

PENTECOST 12
11/8/24
CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

Bless God at all times!

We will bless and thank God at this morning service of worship.

Bless God at all times!

We will bless God when we celebrate birthdays and anniversaries, the markers of our human life.

Bless God at all times!

We will bless God when God holds us fast in the storms of life.

Bless God at all times!

We will bless God when we have been blessed with joy within our family or friendship circle.

Bless God at all times!

We will bless God when evil is confronted and the discouraged are given hope. We will bless God at all times!

Opening Prayer

In the warmth of a still evening beside the lake,
we seek God's renewing presence.

In the smile of a young mother,
we seek God's parental presence.

In the agony of despair, the shock of an unexpected diagnosis,
we seek God's empathetic presence.

In the struggles and fractures of life with family and friends,
we seek God's reconciling presence. In all of life's experiences – joyful, frustrating, painful, exhilarating – and in this service of worship, Loving God, we seek your presence. Amen.

HYMN 602 O love that wilt not let me go

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

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Almighty God,

to you be all honour and praise,

In Christ, you have broken through sin and destruction with the gift of salvation.

We praise you for the truth of your Word,
that when we feel overwhelmed by the treachery of others,
we find a way forward – a way of justice and goodness.
We thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit,
who accompanies us, showing us how to live in freedom.
Gracious God, we would serve you in word and deed,
shining with the light of the gospel so that others may see your justice and
hope.
We love you. We adore you. We honour you, this day and forever.

Gracious God,
who seeks us out and looks upon us with love and compassion,
we come before you with our confession.
We are sorry for the times we doubt you.
We are sorry that we are so easily overwhelmed by the stuff of life so that
we close you out
and then doubt that your realm exists at all.
Even more, we sometimes stop believing that Christ is your incarnated
presence on earth.
We acknowledge that we go about our daily routines without caring about
you.
Yet you continue to hold us in grace,
even when we are hurtful to others and betray our faith.
Help us, Lord, to stay close to you, to believe your Word,
and to live according to your ways.
Fill us with your Spirit and enable us to walk according to your will.
In your name, we pray. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

‘Whoever believes has eternal life.’
This is the very promise of Christ.
We can trust Christ, for he is God’s revealed truth.
God’s grace is sufficient and sets us free.
We are a forgiven people, and our sin is overcome.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

READINGS

- **Ephesians 4:25–5:2**

²⁵ So then, putting away falsehood, let each of you speak the truth with your
neighbour, for we are members of one another. ²⁶ Be angry but do not sin;

do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and do not make room for the devil. ²⁸ Those who steal must give up stealing; rather, let them labour, doing good work with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. ²⁹ Let no evil talk come out of your mouths but only what is good for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. ³¹ Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. **5** ¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, ² and walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

- **John 6:35, 41–51**

³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ⁴¹ Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” ⁴² They were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?” ⁴³ Jesus answered them, “Do not complain among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me, and I will raise that person up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶ Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

HYMN 576 O for a closer walk with God

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pY_8SLWa2MI

SERMON

How many of you caught up with a series on ABC TV a few weeks ago where Maggi Beer was involved in an experiment aimed at getting the residents in a retirement complex to have more nourishing and satisfying

meals. As we all know places like this have to cater carefully as there are only a few dollars to cover the cost of meals.

At the same time many of the residents had been institutionally indoctrinated to simply accept whatever they were offered. Research in that Residential Care Unit showed that about 70% of the residents were malnourished. Over the following weeks there were dramatic episodes about using less pre-prepared ingredients and changing to more wholesome recipes which were more appealing to the residents with their individual needs.

This takes me back to one of my sons coming into the kitchen when I was preparing a meal one evening complaining that he was hungry. I said that tea would not be long but he threw the cupboard open and demanded I get him something NOW!

He said that he was really hungry and could not wait the few minutes before a properly prepared meal would be on the table. He looked into the pantry and told me to just open a box. He thought that all someone had to do was open a box and fully prepared food would just appear. Having an instant meal in front of you can seem a bit like living off takeaways. That sort of food can be bland and very superficial.

