

CAVES BEACH
3/2/24
LENT 3

CALL TO WORSHIP

Into our comfortable ways, O God,
breathe vigorous reflection.

Into our ordered ways, O God,
breathe lively innovation.

Into our worldly ways, O God,
breathe hints of holiness.

Into our self-seeking ways, O God,
breathe the notion of sacrifice, that we may walk the Lenten walk with Jesus, calmly, purposefully, and without fear. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Jesus took the hard road that led to Jerusalem.

We give thanks, O God, that we too can take the faithful way.

The disciple friends of Jesus were with him on that journey.

We give thanks, O God, for the friends who stay with us in the testing times.

Jesus was prepared to confront the evil ones of his day.

We give thanks, O God, for those who speak out against power and injustice today.

Jesus could face the cruel cross because you were with him.

We give thanks, O God, that in our Lenten challenges you are there – a rock, a leader, and the promise of eternal love. Amen.

HYMN 351 Lift high the cross

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

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

We acknowledge you, O God, as creator and as liberator. You are the One who brought the captives out of Egypt and delivered them from the oppression of slavery. You gave laws which shaped how people were to relate to you, to each other and to the whole environment. You implored people to worship only you, knowing that whatever was put in your place would become the object of idolatry - would become the priority of people's lives. In this time of worship, help us to focus on you, O God, as the priority

of our lives. Remind us of your steadfast love revealed so clearly in the new commandment of love which Jesus disclosed with his life and, as we especially remember in this period of Lent, with his death.

The word of the cross is the wisdom of God to those who are saved. Merciful God, we confess our bewilderment over the presence of any wisdom at all in such a dreadful act as the crucifixion of Jesus, your Son, our Lord. Each year as we hear the story again, we wonder - why did it have to happen? It seems as though evil triumphed in this wretched deed. Yet, when we know the outcome of the crucifixion, we realise that it was an act of powerful and sacrificial love, and that in the end, good did triumph over evil, life defeated death. And so, forgive us, O God, when we become so influenced by the wisdom of the world that we demand signs and seek intellectual certainty as proof of your existence . Forgive us when we get caught up in the quest for achievement and power, forgetting that Jesus' power was made perfect in weakness. Forgive our reluctance, O God, to proclaim with our lips and our lives that the crucified Christ is Lord of our lives and help us to empty ourselves of all that hinders such proclamation of our faith . Have mercy on us, O God, and strengthen us to do your will. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. Jesus Christ became for us, righteousness, and holiness and redemption. (from 1 Corinthians 1: vv 18,25,30) And so I declare to you, in Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

READINGS

- [1 Corinthians 1:18–25](#)

18 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scholar? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through

wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of the proclamation, to save those who believe. 22 For Jews ask for signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to gentiles, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

- [John 2:13–22](#)

13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves and the money changers seated at their tables. 15 Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, with the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." 18 The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

HYMN 276 There's a light upon the mountains

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuvbW7gVwal>

SERMON

Since Christmas we have been mainly following Mark's Gospel. For the next few weeks, as we approach Easter, we move over to John's Gospel.

Who can remember those songs we sang in Sunday School like: "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild...?" Any others come to mind ?

Now compare those ideas with this passage from John's Gospel. Here we have Jesus losing His temper. This story appears in all the Gospels. In the other Gospels it is set near the time when we have Jesus celebrating His last Passover.

However in John's Gospel this event occurs at the start of the His ministry, well before there is any inkling of the Easter event. This passage is part of John's attempt to introduce us to Jesus. Even before Jesus has His disputes with the civil and religious authorities we have Him taking on the money changers and peddlers in the Temple entrance. Here is someone who appears to be popular with everyone lashing out with some vengeance in entrance to the Temple precinct.

The issue for us to look at today is to consider what it was that Jesus was attacking? If Jesus had just been reinforcing the Ten Commandments it might have been easier for us. If Jesus was just going after thieves and adulterers that would be easy to recognise. Even if Jesus was pursuing the Pharisees for their legalistic approach to faith and the Sadducees for their aloof manner when dealing with ordinary people we could soon get on board with this approach.

