

PENTECOST 20

15/10/23

CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

You invite us to worship, O God, and we rejoice!

We are able to leave the anxieties of our daily lives behind.

You invite us to worship, O God, and we give thanks!

We realize the full extent of your wonderful gifts.

You invite us to worship, O God, and we remember!

We are aware of your love, so graciously shown in Jesus Christ.

You invite us to worship, O God, and we respond!

We are ready to act compassionately and justly, in Christ's name.

Opening Prayer

O God, your steadfast love is always there for us;

there in times of joy, there when the testing times come.

O God, your steadfast love is always there for us;

there when apathy grips us, there when enthusiasm is ours.

O God, your steadfast love is always there for us;

there in our solitary moments, there when we share in faith community.

O God, your steadfast love is always there for us;

there as we stay in familiar territory, there as we venture and risk.

Your love never leaves us! Amen.

HYMN 133 O worship the King

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dv2BqFgm6_M

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

We praise you, O God, with words of thanksgiving in our mouths and in our hearts - words which can never really do justice to the depth of your care for us. We rejoice in your blessings, yet we so often fail to live up to them. Like your people of old, we often desire to fashion you in our image or in ways that we can control. Knowing these failings of ours as you do, you still invite us to share your life of grace and abundant love by being united with Jesus Christ through the power of your Spirit. We do not deserve such gifts. We can only receive them and respond because Jesus intercedes for us in our weakness.

May this time of worship and our daily living proclaim our thanksgiving for these undeserved and lavish gifts of grace.

It's not as if we mean to forget you,

Source of our life and love,

but we do allow 'busy' and 'shiny'

to draw us away, and then we've caused

you pain again, stopped living well again.

So, we stop now and say sorry

for the golden calves, the shiny things,

the promises of instant happiness we prefer

to waiting for your promise to be known.

pause

And we stop now to say sorry

for the busyness, the rushing, the hurrying,

the distractions we prefer suffer discomfort

in silence, in honestly sitting with you.

pause

We stop.

We wait.

We sit still.

We listen.

We are sorry.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Hear again the promise:

God is here.

God is listening.

God chooses love every time.

Receive the gift and let it heal –
you, your relationships with God,
and with all that lives.

Find peace.

Be at peace.

Be peace.

Amen.

READINGS

- **Philippians 4:1–9**

1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my coworkers, whose names are in the book of life.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about[d] these things. 9 As for the things that you have learned and received and heard and noticed in me, do them, and the God of peace will be with you.

- **Matthew 22:1–14**

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: 2 “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. 4 Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ 5 But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, 6 while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. 7 The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. 8 Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ 10 Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad, so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, 12 and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ 14 For many are called, but few are chosen.”

HYMN 573 A charge to keep I have

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1M-64OwBK1E&list=RD1M-64OwBK1E&start_radio=1

SERMON

I wonder how many of you have seen the movie 'Pulp Fiction?'

How about that old classic the 'Blues Brothers?'

In many ways this week's parable has some similarities to those movies. The violence and bloodshed we heard about this morning are exaggerated to the point that we can see that they are tools to bring out the main message of the parable, it could not possibly be taken as a literal story.

The parable of the Wedding Feast is a dramatic presentation of exaggerated violence which is solely used to emphasise the image of the grace being spoken about by Jesus as He tries to bring out the idea of God's generous love and mercy waiting in heaven.

Jesus starts out saying that this parable is being used to describe to us what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. It is not a photographic description any more than other stories like the kneading the yeast into the flour to make bread, or trying to relate the Kingdom to a mustard seed, let alone the steward who embezzled the money belonging to the absent landlord.

Just like every good storyteller Jesus wants to tell us a story which holds our attention and at the same time brings us more insight into the nature of God's Kingdom. We have festive stories of gatherings at Matthew's house, Simon's house, Mary and Martha's house and then Zaccheus's place, just to name a few.

We could also think about party parables like this one and that party thrown for the 'Prodigal Son.' Of course there is also the Last Supper which is a celebration which we still commemorate today. This is one celebration to which we are all invited.

So this story begins with us being introduced to the wedding feast for the king's son. No mention is ever made of the bride. A lot of Jesus stories seem to be based in feasts and parties and this one starts out with all the best produce being prepared for the grand event. The king wants everybody who matters to be invited. This is a special celebration and he wants to share the happiness of the special event. As the time for the celebration nears invitations are taken by his servants to let the guests know when to come to the feast.

