

PENTECOST 22
20/10/24
CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

Greet this morning with joy!

A new week with all its opportunities lies ahead of us.

Greet this morning with thanksgiving!

This is the time of praise and prayer, the time to remember God's creative generosity.

Greet this morning with care!

We are aware of our responsibility as people of God.

Greet this morning with Christ!

On the first day of the week we celebrate Christ's rising from death.

Opening Prayer

If only humankind would face the consequences of its actions,
your realm of justice and peace, O God, would be clearer and come closer.

If only humankind would realize the Source of its life-giving goodness,

worship would be inspired and faith communities would throb with new life.

If only the church would sense its need to venture into a suffering world,

mission would be alive again and persons would take to heart the compassionate example of Jesus Christ.

If only the impact of Jesus could be felt in our personal lives,
each moment would be fully lived and our struggles would be endured faithfully.

O God, bring our most cherished hopes to reality! **Amen**

HYMN 133 O worship the King

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Great and awesome God, creator and source of all life, we worship and praise you. Out of chaos and darkness, you spoke the words which brought order and light and life to birth. We marvel at such evidence of your greatness and glory. Yet, you laid these aside when you took on human flesh in Jesus Christ. In him we gained a new understanding of your power and glory, for he revealed through his life, that true power is based on empowering others, and that glory is made visible through loving and serving others. We marvel anew at the depth of your care for us, and the many ways our lives have been blessed by the sacrificial life and love of Jesus in whose name we pray.

God, we know that Jesus was not concerned with rank or privilege.

We know that he lived in the truth that all people are your children.

He knew that everyone he met was created in your image.

We know he welcomed all as you welcomed him.

We know this, and yet, we find it so hard to abandon all the false hierarchies amongst us.

We find it impossible to live without comparing ourselves to others.

And, so very often, we do not see the glory of God shining from the face of another.

Forgive us, God.

Forgive us our little systems of control, our prejudices, pettiness, and smallness.

And all of this while we live in your world of goodness.

Forgive us. This is our humble prayer.

Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Here this, family of God, community of faith!

Forgiveness is yours!

It comes free, unconstrained and abundant,
on this day and on all days.

Thanks be to God!

Thanks be to God!

READINGS

- **Hebrews 5:1–10**

Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness, 3 and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. 4 And one does not presume to take this honour but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was. 5 So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest but was appointed by the one who said to him,

“You are my Son;

today I have begotten you”;

6 as he says also in another place,

“You are a priest forever,

according to the order of Melchizedek.”

7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered, 9 and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, 10 having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

- **Mark 10:35–45**

35 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” 36 And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” 37 And they said to him, “Appoint us to sit, one at your

right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” 38 But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” 39 They replied, “We are able.” Then Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized you will be baptized, 40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to appoint, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

41 When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. 42 So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.

43 But it is not so among you; instead, whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.”

HYMN 454 Worship the Lord

SERMON

I was reading the other day about a pastor travelling to a concert with his church choir. One of the members of the choir was an experienced opera singer. The pastor found that it was interesting to compare the dynamics of a church choir to a company of professional singers. There were certainly some differences, but both groups shared a love of music.

It was apparent that the differences were especially obvious when it came to egotistical behaviour among some of the opera people. This is where we get the phrase ‘prima donna’ from. (It is the technical name for the female lead singer in the opera.) However, there was a prime example of this style of behaviour from one or two of the chorus in the opera. This was seen when some chorus members, despite playing minor roles, insisted on being front and

centre for the final bows. This certainly did not endear them to their fellow chorus members.

In today's reading James and John lobby Jesus to try and reserve a special place for themselves when Jesus is in glory. This made me reflect on the comment by the opera singer about people self-promoting themselves. However in the light of the thoughts of James Alison in his book 'The Joy of Being Wrong' there is perhaps another way to look at this passage rather than outright criticism of people self-promoting themselves.

Rather than immediately criticising James and John, perhaps Jesus wasn't rebuking them at all. Instead, he may have been acknowledging their deep commitment. When they express their desire to follow Jesus, even they don't understand the cost, Jesus doesn't condemn them. He simply points out it isn't up to Him to grant such positions.

Interestingly, it's the reaction of the other disciples that stands out. They complain about James and John's ambition, much like how we challenge those who seem too eager to stand out. But could it be that Jesus was actually challenging the other 10 disciples, and by extension us, for our lack of enthusiasm. Could it be that instead of rebuking James and John, He was subtly encouraging their boldness?

Jesus had previously criticised "prima donna" behaviour as seen when He caught them arguing who was the greatest. But here, James and John weren't trying to be the greatest they were simply expressing their dedication. Perhaps their request wasn't about seeking glory but about being fully committed to Jesus no matter the cost.

If this is the case then Jesus is not criticising them, rather He is questioning them as to whether they really recognise the full cost of following in His footsteps.

“Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with?”

These two seem to be firm in their commitment: “We are.” Now Jesus affirms their commitment and goes on to say: ‘Unfortunately, you will indeed drink the same cup and go through the same baptism. But as to whether you will be the ones on my right and my left when we get there, I won’t be the one arranging that.’