Jesus did not refer to any of those common issues. He challenges those profiteering on people worshipping. This is not an attack on a gambling den, it is an open attack on commercially based religious practices which had built up in the Temple over generations.

Jews from all over the world came to worship in the Temple in Jerusalem. This attack by Jesus took place at one of the holiest times of the year, the Passover. It was a time when Jewish people gathered to celebrate what God had done in freeing them from slavery. There were religious leaders everywhere helping the people attending to fully celebrate that occasion, mostly for a fee. All the pilgrims and visitors wanted was for God to be present. The religious leaders wanted to be paid for their assistance and expertise.

The point which comes out here is a challenge to all people who lead in worship and associated religious activities.

You weren't allowed to put Roman coins in the Temple collection boxes. It had to be the Temple shekels. In order to get this currency you had to go to one of the Temple approved money changers. These people were set up in the Temple entrance as people arrived at the Temple.

Next to them were the people who sold sacrificial animals. If you were going to have an animal sacrificed then it had to be approved by the Temple authorities and whatever you brought with you would not be approved of.

Each of these traders obviously had to make some profit to allow them to survive. Over time it was a closed shop and it became very profitable line of business for those involved. This help and assistance came at some cost for the visitors no matter how poor they were.

This is the challenge for the church, even today. Jesus attacked and disrupted the trade of those who had built their empire out of visitors being forced to accept their services for a profit. With Jesus rampaging through the stalls and throwing the offering around the place the whole atmosphere of steady business was shattered.

Worship for Jesus is not a business transaction sold to the highest bidder and restricted to a few with the necessary cash.

Jesus showed that this was not what the worship was about. Those same people who had fallen on their faces in fear of God's revelation a few generations previously were now caught up by a religious mafia who held all the power over access to God's presence. God's love is not a commodity that can be traded even in our own modern economic rationalist times.

All of us have our individual spiritual needs. We need to have a meaningful relationship with God and have that guide us through life. If we flitter around internet we can find all sorts of spiritual instruction. All too often this has been packaged into attractive packages which are then displayed like some items on the supermarket shelves. We can then take our pick of what we want to suit us, then trot off to the checkout.

But the question remains for us, does this really suit our needs or is it just playing with token ideas without any real fulfilment.

For all too many people the local church has become a service centre to be used only when it is convenient.

In fact church should be a place where we come for the infusion of the spiritual energy we need to help us with the week ahead. One of my roles is to bring that to the service so that we are getting a balanced diet of spiritual food.

We all hunger for an encounter with the full experience of our awesome God. It is only as we encounter that spiritual input over a period of time that we develop a balanced diet which truly nourishes our faith. It can't possibly be absorbed in a few minutes a week but we need to draw on it in pieces which can be digested in the coming week, ready for the next helping the following week.

This not like jumping into some hologram of a burning bush or jumping on board with the latest mutterings of some self-proclaimed guru who pops up at our door offering their own brand of salvation.

This equally does not mean that we sit back comfortably at this time of year looking to take the easiest path on the road following Jesus to the cross. The good news of the Lenten journey is one of moving out of our comfort zone. Jesus is mad at trite expressions of our faith which don't connect with the fullness of God's message. Side issues like money changers and the peddling of indulgences are far from the place where Jesus invites us to worship.

Prettily packaged ideas of nice, convenient and false spiritualities are what causes Jesus to lash out with His whip and upend their nice cosy little display tables. Like those in the Temple forecourt in Jerusalem Jesus will confront every aspect of those who will promote and divert us away from the true essence of God.

The commands which God gave us aren't simply a means of getting what we want all the time. Genuinely exposed to prayer and spiritual discernment God will expose our selfish and petty ideas and mould us into followers of Jesus.

How many of us come to worship to simply fill the 'God shaped' hole that we think we have in our lives. If we approach our worship with an open heart the reality is that we can so easily be confronted with a God who is willing to kick our doors down as we discover that our conveniently

constructed ideas are not acceptable to God who will then overturn our complacency leaving those old ideas rolling across the floor.

