

**EPIPHANY 5**  
**4/2/24**  
**CAVES BEACH**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

God cares beyond our imagining;  
God has staying power that never fades;  
God gives power to the weak and strengthens the powerless.

**Nothing is beyond those who trust God.**  
**Weakness and exhaustion are facts of life;**  
**the young and fit eventually tire.**

But those who trust in God will renew their strength.

**Like an eagle rising in the sky, like a marathon runner at peak performance, nothing will stand in their way. Tiredness and weakness are not an option!**

**Opening Prayer**

Our times are shadowed by terror, violence, and greed.

**Dawning Light, we praise you!**

Our church is shadowed by uncertainty, fear, and apathy.

**Dawning Light, we praise you!**

Our lives are threatened by insecurity, selfishness, and change.

**Dawning Light, we praise you!**

Living God, Dawning Light, for our time, our church, and ourselves,  
**for the gift of Jesus, reflecting your light, we praise you. Amen.**

**HYMN 236** Jesus' hands were kind hands

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7oAg1wZ3Rc&list=RDO7oAg1wZ3Rc&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7oAg1wZ3Rc&list=RDO7oAg1wZ3Rc&start_radio=1)

**PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION**

God of abundance, God of great outrageous love,  
we sing your praises – nothing is more fitting or appropriate.

For you are the great rebuilder.

You gather the scattered and bind up the shattered!

You're the mastermind behind each star –  
shining, shimmering, counted and named.

Sing all you people, a sweet song of thanks:

let the music of our instruments sound out our praise!

You green the earth  
with generous rain and sun,  
sustaining and nurturing all living beings.  
Your delight isn't bound up in the strength of the horse,  
nor your pleasure in the speed of the runner.  
You find joy in the heart that trusts and hopes in you.  
Sing all you people, a sweet song of thanks:  
let the music of our instruments sound out our praise!

**Merciful God**, the words in Isaiah about not knowing you, and not hearing about you, resonate within us as we link them with the words of Paul - "woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!" We know that one of the greatest challenges today is to communicate the gospel so that people really hear it. Yet so often our persistence in clinging to old and familiar traditions, practices and language, block people from hearing and experiencing the good news of Jesus Christ. Woe to us all if we persist in proclaiming the gospel in words and ways which put people down, rather than build them up.

Forgive us, O God, for clinging to the use of language which excludes people from hearing the great good news about Jesus. Woe to us all if our lives and characters proclaim other than the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Forgive us, O God, if our piety is visible on Sundays, but hard to detect the rest of the week.

Woe to us all if the gospel is proclaimed only within these walls and not daily in the communities where we live or study or work.

Forgive us, O God, for earnestly praising and worshipping you in words and ritual, whilst failing to perform deeds of mercy and service.

Woe to us all if we forget that proclamation of the gospel goes hand in hand with the belief that the hopes and dreams of the downtrodden and powerless can be transformed into reality when we risk stepping out in faith.

Forgive us, O God, if our zeal for mission and evangelism is shaped by the state of our finances rather than the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Strengthen us with the Holy Spirit to do all for the sake of the gospel, so that we, and all those to whom the gospel is truly proclaimed may share in its blessings.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

## **ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS**

Hear the good news: Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old life

is gone; a new life has begun. (based on 2 Cor 5: 17) Friends, believe the gospel: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!  
Thanks be to God!

## **READINGS**

- **1 Corinthians 9:16–23**

16 If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! 17 For if I do this of my own will, I have a wage, but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. 18 What then is my wage? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel.

19 For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might gain all the more. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to gain Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might gain those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not outside God's law but am within Christ's law) so that I might gain those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, so that I might gain the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. 23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I might become a partner in it.

- **Mark 1:29–39**

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30 Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31 He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32 That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed by demons. 33 And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34 And he cured many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons, and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. 36 And Simon and his companions hunted for him. 37 When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." 38 He answered, "Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also, for that is what I

came out to do.” 39 And he went throughout all Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

**HYMN 597** Master, speak, thy servant heareth  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=raPJHiezEhw>

## **SERMON**

Sometimes there is a need to re-examine what we are thinking when we approach a well-known Bible passage. I would like to thank Alison Sampson for her efforts to re-examine the Gospel reading today and suggesting how we can look at the message in Mark’s Gospel differently.

For some time I have been concerned about the section in this passage where Simon’s mother-in-law, who was suffering from a fever, who then suddenly jumps up and serves everyone without a chance for her to recuperate. Having suffered with Covid just after Christmas I know that we can’t just jump out of bed and take off where we left off like we did before becoming ill.

After this miracle Mark goes on to say that people flocked to see Jesus and He healed those who were suffering, casting out many demons. Thinking back on this passage I have often wondered why it is not such a common experience today that people are freed of their demons.