This is where the whole picture becomes focused on the theme. The special guests just won't come. There is no reference as to the valid reasons that the invitees gave. We can speculate from the parable that they had more pressing things, like pruning the hedge, or watching their crops grow and so on. Perhaps they were so caught up in the routine of everyday life that a gathering like this held little interest to them.

All too often we can be so absorbed in the hum-drum of every-day life that we are more concerned with a God who might punish us than a God who wishes to celebrate with us and feed and nurture us.

Jesus continues on with the story telling us that the king was not deterred by those not taking up his invitation immediately. He sent out another round of servants with the message that the party is ready to start. The ox is being prepared and the food is about to be put on the tables. It is time to party!

This is where the story is exaggerated in order to bring out the spectacular message in the story. The messengers are not only ignored but some of them are beaten and others killed by those who had been invited. This sounds like a bit of high drama in such a situation.

However Jesus wants to emphasise how dramatic and offensive those people were who refused the invitation, especially those who murdered the messengers. This being a direct reference to the many prophets sent by God who were banished or killed over the years.

Now we really get into the over played drama like that in the Blues Brothers. Jesus continues the story saying that the angry king then sent his troops to kill the murderers and to burn down their cities. This was no half-hearted response, this was the full on repercussion. These recalcitrant prospective guests were not just wiped off the invitation list, they were wiped out.

As we know this was an over emphasis of the repercussions which we should not take at face value. Jesus has put this narrative point in to emphasise His objectives. These were the people who were the cream of society, those in the most honoured positions, such as the religious leaders. Their presence at the wedding celebrations would have made it a party that was remembered for years to come.

The invitees lacked even the most common courtesy by not even making any attempt to politely respond to the king's invitation. There was not even any effort because it was their king inviting them. These people now joined

that growing list of people who thought that they were members of the in-crowd but ended up on the wrong end of the invitation list.

This was clearly aimed at people like the Pharisee who loudly called out in the temple congratulating himself on being so much better than the other people gathered around him. Then there is the older brother sulking when the party is being held for the returning 'Prodigal Son.' Then we can think back to that group of supposedly righteous people who spat the dummy when a woman of questionable virtue let her hair down and poured expensive perfume over Jesus' feet after the host had not bothered to offer even the most basic courtesy of bathing his guest's feet as Jesus entered the house.

These people strike our conscience as we think about ourselves as doing good deeds and being clean living people. Why should we bother going to the king's house to celebrate a marriage?

It appears to me that Jesus made such an outlandish and violent story to emphasise just how easily we can make the wrong decisions about our ability to be part of God's family. Jesus is emphasising just what is at stake, life or death!

We can be saved from destruction simply by being able to attend the party to which we have been personally invited. This comes as a gift, not some nebulous reward. There are no other options.

Now the king goes to 'Plan B' as there is going to be a party no matter what. Those surviving servants are now sent out with the invitations to contact everyone they can find. Here is the sting in the tail. Everyone is invited, good and bad alike!

This shows the fullness of Jesus' explanation of how the Kingdom of Heaven is freely available to everyone without hesitation.

It didn't matter who you were, bag ladies, people with weird outfits, people who are not normally accepted in society, people with their baseball caps on backwards, plumbers in their dirty overalls, people struggling home after a long night of clubbing, all welcome.

As the wedding venue filled with this motley mix of guests everyone seemed to be mixing happily. However there always has to be one 'party pooper' who tried to put a dampener on the celebrations. Why mention this person in such a big crowd? Most would have not had the right clothes to be part of this event, but the king picks on just one person who was not 'wearing the wedding robe.'

This was not so much a matter of clothing as being about their willingness to join in the celebrations. How often have we been to a gathering where we want to enjoy ourselves and there is that one person who tries to be a wet blanket and ruin the time for everyone.

As we think this through we can realise that we can't get thrown out of heaven if we haven't already been admitted. Those who have been accepted will only be ejected when they reject the invitation and think themselves too good to be able to mix with the other people there.

This person just sat there cold and sullen not willing to accept the invitation that they have received. They would rather relive their own perspective of how heaven 'should be.' Here we see that judgment comes down on those who reject the open invitation that Jesus is talking about.

When we stand to one side clutching at our own goodness, our own petty little virtues, our miserable little airs and graces, while the party rages that is what Jesus is referring to. Hell is for the sweet, good, well-groomed people who play it safe and cherish their dignity rather than risk joining the party.

But we can't end on such a down-beat note. The main point of this and all the party parables is this: "All is prepared, the time is now! Come to the party. Everything you need will be supplied, there is no charge, it's all free. All you need is the desire to have a good time and the willingness to come right now. So come on in and party. It just wouldn't be the same without you."

