

PENTECOSY 10
28/7/24
CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

As we sit within this community of faith, so we are fed.

Praise and prayer feed our minds and spirits.

We are wonderfully fed.

The teachings of Jesus bring us to the faithful way.

We are graciously fed.

The cross of Jesus calls us to the selfless, practical way.

We are gloriously fed.

**The rising of Jesus from death fills us with a timeless,
unbounded hope.**

Opening Prayer

God, you give us food and drink for each new day.

You are worthy of our praise!

God, you give us friends for the testing paths of life.

You are worthy of our worship!

God, you give us the saints as models of Christian life.

You are worthy of our trust!

God, you give us Jesus Christ to strengthen us when we take on the powers and oppressors.

You are worthy of our love!

Great Eternal Giver, we praise you! Amen.

HYMN 411 Filled with the Spirit's power

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= QG-8ycM2yc>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Loving and merciful God,

great is your wisdom and vast is your compassion.

Your providential care sustains our souls in every situation.

Remind us again that through Christ we are your beloved children.

Remind us that we can trust your Word

and find our needs met through your grace.

As we come to worship you, may our thoughts and words bring you honour and glory.

Holy God,
Help us to be honest before you in our confession. (*Silent prayer*)

Though you have held us in love from the moment of our birth,
we confess that there are times when we close you out,
times when we trust in our own capacity and strength
rather than seeking your guidance and following your ways.
Forgive us for only turning to you when we have run out of our own
resources,
when our resilience wanes and we fear for our future.

Loving God,
we acknowledge that there are times when we doubt your providential care,
times when we lose sight of your infinite goodness
and hoard what we own rather than sharing what we have with others.
So often, we lose sight of your kindness and cling to what we have in
greed.
Help us to trust your sacred presence in all things
and be content in your covenantal promises.
Search us, O God, and place within us a humble spirit that our whole being
might be alive with the joy of your goodness.
In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

God's forgiveness is offered to all.
The promise of Christ is that we can live freely
and forgiven through his saving grace.
So, I declare to you – our sins are forgiven.
Thanks be to God.

READINGS

- **Ephesians 3:14–21**

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. 16 I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit 17 and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. 18 I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth 19 and to know the love of

Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

- **John 6:1–21**

6 After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. 2 A large crowd kept following him because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. 3 Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. 4 Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. 5 When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?” 6 He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. 7 Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.” 8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, 9 “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” 10 Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was a great deal of grass in the place, so they sat down, about five thousand in all. 11 Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. 12 When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” 13 So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. 14 When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.”

15 When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself. 16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, 17 got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. 18 The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. 19 When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. 20 But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” 21 Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

HYMN 560 All my hope on God is founded

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3LCGh02Vew&t=32s>

SERMON

After last week's thoughts on how we look at Compassion I thought that we might move on to Gratitude this week. I am sure that we have all heard many sermons on the feeding of the 5,000 and the boat caught in the storm.

We often tend to express gratitude for things only when we feel it needs to be done, especially when we think that someone has done us a special favour. In those situations how often are we only really doing it to satisfy the other person rather than it being a genuine expression of our feelings. I should be clear here that I am not suggesting that we should take a more selfish approach and stop acknowledging others.

This is where the reading from Ephesians comes in. It suggests that genuine gratitude is one of the keys to becoming a loving community. Let us delve into the approach that Paul is teaching us.

This passage from Paul's letter to the faithful in Ephesus is very much an explosion of gratitude. When Paul thinks about what God has done he goes down on his knees, overwhelmed with gratitude. From his gratitude comes both his prayers and his thanksgiving praise and his inner strength. Among the prayers Paul offers are those expressing thankfulness for the faithful in Ephesus.

When we look at the prayers that Paul is offering we can see that he is praying to the God who conceived us. Through God we were created to find both life and our true identity. Here is the reason for gratitude from the start, this is the ultimate answer to the quest that every human being embarks on.

There are questions like;

Who am I?

What is authentic life?

They are not only profound but at the same time central to our perspective of life in this world.

How many of the world's tormented and dysfunctional people have fallen into their chaotic state because of their inability to find answers to those questions. This is not necessarily the fault of the seeker but it is too often the result of having their outlook on life being distorted or even destroyed by the abusive and unthinking actions of others.

How often do we hear:

“I'm not really sure who I am. I feel like life just happens around me without ever being able to get a sense of what I'm on about, of what makes it meaningful and worthwhile for me.”

Paul also knew of those desperate voices. His response was to offer those people an understanding of the gratitude that he had for what God has done. Paul prays that God's Spirit may get into all of us and therefore give us a stronger feeling of our inner soul being supported by God.

It doesn't matter how strong a person may appear to be ... if they have no understanding of who they are and what life is about they will lack that inner strength to get through the trials of life. They might be as strong as Mr Universe however with the heart of a soufflé they will in fact be a weak and sad and pathetic person.

If we were to read the Old Testament passage set for today we would find out about the infidelity of David who once seemed to be the hero of the nation. But power and wealth and adulation had so weakened him inside that there's no integrity left. He was out of control.