Do we live in a different era?

We now have fantastic modern medicines and treatments.

Do we lack the faith to take advantage of healings and exorcisms?

Now this leads me to take a closer look at the words which we translate as ‘healing’ and ‘exorcism.’ In actual fact these events do still happen, but they are nowhere near as common as Mark tells us about in his Gospel.

Today’s passage about Simon’s mother-in-law says that she was sick with a fever. We are told that Jesus took her by the hand and the fever left her. She then goes on to serve the visitors. This wording around the concept of serving is interesting.

The Greek word here is 'diakoneo.' This word might sound familiar. It is a base word for the word we use for 'deacon.' This word also appears in other places in the Bible. When referring to men it is generally translated as 'minister.' However when the word refers to women that same word is used to be translated as 'serve.'

The point here is why are there different interpretations for different genders? Why not say that when the woman was healed that she began to minister to them?

Can you see where this is going?

By making a simple correction to the translation we change the whole concept from making a cuppa to acting like a good host and ministering to the whole band of followers who were with Jesus. We now see the outcome of Jesus healing as more than just a dose of Panadol.

From this it now becomes clear that Jesus' actions can free us to serve God and His healing not restricted to some super-doctor concept. Healing enables people to minister within their own community and beyond.

This leaves us with the issue of exorcisms. Does this allow us to heal people with something like schizophrenia or another mental illness? Like the word 'diakoneo' is there something else going on here?

I am sure that we can all recall the passage in Mark 5:1-20 where Jesus is near Gerasenes and is met by a man living among the tombs. We are told that he had been possessed by unclean spirits such that he howled and screamed and threw himself against the stoney graves.

When Jesus asked for the name of the unclean spirits the response was: "My name is Legion, for we are many." That spirit called 'Legion' then begged Jesus not to send them away. Jesus however sent those spirits into a heard of pigs who then stampeded off and drowned in the sea.

As we consider this we have to reflect that the Roman Legions controlled the whole country. For the last 400 years a Legion known as 'X' was stationed there. Their symbol was a boar, or wild pig. This was an obvious insult to the Jews as pigs were seen as unclean and should be avoided at

all costs. This symbol was embedded onto many buildings around Jerusalem and also on the local currency.

How would you feel when a ruthless occupying force was using a blasphemous symbol as their sign of power? Women could be molested and raped with impunity. Men could be ordered to drop what they were doing to carry a soldier's pack or do whatever tasks that the soldiers wanted.

In this environment people had started to mistrust one another as people were coerced into dobbing in their neighbors. Their religion was mocked and degraded. In other words their whole lives were disrupted and dislocated by these foreigners or evil forces.

How much of an impact would it make for a person to be liberated from this oppressive force and be able to live free from fear. The Legion called X had made life a living hell for many people. The possessed man was liberated from all the fear and trepidation brought on to him by the occupying possession calling itself Legion.

When we look at the story again we see that the man asked to be with Jesus. Jesus healed him and then commissioned the man to go and proclaim the good news. This healing amazed all those who witnessed it.

The man changed from living in a city of the dead and went off to the city of the living. In response to his healing he went to spread good news. Like the physical healing in today's Gospel the purpose of the exorcisms was to turn people towards God through Jesus' ministry.

As we go through the earlier parts of Mark we come across many stories of Jesus healing the sick and demon possessed. All those who came to Jesus for healing ended up being exposed to His teaching. Like the possessed man in the Synagogue last week.

Towards the end of this Gospel Jesus commissioned His disciples to do the same. From this we can see that exposure to Jesus' message was healing for all those who listened. When people listened to Jesus message and took it into their hearts they were liberated from sickness and demons and became people who willingly took part in His ministry.

Today the good news is that we are not living under the domination of an occupying military force. When we are ill we are not automatically shunned as unclean. However we are all impacted by the disfunction that prevails in our society which wants to undermine our faith and our security. Those forces are just as numerous and could still be called Legion.

In the media we are constantly confronted with stories of fear and trepidation.

There is the promotion of the ideas that we need to continually acquire more and more consumer goods to give us happiness.

There is the fear that the conflicts across the world will break out on our streets.

There is the strident denial in much of society of the presence of a God who is with us in life and death.

There is the constant undermining of the peace and support that a Christian faith can bring into a troubled world.

Lent is only a few short weeks away. During that time we are going to be guided to reflect on the disfunction of the world in which we live and the daily demons which we are confronted with.

Lent can be a time for us to confront that Legion of pain and suffering which can so easily consume our lives. We can claim the healing coming from Jesus' message which liberates us to minister to one another and proclaim the good news.

