We pray this prayer in the name of Jesus whom taught us to 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 717 Give thanks with a grateful heart

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

BENEDICTION

Blessed are you,

Let these words echo within you and comfort you.

Let these words echo through you and inspire you,

Let these words echo out into the world and transform us all.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzDdN-5gmuU&t=26s>