

EASTER 4

25/4/21

CAVES BEACH

ANZAC SEGMENT

ANZAC Day is of special significance to the people of both Australia and New Zealand. We commemorate the day on which our combined forces first went into battle together. It was at a place called Gallipoli in Turkey during World War 1. For us it is a time, not to glorify war, but to solemnly commemorate everything that our brave armed forces have striven for ever since that fateful day in 1914.

Today I would like to invite all of you to join with me in a short time of commemoration.

LET US PRAY

Today, we recall those who,

In the tragedy of war gave their lives for the people of Australia and New Zealand

and those who died for the freedom of all people.

We remember those who fell on the ridges of Gallipoli;

those who rest in the cemeteries of the great wars;

those who rest in the haze of deserts and jungle;

those who rest in the depths of the seas.

We remember those who have fallen in the defence of peace,

on land, in the air and on the seas.

We remember each man, woman and child who has died

so that the light of freedom, justice and humanity may continue to shine.

Today as we remember we ask God that our praise may be worthy of their sacrifice.

Strengthen us now,
in these times of uncertainty and confusion.

Amen

THE ODE

They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn;
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

We will remember them.

LAST POST

SILENCE

ROUSE

Lest we forget!

We will remember them.

HYMN 28 God is our strength and refuge

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SW5yAqx810>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

A reflection on Psalm 23

In this place where shadows inhibit and dull my view,

I will fear nothing,

For this is the place where the Creator of the Universe
comes and sits with me.

I lie in lush grasslands,
gazing up at an ocean of starlight,

galaxies and meteors,
blazing pathways into the infinite
as they sprint across the expansive sky,
and I know I am safe
in this journey between life and death,
for I am in the protectorate of the shepherd
who steps into the path of danger,
who finds me good, nourishing things to eat,
and restores me to wholeness.

Goodness and mercy
are my constant companions
as the living God delivers me home.

Truly whatever happens,
I will not let fear dictate my way,
God is with me and always will be.

God,
the images of you that we fill our minds and hearts with
probably say more about us than what they say about you,
Some of us want you mild and smilingly meek,
Some of us want you armed and battle-ready,
Some of us want a distant cloud-dwelling God
unconcerned with the welfare of your people,
who has no say with what happens below,
Some long for a cop with a black and white view

who looks to strike down those who do wrong,
Some look for you in creation, some look for you in the faces on the street.
Forgive us our limited insights that preference our own needs
above doing the work needed to open ourselves up
to the many ways in which you reveal yourself to us.
Remind us that you have given us a vision of who you are in the person of
Christ – the one who stood with the poor,
ate with the excluded,
called the religious to account
and longed for justice and to gather all people
into the warm embrace of strong, steadfast loving kindness.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

God's nature is to be in loving relationship with us and all of creation, all the ways we see God reveal Godself to us are a reason for joy and the reassurance that God does not withhold mercy and grace from us, we are held and loved eternally.

READINGS

- **1 John 3:16-24**

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 17 How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

18 Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. 19 And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him 20 whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21 Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; 22 and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

23 And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. 24 All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

- **JOHN 10:11-18**

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.¹² The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.¹³ The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep.¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.¹⁶ I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again.¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

HYMN 10 The Lord's my shepherd

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

SERMON

Today is a day of remembrance of the price paid for our freedom. It is perhaps the right time to look at how we treat one another. The 23rd Psalm is the Psalm set for today and it is perhaps forever linked with comfort at a time of death.

In a world of conflict on so many fronts we can all too often come across people criticising one another for not really being a 'proper' Christian. This is especially the case when there are theological disagreements. The proponents on each side seem only too ready to polarise the situation as they accuse the other side of not holding to the 'truth' as they see it. For them the 'truth' is the only litmus test of a real Christian. All too often this approach has also led to conflict and wars.

In this First Letter of John we hear: “This is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.”

So where does this take us? “Believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another?”

There is nothing here about how we read and approach the Bible. That is not required.

There is nothing detailing how we have to experience a particular spiritual experience to be ‘real’ believers. That is not required.

There is nothing here about what our politics should be or what our views should be on the environment, sexuality and social justice. That is not required.

There are just two simple statements.

- Believe in the name of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, &
- Love one another.

These are not simplistic statements so we need to be able to flesh them out to better understand them. To help in this journey of discovery we should also consider what Jesus told us. At another time Jesus said that the two most important things are to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and to love your neighbour as yourself. I don’t see a lot of difference here, do you?

This raises the issue of whether we are genuinely loving God or are we just looking at some idealistic image of God that we have created in our mind?

When we hear John in the Epistle talking about believing in the name of Jesus what is he looking to say?

Is the ‘name of Jesus’ a pointer to who God really is?

Does the God that we seek to love with all our heart, soul, mind and strength really look just like Jesus?

As Christians who accept the Trinity we see Jesus as part of God.

It can be very simple to love God in theory while we are in some way thinking of a distant concept that we can attach to abstractly. However when God starts to be active in our world do we really still love God and what God seeks to do in our world or do these actions make us uncomfortable?

Is our love deep enough to help us overcome our discomfort?

Looking back we can see that there were a lot of people who said that they loved God – in their heart, soul and mind – but when Jesus actions challenged them they had no time for God's Son. If we really believe that Jesus is part of a God which is showing us how to behave and what God wants done, what is our response?

