

## PENTECOST 17

24/9/23

### CAVES BEACH

#### CALL TO WORSHIP

Give thanks to the Holy One!

**God is great, and is the source of all good.**

Bring praise to the Holy One!

**Spread the word about all God has done.**

Be glad that you belong to the Most High God!

**God's encouragement is continually there  
for God's faithful people.**

God's wisdom is available for all nations and people;

**God's covenant holds fast for a thousand generations.**

#### Opening Prayer

You call us to a generous way of being, O God.

**When our praise and prayer come from the heart, you  
cheer us on.**

You call us to a generous form of friendship, O God.

**When we listen carefully and encourage with sensitivity,  
your presence is felt.**

You call us to a generous spirit as we work, O God.

**When we help out carefully, and share our rewards  
sacrificially, your Word is heeded.**

You call us to look at the generosity of Jesus, O God.

**And as we look up at the cross, we know how far  
generosity can go. Amen.**

**HYMN 154** Great is your faithfulness

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

## **PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION**

We praise you, O God, for providing direction and nourishment for your people of old. We praise you for doing the same for us in the person of Jesus Christ. In him, you set before us a way of life to guide us through the wilderness experiences of our lives - those times common to us all - of illness and grief, disaster and depression, uncertainty and hopelessness. The gift of Christ's life enables us to cope with these arid times and to have faith that through him, your presence is continually with us, strengthening and supporting us. May this time of worship be an expression of our wonder and joy that you should care so deeply for us and all people.

**Merciful God**, the story of the landowner and the workers turns our ideas about fairness upside down. We probably would agree with the workers who complained about the seemingly blatantly unfair action of the landowner. We may puzzle over this parable and dismiss it as not really applying to us. But every time we suppose that our faithfulness, our status, our piety gives us a special claim on your favour, we need to hear this story of your abundant grace. Forgive us when we measure the behaviour of others against that of ourselves rather than measuring our behaviour against yours. Your divine generosity astounds us and calls into question our values and our selfishness. Open our eyes to see beyond our own needs, and unclench our hands to share what we have with those in need.

This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS**

We are enabled to live our lives in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ because of the generous love of God for 'if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

Thanks be to God!

## **READINGS**

- **Philippians 1:21–30**

21 For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me, yet I cannot say which I will choose. 23 I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better, 24 but to remain in the flesh is more necessary

for you. 25 Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, 26 so that, by my presence again with you, your boast might abound in Christ Jesus because of me.

27 Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel 28 and in no way frightened by those opposing you. For them, this is evidence of their destruction but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. 29 For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ but of suffering for him as well, 30 since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

- **Matthew 20:1–16**

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. 2 After agreeing with the labourers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, 4 and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. 5 When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. 6 And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around, and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' 7 They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' 8 When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' 9 When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received a denarius. 10 Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. 11 And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, 12 saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' 13 But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? 14 Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. 15 Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' 16 So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

**HYMN 126** God moves in mysterious ways

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5\\_BhPwROzo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5_BhPwROzo) (Not exactly the same words)

## SERMON

We live in a time when we all seem to expect a good financial reward for our efforts. This passage from Matthew seems to me to go against that approach to life. In our day and age, is it really a fair deal that someone who comes to work at the last minute gets paid the same wages as someone who has worked hard all day?

In our modern world this approach seems to go against all our natural instincts of fairness. It is almost like we want to bring in the union to fight for better pay and no undercutting our hard earned benefits.

Why should a person who has only worked for a few hours get the same pay as those of us who have put in a hard day's work?

If they only worked a few hours, why not just pay them the hourly rate?

Why should they be able to claim better hourly rates than we can achieve?

Initially this sort of justice can seem to go against the grain as it seems go against our traditional approaches to justice and fair play. With our world experiencing rising inflation and forever searching for better value for money why pay such frivolous wages?

So, Jesus is trying to describe to His followers what heaven is really like.

Does this mean that people who want to just sponge off society will get equal rewards on pay-day?

The really hard part is that no matter how hard I work at it and no matter how productive I am, God rewards people equally, not according to their long service or efforts. There are no performance bonuses no acclaim for long service and no medals for special efforts.

Everyone has equal access to a 'get out of jail free' card.

Let's face it we are all going to come before God with no special advantage over the next person.

Should I develop a special ability to translate the Bible into the everyday common Australian vernacular there would be no special bonus or extra rewards from God.

I could bring a revolutionary movement across all the churches in Australia where we come together as one but that would not get me a special status with God in the light of this passage.