A bit of simple voyeurism is soon adultery and finally murder, because he no longer has a clear grasp on who he is and what his life is about. He became a pathetic and dangerous figure. A long way from the image of Jesus who sees the crowd adoring him and wanting him to be their great leader, and He knows Himself well enough to turn His back and walk away.

Paul prays that the Holy Spirit will put a steely resolve into every fibre of the soul of Christ's followers. Paul prays that we can remain solidly connected and that our souls' roots will sink deep into the love coming through Christ Jesus. If you're anything like me, you'd love to hear phrases like that used every time someone described you.

Then there is an interesting shift in Paul's prayer. He doesn't pray that we'll be able to look inside ourselves and get in touch with ourselves in new ways so that we can discover this strength. Instead he prays that we might begin to comprehend who God is and what God has done for us. Then he prays for us also to be overwhelmed with gratitude the same as Paul has experienced.

I don't think that this is a change of subject. It seems to me that Paul is saying that we need to get our minds around who God is and what God is doing in us, and for us, and because of that we can discover the truth about ourselves. Paul is looping back to his opening observation, that we find our life and our identity in God.

If we want to get in touch with our true identity, we need to begin to see ourselves through the eyes of God. We need to hear the name God has given to each of us. In this respect naming is allowing us to fully connect with God.

We need to get a sense of just how in love with you God actually is. Most of us have had some experience of how much your sense of self is strengthened by the experience of being loved and valued by someone else.

If you want to discover who we are in all God's true beauty and integrity, so that every fibre of our being becomes as strong as steel, we will need to fully experience what it is to be deeply, madly, passionately, exuberantly loved by God.

However there is a bit of a conundrum here. It is in expressing our gratitude to God that we begin to catch the vision of God's love for us, but we need to have sense of that love in order to have any gratitude to express.

Part of the answer is just that it's a cyclic thing. In much the same as we experience it in our human relationships, the more appreciation we show for the love we receive, the more we seem to receive. Love and appreciation feed one another. We experience it that way with God, but it's not quite the same because God's love is always far greater than we have been able to experience.

There is another dimension to this with God, and it is quite important in understanding why it is we gather here each Sunday and join with one another in prayers as well. We gather to join our voices with the voices of others. And by doing that we don't just offer a kind of lowest-common-denominator prayer but a prayer that can authentically voice something all of us can fully own.

We commit ourselves to joining our voices with prayers that express things beyond what we can fully comprehend and way beyond anything we have fully experienced. We join our prayers to prayers that capture something of the gathered vision and wisdom and ecstatic praise of God's people of every place and time.

When we are gathered together this is the prayer of the church, and we join with it, not because we can authentically pray all of it as our own individual prayer, but because we want to grow into it. As individuals we join with the collective voice of so many others, so that the collective wisdom and experience might become authentically our own.

We don't have to fully understand every prayer and every action in corporate prayers. Comprehensive understanding is not a prerequisite for participation. Quite the opposite. Participation is the only way we will ever understand. Our corporate prayer is like a sacred song and dance which is filled with gratitude and praise and wonder at the glory of God. This is because of God's astonishing love for each and every one of us, including all of creation.

It is by participating in that sacred song and dance that we will begin to own that gratitude and wonder for ourselves, and it is within that that we will discover who we are and all that our life is meant to be. And we will know, deep in every fibre of your being, that all the glory belongs to God, both now and for ever.

HYMN 155 O lord my God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=USM71JqV30o>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

All we have and all we are belong to our God.

Let us come with open and generous hearts

to share what we have for the sake of Christ's mission in the world.
God of love and mercy,
we bring what we have,
that your love may be extended to all who have need.
May these gifts be a token of our love for you and others. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Merriwa is a rural centre with an active community of faith.

Prayer: As a congregation we are praying for outreach into our community, the continuation of scripture in schools, and Godly, bible-based preaching in our services. Amen.

Let us pray for the world in which we live...
Creator of all that is, we pray for the created order.
We pray that the threat of climate change may be averted
by the determination of nations and individuals
willing to change their ways and care more diligently for nature.
Help us to be willing advocates for change. *(Silent prayer)*

Almighty God, we long for peace.
We detest the horrors of war that destroy cities,
murders innocent ones and creates havoc.
In truth, peace can be possible only by changing the hearts of those in
power from hatred and fear to love and understanding.
By your Spirit's presence and the voice of the people bring peace, we
pray. *(Silent prayer)*

God of compassion, we pray for one another
and all who cry out in anguish today.
May your merciful touch bring healing in body, mind, and spirit so that
those in need may know that they are held in your eternal grace.
(Silent prayer)
Receive our prayers, offered in the name of Christ. Amen.

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 147 To God be the glory

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-15v9iworAU>

BENEDICTION

God invites us into mission with Christ:
to feed those who are hungry, to seek the lost,
to restore that which is broken,
and to declare that God loves all people.

Let us go,
empowered by the Spirit,
filled with the knowledge that restoration and reconciliation are always
possible.

Let us go to declare the justice and truth of Christ,
sustained by the eternal love and grace of God. Amen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH_HdkWs74