The message coming from our reflection today is that:

We do not need to live in chains;

we do not need to live among the dead;

we do not need to be paralysed by fear or despair. The sicknesses and demons are not the last word. Jesus, the One who liberates us, is more powerful than them all.

When we turn our lives towards Jesus and listen to his teachings, we will find healing;

and with that healing will come our ministry to those around us.

**HYMN 647** Comfort, comfort all my people

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rt\\_CaPi\\_yjY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rt_CaPi_yjY)

## **PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING**

The giving of our offerings is one way we join in Jesus' generosity and freedom.

Generous God, freedom-bringer, receive what we bring and allow it to be part of your life-giving presence and activity in the world. Amen.

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Loving God, compassionate God,

We long for your love and your compassion to flow through us, but often, we are tired or stressed – worn out from the challenges of life.

And when we can't access those places of care and empathy within us, we can feel guilty.

We act out of duty and obligation.

Or we check out, avoiding people and responsibilities, hoping that they all go away.

Jesus, lowly and humble one, draw us into your care.

Draw us into the true rest that only you can offer.

Draw us into silence and grace.

Meet us in this quiet space right now.

Help us to breathe.

*A space for stillness.*

And as we rest in this quiet place with Jesus,  
we search our hearts for the burdens we have been carrying –  
for those in our households and families,  
for those in our church,  
for those in our neighbourhood and nations,  
and all around the world.

We name these in this prayerful space with you, Jesus.

*Space for prayerful response.*

Loving God, compassionate God,  
bring grace and healing love to all the burdens of our hearts and continue  
to meet us in the not-so-quiet moments of our week. 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 351** Lift high the cross

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ephp3TVkPVY>

## **COMMUNION**

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

**And also with you**

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.  
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.**

Hear the words of institution of this sacrament  
as recorded by the apostle Paul:

For I received from the Lord  
what I also delivered to you,  
that the Lord Jesus,  
on the night when he was betrayed,  
took bread,  
and when he had given thanks,

he broke it and said:  
This is my body which is for you.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.  
In the same way also the cup,  
after supper, saying:  
This cup is the new covenant in my blood.  
Do this, as often as you drink it,  
for the remembrance of me.  
For as often as you eat this bread  
and drink the cup,  
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

And so according to our Saviour's command,  
we set this bread and this cup apart  
for the holy supper to which he calls us,  
and we come to God with our prayers 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.**

Thanks and praise, glory and honour are rightly yours,  
our Lord and God,  
for you alone are worthy.

In time beyond our dreaming  
you brought forth life out of darkness,  
and in the love of Christ your Son  
you set man and woman at the heart of your creation.

When the right time had come,  
you sent your Son Jesus.

He was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,  
and became truly human.

And so we praise you  
with the faithful of every time and place,  
joining with choirs of angels  
and the whole creation  
in the eternal hymn:

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

**heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.**

We thank you that you called a covenant people to be a light to the nations.  
Through Moses you taught us to love your law,  
and in the prophets you cried out for justice.

In the fullness of your mercy  
you became one with us in Jesus Christ,  
who gave himself up for us on the cross.  
You make us alive together with him,  
that we may rejoice in his presence  
and share his peace.

By water and the Spirit  
you open the kingdom to all who believe,  
and welcome us to your table:

for by grace we are saved, through faith.

With this bread and this cup

we do as our Saviour commands:

we celebrate the redemption he has won for us.

**Christ has died.**

**Christ is risen.**

**Christ will come again.**

Pour out the Holy Spirit on us  
and on these gifts of bread and wine,  
that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ.

Make us one with him,

one with each other,

and one in ministry in the world,

until at last we feast with him in the kingdom.

Through your Son, Jesus Christ,

in your holy Church,

all honour and glory are yours, Father almighty,

now and for ever.

The bread we break

is a sharing in the body of Christ.

The cup we take

is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world,  
**have mercy on us.**

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world,  
**have mercy on us.**

Lamb of God, you take away the sin 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**

Let us pray:

Bountiful God,  
at this table you graciously feed us  
with the bread of life and cup of eternal salvation.  
May we who have reached out our hands  
to receive this sacrament  
be strengthened in your service;  
we who have sung your praises  
tell of your glory in our lives;  
we who have seen the greatness of your love  
see you face to face in your kingdom,  
and come to worship you with all your saints for ever.  
**Amen.**

**HYMN 531** Sent forth by God's blessing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8BVuHxtW6OU>

### **BENEDICTION**

Our God meets us in the quiet places  
and goes before us wherever we might go.  
Trust that the everlasting God lives deep inside of you.  
May you wait on God and have your strength renewed.  
May you rise up with the grace of an eagle.  
May you run and not be weary.

May you walk and not faint.  
Go in grace. Go in peace.  
Amen.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH\\_HdkWs74](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH_HdkWs74)