After reflecting on this passage from Matthew for many years I still find it hard to reconcile my difficulty with the fact that those who worked for just one hour still received the same rewards as those who has worked hard all day. It is not that I am ungrateful or even being a windger for not being able to advance my standing in God's eyes.

This struggle is not uncommon for people with a long-standing faith. I have heard others who have expressed exactly the same difficulty. After all we have grown up used to living in a society where we naturally tend to rate people by one criteria or another. With this sort of grading of other people we tend to want to give extra rewards to some people and try to dismiss those who don't live up to our standards.

After all this is how we judge people in our workplaces and in our social lives. It is a normal and accepted way of evaluating people that we meet with. We tend to want to avoid people who don't quite meet our standards. So often we can sit back and give ourself and good reward for not having needed to stoop to the depths that some people have to go through just to become accepted in society.

Those people who are gifted with those talents to make them admired in our society tend to receive all the advantages and accolades that others miss out on. Some people seem to get a better deal than we do. We want to push back against those sorts of unjust situations, especially when we have worked equally hard at the goals set for us.

Surely those working in areas like supporting vulnerable children and the elderly in nursing homes should get more than the high-flying share traders?

Why don't our nurses, for all their hard work, get more money than the fashion models?

The basis on which we put values on people's efforts sometimes seems to be disproportionate and out of all reason. Take the recently retired head of Qantas as an example.

Why should the CEO get millions while their casual workers struggle just to pay rent and often they can't afford to eat every day?

Why are men so often paid more than women?

We can so easily tend to get caught up that we ignore these anomalies. We can tend to look the other way and not ask hard questions for fear of being labelled as different.

In this parable Jesus simply points out that the culture that God created in heaven is nothing like the social systems which we create here on earth. This is a theme which carries right back to the way that God treated the rebellious Hebrews when they were wandering in the wilderness. Despite their rebellious nature God provided food in the wilderness in the form of manna from heaven and even quail one night. The point here is that God provided for everyone's needs but at the same time kept everyone on an equal footing.

Here we have the landowner paying people who had worked all day for the same amount as anyone who missed out for some reason and came later. It is not like those who worked extra hard received any more recompense than the late-comers. God's gift here is a sign of gracious generosity to everyone, not an opportunity to get one up on your neighbour. Regardless of how we regard others' work ethic and effort, God comes back with unremitting generosity.

Culturally we are ingrained with the seeking of merit and rewards so that we increase our achievements and efforts.

In what we call the Middle Ages there was a popular concept of purgatory for those who were not quite as dedicated and righteous as was the norm in that society. It was especially relevant for those who did the wrong thing and kept on sinning by the laws of those days. The belief was that the culprits had to endure a long time in pain and suffering for their wrongs before they gained entry to heaven.

However, when we actually look at the teaching that Jesus left with us we see a different concept. In Jesus words everyone who commits to God is welcomed with open arms and treated equally. Everyone is of equal value to God.

Whether in their lives they were tireless campaigners for human rights,  
or having a near perfect record of church attendance,  
or a teacher who modeled all the best human attributes,  
or the office worker who went the extra mile without reward when the times were tough,  
or the spoilt rich young people who ran away and squandered their inheritance,

or people just sitting around relying on others to support their drug fuelled lifestyle,

let alone to corrupt business executive who bankrupts a business leaving nothing for their employees.

The list can go on and on of those who do the 'right' thing and those who seem to fail miserably when facing a moral challenge but the message is that we all seem to have the same invitation to receive grace once we commit our lives to God.

As the old Professor Julius Sumner Miller used to ask on his TV show so often: WHY IS IT SO?

What kind of God treats people as being of equal value?

Where is the justice here?

Actually when I take to time to stop and look back carefully it is incredibly good news. Once we move beyond the lifetime of inculturation that we must be better than the next person to be considered worthwhile then we have great news.

Looking at the parable we can see that the workers who spent all day in the fields didn't have their pay cut in any way to make allowances for those who came later. When I am perfectly honest with myself, I know that I am never going to achieve perfection. The reality is that God is probably going to treat me far better than I deserve.

From this parable I know that God will treat me as an equal with someone like Bishop Desmond Tutu. In God's regime we are on a par with Mary of Magdala, Oscar Romero and John Bunyan. In our faith in God we are made one with God and receive the same reward regardless of our academic, business and social achievements.

If we can move beyond our hang-ups about rewards and achievements we can see that we are all equally members of one body, God's family. No one of us is better than the other in God's eyes.