HYMN 154 Great is your faithfulness

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

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

With gratitude and joy, we accept God's invitation to share in the banquet of life for all.

Keep reminding us, O Holy One,

of the joy of attending your banquet:

joy offered to all;

joy offered through each of us as we give,

we share, we nurture life with you.

May all we bring give you joy and honour. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Freedom from FearFreedom to live.

Jeff and I have been reading” Songs of a War Boy.” by Deng Adut written in 2016

Deng Adut was 6 years old when war came to his village in South Sudan – he was conscripted into the Sudan People’s Liberation Army, where he was taught to use an AK-47 military assault riflehe was sent into battle at 7years old“ a child soldier, must kill or be killed”

For 5 years, he walked thousands of kilometres without shoes or undies. He was shot in the back, had many serious illnesses, and suffered the relentless brutality of war

Then he was rescued and smuggled into a Kenyan refugee camp. From there, with the support of the UN and help from an Australian couple, Deng and brother John became the third Sudanese family to resettle in Australia.

Despite his physical injuries, mental trauma and nightmares Deng taught himself to read and later at Western Sydney University did his masters in law, and finally became a lawyer of notoriety

In 2015 Deng gave the Australia Day speech -here are sections....

“As a 7year-old soldier -I was ignorant – I lost my freedom to read and write – I lost the right to be an innocent child, and the right to become an initiated member of my tribe.

I came to Australia as an illiterate, penniless, 14 year old teenager, traumatised both physically, and emotionally by war – to be a lawyer was unthinkable – but Australia educated me – how lucky to receive an education in a free land and use it in daily life!

We Australians take for granted – free education – food – clothing – shelter – health care and personal safety.

Australia is a nation where most of us, most of the time, seek to give and receive “ a fair go” and respect democracythat is

“Advance Australia Fair”in our national Australian anthem.

As immigrants, we begin as strangers with much to learn – but the freedoms of Australia mean that most of the time there is a welcoming hand ...so no need to fear

Freedom needs to be fought for.... Freedom from fear can never be taken for granted – the first line of defence against consuming fear is our collective hearts and minds – willingness to be accepting, tolerant, inclusive and welcoming.

My gratitude is to my fellow Australians for opening the door – without your

spirit of “a fair go “ -my story could not have been told.
My Guru told me to live my life so that I can build a living memorial for my departed loved ones.
What a story!!!!

Now.....Reading from “The Message “paraphrase of the Bible from
Romans 12:1-2

With God helping you.....Offer your lives as a living sacrifice – take your every day life – (your sleeping -eating - going to work and walking around life)– and place it before God as an offering.

Embracing (accepting)what God does for you - fix your attention on God and God will bring out the best of you

Let us pray

Lord, what a challenge to hear the story of Deng Adut– Australia is a wonderful country to live in – thank you for all our freedom.

We thank you for the opportunities in our ordinary everyday lives to serve you and bring honour to your name.

Teach us to love sincerely – help us not to quit in the hard times – show us how to discover beauty in everyone and not to judge.

We want to be genuine in our Christian lives – help us to get along with one another as we serve you in whatever we do.

We pray for the world.

We are at war again – this time in Gaza – there are wars in Ukraine and Afghanistan.....wars & civil wars.....tyranny and riots ...around the world in Africa, Asia, Europe, South America, New Guinea, and more as a result of wars and crime, there is death, suffering, homelessness and fear – we pray for peace.

We pray for the Christian church in the world – we ask for your help in bringing a glimpse of Christ’s love to this troubled world.

We pray for our church.

We ask for guidance and direction as we strive to serve you through our Caves Beach Uniting Church ...in our Sunday services– our Bible study group and craft and chat group.

Guide us as we leap out in faith for the selection and employment of a Christian worker in our local area.

We pray for our church members here this morning – for our friends, families and neighbours

We pray for health and strength in body and mind.

We ask your blessing on those who are in aged care that their lives will still be meaningful and happy.

We pray for those who are suffering pain, loneliness, disappointment, and anxiety.

Again we thank you for our country, Australia, we pray for wisdom for all our leadersthose in politics , social clubs,, universities, colleges, schools, hospitals, and emergency services.

We pray for peace – we pray for freedom from fear.

We will say 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 658 I the Lord of sea and sky ...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zr9SMm1gII>

BENEDICTION

Hear the call of Holy One,

heed the invitation:

be ready, be waiting,

be present when you are asked to turn up.

May Wisdom welcome you,

Creator nourish you,

Spirit sustain you,

in the streets and at the feet

of the mountains. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-u-WxpmOpN4>