The reality is if that if all we want is a 'nice' and 'feel good' religion then don't come looking to Jesus for an easy way out. Looking across the bookshelves in any self-help book shop, or on the internet, you can find any number of self-designed religious ideas which you can adapt to suit your feelings today. Immersing yourself in the Bible and exposing yourself to the love and grace taught to us by Christ is not the easy and comfortable way forward.

If, however, you want to hand yourself over, body and soul, to the God of the universe, to the often frightening and all-consuming God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, then you are welcome to approach Jesus and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It is interesting today that we are also celebrating Communion. Is it something that we just go through each month or does it signify our connection with the crucified Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit still with us today?

In the process the bread brings to us the body of Christ and the juice is the blood of Christ. It is not just a few morsels of food aimlessly consumed but a deep act coming from our faith. In the process the Holy Spirit joins with us to empower our ongoing spiritual life.

This is the Christ who smashed the tables of those who sought to profit from the presence of God in the Temple. Jesus still comes to disrupt our lives and our complacency when we start to do things only because it is the routine rather than connecting with the living God.

HYMN 609 May the mind of Christ my saviour
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gE5fOXSymBc>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

This is a place where we celebrate God's generosity in our lives. Let's express our gratitude and our joy in the giving of our offerings.

Loving God, we are grateful for how you have enriched our lives. Keep helping us to embrace and participate in your economy of grace. Receive our offering as one expression of this. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Hamilton Wesley Uniting Church meets each Sunday at 9:30am. The congregation operates a café, book shop and op shop in the church. Customers include some refugees stocking up on bed linen and crockery for the women housed in their facilities, university students, people in need. Life Dinners are held monthly at a hotel or café with focused topical discipleship discussions. Incredible Edibles is a social group for church members to meet each other in a casual atmosphere and to bring their partners who do not attend church.

The Hive (previously known as Fellowship House) is community focused with the first floor totally occupied by Wesley Mission services, child, youth and family services, queer youth groups and an employment agency. The ground floor provides space for community activities and the rooms are booked for gatherings of various not-for-profit groups.

Prayer: Creative God, we pray for discernment through the process of Mission planning, inviting us to explore as a community, who God is calling us to be in this time and place. We pray for wisdom and guidance as a community of lifelong learners in discipleship, growing our following, worship and serving our community in mission, focused here and in Newcastle city.

Jesus, compassionate God, friend of sinners,
the whole world is longing for grace, for resurrection.

Where you go, healing happens.

Where you go, forgiveness happens.

Where you go, renewal and reconciliation happen.

You say that we are divine temples,

homes for the indwelling Spirit –

for the living God – for you!

So, we think about your people here,

and we ask that you help us to take this seriously –

that we might be places where heaven and earth overlap.

We think about all the places our people go.

We think about each of our homes and ask that your healing, forgiving, renewing love would pour forth in these places.

Bless our families.
Bless our loved ones.
Bless this community.
And we think about the steps we take,
the people we meet,
the people we pass along the way –
let there be moments of grace and wonder, peace, and wholeness.
May you touch people's lives through us.
Help us to approach all people with a kind of reverence and deep respect –
each person worthy, each person a temple, a sanctuary,
a sacred dwelling place for you in this world.
May healing come.
May forgiveness come.
May renewal and reconciliation come.

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 540 Christians lift your hearts and voices **Sorry no link for this one**

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 537 Let us talents and tongues employ
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYnF86ZzHH8>

BENEDICTION

Brothers and sisters, it is time to leave this place.
You are like a sun rising,
ready to glow with divine love and purpose in all the places you will go.
So, blaze with joy; delight in the invitations that God has placed before you.
And may God's wisdom be sweet to taste,
may Christ's guiding voice be like gold to you,
and may the company of the Holy Spirit fill you with an immensity of
wonder and purpose, for you are a sanctuary of the living God.
Go in peace.

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