**HYMN 609** May the mind of Christ my saviour

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gE5fOXSymBc>

**PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING**

Our God meets our needs in the wilderness and guides us on the way. Let's continue our journey of faith in practical ways with the giving of our offerings.

God of wonders, we thank you for your goodness and faithfulness and for how you care for us in the wilderness. May these offerings help meet wider needs as an expression of your grace and love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

A glimpse of eternal life.

Thoughts gleaned from the devotional called "Unlocking the Bible" and "The Message" translation of the Bible

Heaven & Eternal Life .....an immense topic, but .....the culmination of our Christian faith

At the transfiguration, Jesus gave three of his disciples a glimpse of the future.....showing them what glory there would be after his death and resurrection... His appearance changed... His face shone and an awesome brilliance radiated from him.

Moses & Elijah appeared with Jesus and talked with him, showing us something important about our future... we will never cease to exist – Moses was still Moses – Elijah was still Elijah – and you will still be you ....So it seems identity continues in heaven... God's purpose is ...to gather a great community of his people to share the joy of his presence.

For the disciples ,the way ahead on earth would still be hard.....but now they had seen a glimpse of the glory that lay beyond the cross...and that glimpse gave them the hope and courage they needed to continue....even after Jesus had ascended into heaven

When Christ was being crucified ,one of the criminals being crucified beside him ,asked Jesus to remember him ,when he came into his kingdom...Jesus replied." Today you will be with me in paradise." – salvation depends not on your works for Christ....but on Christ's work for you – Christ's sacrificial work is finished on the cross ...so that you can place your life, death and eternity on him with complete confidence.

Jesus has opened paradise – he has born the sentence of death for our sins– & He offers forgiveness to all who will come to him ,in repentance and faith, receiving what he has promised.

Jesus said." I am the Resurrection and the Life.... anyone who believes in me will live even after dying."

When Christ returns in glory and gathers his people, every believer will be there – you will be there.....rejoicing in the presence of God..



When the body of Jesus was raised, it was also changed – his flesh was adapted to everlasting life – no longer subject to ageing, sickness, death, pain, or disability

. We will experience the same transformation.....Our bodies will be adapted for everlasting life... the corpse that was buried has no beauty .....but when it is raised ....it will be glorious!

Just as Jesus was taken up into the clouds on his ascension into heaven ...when he returns... we will be caught up to meet him in the air.

The Trumpet will sound – & in the blinking of an eye – the dead will be raised out of their graves – never to die again , and we will all be changed – everything perishable replaced by the imperishable – the mortal replaced by the immortal.

The irony is that ,when Jesus was born, there was no room for him....

but in his Father's House ...there are many rooms for us,

Christ's death and resurrection have made heaven ready, reserving a place for all who believe .....thus opening the way into everlasting life.

Jesus said." If I go through the agony of death, and rise on the third day, and ascend into heaven, all for the purpose of preparing a place for you – then I will return and take you to be with me

Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father we thank you for a glimpse of Heaven – we thank you for your completed plan for our personal salvation so that at the end of time ,we know we have already experienced total forgiveness for our sins and we will be raised immortal beings .....living eternally.....surrounded by perfection and love

We pray for the world – each country & it's leaders– the meetings of world leaders.....their concern about climate change and democracy.....we pray for wisdom as the world attempts to make positive changes not only in the production of energy but also in relationships between peoples of the same & different countries throughout the world.

We pray for the Christian church in the world – for its cleansing and dedicated leadership.....for guidance and direction

Our new world needs new ideas for worship and service .....

Help us to realise our responsibility as a Christian....to represent Christ in our personal world ——in the space we each occupy

We pray for our own little Church ——it's members here this morning ——our families ,neighbours ,& friends

We remember our members who have moved to other areas to be with

family ....those with health issues ....and some who are in care  
We ask your blessing on My Aged Care and all its branches --- for wisdom  
& guidance as their helpful services allow so many elderly people to live  
successful, independent lives.

Lord, despite all the sad ,bad ,and ugly things we see on the daily TV News  
there is so much beauty and peace surrounding us here in Caves  
Beach..... help us to be joyous in our living.... filled with your love so that  
we are available to help, to listen and be concerned for those around us.  
..give us compassion, we pray.  
We thank you for inner peace, as we know that all is not lost because death  
is only the beginning of eternal life

We will sing 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 256** From heaven you came

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4963QPHAIM>

**BENEDICTION**

Go, with all the company of God's people, from this place now.

Draw near to the God who accompanies you,  
who protects and feeds you,  
and who extends freedom before you and within you.  
May you know fully who God is for you and who you are to God.  
Go with love, go with hope, go in peace!

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