Is it all too hard?

In the reading from John's Gospel we heard Jesus say that he is the 'good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep.' He builds this picture by making a comparison with the images of people who are just hired hands.

The hired hands don't really care about the sheep if it comes to a time of danger. They just want to keep an eye on the livestock. When danger in the form of a hungry wolf comes along the hired hands soon get out of the way so that they are not hurt.

Looking at this clearly we can see that Jesus is certainly passing on a message to us about the differing styles of leadership in our world. When there is actual physical danger to be confronted, how many world leaders would be on the front line?

There are plenty of leaders who will allow others to confront the dangers with the losses put down to collateral damage, other people are expendable. This is just like the sheep abandoned by the hired hands. Jesus is real and involved, Jesus doesn't back away.

If some unruly mob starts to call out for a victim how many leaders will throw a suitable victim to the mob in order to keep themselves safe. The image I have is of throwing some random sheep over fence to keep the baying wolves away. That is not God's way.

There is more here than just worldly leadership styles. Jesus is calling on us to develop a better understanding of God. An understanding that is concrete and relatable. God is not remote and immune from the tragedies that occur in our world. God is deeply impacted by what happens to His sheep.

Equally God does not demand some blood sacrifice when His will is ignored and His honour challenged. It is not a matter of saying to us to sacrifice some unblemished lamb or humanity will suffer. God does not call for blood sacrifices.

God is the 'good shepherd,' the 'true shepherd,' who willingly lays down His life to stop the wolf getting to the sheep. It is the same God who goes out in

search for just one lost lamb. When the persistent challenges of human hostility and conflicts and war keep arising Jesus throws Himself before the conflict so that His death can show up the failed systems which seek to dominate based only on the idea of hatred and distrust.

Let us hear this again: “No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

We then turn to the commandment in John’s Epistle that we should believe in the name of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, so that we can see God in action through him. We need to respond with an equally open and strong and unfailing love towards God. This must include our heart, soul and mind being fully involved.

But this is only part of the picture. We need to flesh out the depth of what is written in John’s Epistle, the first reading we had this morning. John fleshes out the love that God has for us and for us to aspire to in our own lives. “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.”

We need to flesh out the image of the good shepherd who willingly lays down His life for His sheep. This is in fact about us. We all have to take responsibility for caring for each other. If we reflect we can see that both Jesus and John use the same wording ‘love one another.’

However we must always keep our focus on a love that is based on the real image of Jesus, not just some illusion. If we lose focus we could end up once again loving the image and not the person who is in front of us needing our help.

To let us fully reflect on such images let me offer this for us to think about.

It is all too easy to extend our fond wishes to a group of unidentified asylum seekers in a detention centre on the other side of the country as their plight will never impact on our daily lives. They will never interrupt or disagree with me and my opinions or even misconstrue my words and expectations of them.

It would be very different if I had to deal with their daily lives filled with human disfunctions and the results of the trauma which drove them here. While they remain distant images I can love them without any pain and anguish.

Looking around the room today and considering the community in which we live we start to have a lot more real struggles with loving others. I am sure

that each of us can think of someone who we struggle to love and respect. Loving one another in reality is an almost impossible challenge.

This is one of the reasons why we gather as a community. It is because of our differences. We are not necessarily a natural grouping of people considering all of our different foibles and characteristics. At best we are probably a motley crew who are brought together awkwardly by just one common factor. We are all called into community in Christ.

Over the years there have probably been many moments where frictions have arisen, our tempers brought almost to the surface and we have been tempted to start blaming others for the difficulties, just like the hired hands in Jesus' advice from John's Gospel.

There is that niggling feeling that if we just threw that one difficult person over the fence to satisfy the wolves we would all be so much better off. But, we are followers of the Good Shepherd who says to us and I quote: "For we know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another."

There is the simple fact that we are called to love a God who is not just some simplistic vision. God is real and active in our world. God challenges us and our complacency. We are challenged to love God, warts and all. God can be difficult to love.

God is the constant challenge which draws us into a real and dynamic faith. This faith is not just smooth sailing it involves us sharing the full reality of God in our love of all our neighbours.

HYMN 154 Great is your faithfulness

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

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

Guide these gifts as they make their way into the world, may they bring hope and the possibility of a better way forward wherever they land.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

We take to heart the thought that you are the Good Shepherd,
that you lead us to places of goodness and mercy.

When we find ourselves in places where souls are hungry and hearts are broken,

give us the skill to nourish and restore.

When we are in places where kindness is lacking and mercy is in short supply,

give us the courage to speak words of peace.

When we find places in which hope has died

and oppressive forces make a life a misery,

may we find a way to reignite faith in your restorative love.

When we are fearful and alone,

reassure us that you are by our side.

When we find ourselves in lush, soulful places of beauty,

give us the words to fully express our gratitude.

We are your people, we look to you.

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 231 At the name of Jesus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4d4UXSJXig>

BENEDICTION

One thing we know truly about God, is that God remains by our side throughout our lives, ready to comfort and provide all we need for an abundant life. We leave this place with this reassurance ringing in our ears and with our hearts and souls ready to be God's people in the world.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJ6RaKX4 I4>