This is a bit like some people's approach to spirituality. We can try to digest it but there ends up being no genuine nourishment in the ingredients. There is nothing there to properly nourish us and provide the basis on which to grow in our faith. How often in our quest for spirituality do we end up only consuming junk foods? That diet is out of balance and we can end up malnourished like those elderly residents. What we really need is the spiritual food that will genuinely sustain us.

Looking back at the reading from John's Gospel we can understand the interaction between Jesus and the hungry mob. Following on from last week's reading Jesus is confronted with a mob who just wanted Jesus to open a box from the pantry to satisfy their perceived hunger. They had eaten their fill as part of the crowd of 5,000 who Jesus had just catered to a few verses earlier. They had eaten their fill then but already they were hungry again.

In John 6:27 Jesus says: “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life” If we think about it carefully, there have no doubt been times when we have finished a meal, at home or in a restaurant, and said to ourself that we are still hungry. Your hunger has not been quenched. Then there are those times when you have left the meal table thinking: “I’m full but it wasn’t that good or what I really wanted?” Then there are the times when you have simply felt hungry because there was not enough food for you.

Much the same can happen in our spiritual lives, our prayer life, our family relationships and just our day-to-day life. In our constant searching for meaning and purpose in our lives we can often wonder what more we can do to satisfy that hunger.

There are those times in our lives when we just want to open a box and get a quick fix. However, we always seem to end up feeling that we are being malnourished and left partially empty by that experience.

That hunger and the resulting emptiness are very real. Jesus knew this and He knew that there was more to this than just filling the human stomach. “I am the bread of life,” he said. “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry.” Our soul needs to be fed and nurtured just as much as our stomach.

This leads to some questions that we each need to ask and address:

- How deep is your hunger today?
- What is that spiritual hunger which is eating away at your life?
- What parts of your spiritual life are malnourished?
- What is it in your relationships that you are missing?

We need to choose from two options in seeking to address our hunger:

1. Do we simply want to open that convenient box from the pantry?
or,
2. Do we want to be fed by the real ‘bread of life?’

In speaking here about the bread of life I am referring to more than the bread in our communion service last week. While that sacrament is important there is more to this question than a physical piece of bread.

Let’s consider how Jesus operated then and still does today:

- Jesus was present. He listened. He welcomed and connected with people.
- Jesus told stories based in real life and through this He helped people to find meaning in their lives.
- Jesus was compassionate. He reached out to the painful and broken places in their lives.
- Jesus told His followers about His vision of a new life in a changed world.
- Jesus offered hope and the promise of peace in the middle of life's confusion.
- He told us that we are all one bread and one body and that our neighbour's life matters as much as our own.

So now is the time to think back and consider whether that bread we have been eating just comes out of a convenient box?
Can we become the bread that not only feeds and nourishes us but also those around us?

Rather than just looking at Jesus claims for those in His time, could it be that we can become the bread of life fed by His 'spiritual bread' feeding others?

Maybe God can work through each of us to feed those around us?

HYMN 547 Be thou my vision

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

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

All we have and all we are is a gift of God.

Let us respond to God with our love offerings.

Loving God, your goodness never fails.

You sustain us and send us forth as your disciples

as a sign of your loving kindness and in service of those in need.

Receive the offering we bring and the offering of our lives.

In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

This morning in our Hunter Presbytery prayer list, we will pray for Millers Forest Uniting congregation. I wondered where it was so I looked it up and found it's a 7 minute drive west of Raymond Terrace. They are small in number, mostly in their seventies, and have a service in their little church on the first Sunday of the month. They get involved in their community and are willing to assist others. So we will pray for them.

And before we pray I'd like to tell you, if I may, briefly of an incident some years ago in my life that I was reminded of when I read the Gospel passage for today where Jesus says, "I am the bread of life". I was on Normanby Island in Papua checking remote schools, and a boat had left me at Bunama but the captain had forgotten to pick me up again. One day, someone evidently overheard me comment, sort of off-hand wishful thinking, that I'd love to eat some bread. Later when checking the school roll I found that one boy called Andrew had been away for two days. And also before the boat did eventually come back for me, I was actually given a loaf of bread. On asking where it came from I was told that it came from Kurada, a Catholic Mission station. I was already out at sea before I put two and two together - that is, I put Andrew's absence and the bread together, because to walk to Kurada and back would have taken a Papuan about two days..... About 15 years later on another island, a chap was doing handy-man work at a school. On my asking his name, he replied "Andrew." I asked him, "And where are you from?" "Normanby". "But what place?" I asked him. "Bunama," he said. "Ah," and I thought a while, and then asked, "Would you have got my bread when you were a small boy?" "Yes, that was me," he said. So I realised then that little Andrew and big Andrew were one and the same. And so I was able to thank him.

My point of telling you this is that yes, at long last I was able to thank Andrew. But today we hear Jesus say, "*I* am the bread". He *himself* is the bread of life given for us. He *himself* is our food, our nourishment. And I wonder, how often do we *thank him*, for that, his most costly and extraordinary gift?

Let us pray:

Loving God, we come to thank you today for your extraordinary generosity towards us in Jesus, who, dying on the cross and having victory over death, is your gift of life to us. We thank you that you that your Son is our bread, our nourishment, which enables us to be His body in the world. We

pray that all, including ourselves, who know Jesus as their Lord will live out your command that we love one another as you have loved us every day of our lives.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Creator God, we are so grateful that we live in a place where we enjoy freely the beauty of your creation around us, when we know at the same time there is so much destruction and devastation in other places. We see destruction caused by man-made environmental disasters, we see the terrible destruction caused by bombs of war, we know there is mis-use of resources which causes pollution of land, sea and sky. We pray for our local, state, and federal leaders that decisions in government are made not for the corporate world, but for the *common* good - for the well-being, indeed the survival, of all people, of all living things, of all species that are part of your creation. Help us in our own corner here to be mindful so that we think before we buy, so that we are careful with our waste, and aware always of our own responsibilities so that life and faith are one.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

O God whose Son is the Prince of Peace, we pray for world leaders so that consultation and negotiation may enable a de-escalation so that war may give way to peace. We pray for peace in the Middle East, in the Ukraine, in the Sudan, in Myanmar, for peace in all places where there is such dire conflict at present. Help us, we ask, so that we might not come complacent and wish to shut out the suffering of others, but rather help us to be willing to remain vigilant in our heartfelt concern and prayers for all.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Loving God, we come before you in prayer for the little Uniting Church congregation at Millers Forest. We pray as they have asked us to do, that they will be an ongoing witness committing to be a welcoming church to all and to do as called: God's work in their community witnessing and helping their neighbours also, maintaining the building and surrounds to reflect the caring to others.

Lord, In your mercy, hear our prayer.

Gracious God, we come to you giving thanks too, for our own congregation here at Caves Beach. We thank you for the opportunities you give us to share our faith in word and action. We pray for your guidance to be upon Presbytery, Mark our minister, and our Church Council members that we may be a beacon of hope in this community. We pray for those of our community and those we know personally who need your strength and comfort at this time - taking time now to bring them to God in a time of silent prayer Loving God, as we pray for all in sorrow, need, sickness, or any other trouble, we pray too, that all who are in caring roles may be given wisdom, patience and gentleness. We pray for peace in all our hearts this day.

We ask these prayers in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who 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 442 All praise to our redeeming Lord
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2Qhk8zl7Jo>

BENEDICTION

Believing, we have eternal life.
Let us go to share the joy of the gospel with all.
Let us go to serve faithfully the goodness of God,
helping all we encounter who are in need.
Let us go to be a true example of the truth of Christ

and work for justice in the world.
May the truth of Christ lead us,
the love of God sustain us,
and the wisdom and power of the Spirit keep us strong,
this day and forever more. Amen.

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