Can we see what Jesus is pointing out here? He is pointing to the cross and he talks about His impending death He tells them that when He is hung on that cross in glory He will have no say in who is with Him in glory.

There is no element of criticism here of James and John. In fact Jesus might have been pleased that at least two of His disciples were so committed in their belief in Him and His teaching as well as them being prepared to endure whatever was ahead.

This made me wonder, why like the 10 disciples, I had been so quick to judge James and John. Was their dedication highlighting my own lukewarm commitment? Was it easier to criticise their enthusiasm rather than rise to the same level of passion? Could it be that we, too sometimes tear others down simply because they make us feel insecure about our own half heartedness?

It is here that we might see that Jesus can see through all these games. It is not about James and John; it is about me. When I have spoken about their competitiveness and arrogance in the

past it was simply projecting my failure to see Jesus in His full light.

Here James Allison brings out the need to reflect differently. We need to rethink the whole idea of how our desires influence Christian ethics. How often have these thoughts in the past centred on the belief that what God actually wants is for us to say no to our desires and move into a life of stern denial.

There are, of course, some human desires that we need to keep a lid on. We need to pass over the desire to seek revenge, or to pursue humiliation of those who would have a different opinion to ours. However there is nothing wrong with seeking to live a more fulfilled life, deeper personal relationships, experiencing fantastic joy and even to be humbly recognised for our efforts. These are things which Jesus applauded in His teaching.

Jesus left with us the message that we should live life to the full so that our humanity is fulfilled. I can see nowhere in the Gospels where Jesus sought to make us passionless people who denied the fullness of life. Jesus would not want us to cut out all of our desires. Jesus simply sought to encourage us to live a life which overcame some peoples' toxic domination and control of God's creation.

When we reflect we can perhaps see that James and John simply wanted the best for Jesus and His message was to be celebrated and shared. Was it that the other 10 disciples found their own restricted and stifling approach too much to deal with so that they turned on these two?

Just a few verses earlier in Mark's Gospel we hear Jesus teaching His disciples that they had to receive His guidance like little children if they wanted to live the way that God intended.

Could it be that both John and James were the only ones to really take this guidance on board?

It is not that little children are always completely innocent. Let's face it if you have raised children you will understand that they can be difficult at times. However they are whole lot more direct in seeking out what they want than most adults. They just come out without any reservations when they are concentrating on something they desire. This is the directness that Jesus was seeking from His disciples.

If we have been the ones targeting the people like James and John then perhaps we need to rethink our approach. We should not try and crush the passion of people seeking to be more like Jesus. We should have the courage to reach out and speak out clearly about what Jesus has shown us.

This passage from Mark is not a harsh rebuke, rather it is an encouragement to shake off the chains which bind us and hold us back from fully expressing God's love. There is a passionate life calling on us to join in the dance of freedom. We need to seek out our desire to be the best example of the person that God created us to be.

Instead of pulling others back and holding ourselves back we need to go ahead freely and joyously praising and sharing the excitement that is the future with God's love in our lives. We need to be like James, John and the little children sharing freely that love of God and the freedom promised to all of us.

HYMN 256 From heaven you came

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

God, who gives life to all,
who gives the world its life,

who is the life of the whole universe,
we bring our giving to you.
May the giving of ourselves in service to you
and your world be a true giving in joy and humility.
Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Good morning my brothers and sisters in Christ!

Let us pray,
Father, we are thankful that You act on behalf of Your children, as
you and love each one of us perfectly.
What a blessing it is that we can confidently come into Your
Presence in prayer.
In Jesus's name, Amen.

A quote from St Francis Assisi:

“O” Divine Master, grant that we do not seek so much as to be
consoled, as it is to console,
to be understood as it is to understand, to be loved as it is to love,
for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning, that we are
pardoned.
Let us pray,

Everlasting God, be present in all places where there is suffering,
violence or pain.

We especially pray for those people living through war or
oppression and the many who are
forced to leave their homes to seek refuge elsewhere. Be with
those who are trying to bring
peace in areas of warfare and terrorism and for the relief agencies
trying so hard to bring food
and medicine to those who are suffering.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Creator God, we pray that you will guide those who administer justice that they may be honest and merciful in all that they do and give wisdom to all who make laws, ensuring that the laws that they make, may always prevail for the common good. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Lord, we pray for peace in a world full of chaos and uncertainty. Help us to remain calm and centered in your love. Let your peace guard our minds and souls. Thank you Lord, for the blessings you have bestowed upon us. Even in difficult times, help us to have hearts of gratitude. May we always find reasons to thank you and to appreciate your goodness. And Father, we ask for patience, in moments of frustration, help us to remain calm and trust in your timing. Lord, In your mercy, hear our prayers.

This weeks congregation from the Hunter Presbytery Prayer Diary is the Grahamstown - Raymond Terrace Uniting Church. The Raymond Terrace Uniting Church is one of the 5 congregations in the Grahamstown Multi-Centre Congregation. They are a welcoming group of about 20 who meet each Sunday at 9am. Every month they have a Sunday lunch after the service and there is a weekly Bible Study on Friday afternoons. They join with their other congregations for a social gathering once a month.

Lord, we pray for the Raymond Terrace Uniting Church and the Grahamstown Multi Centre congregations for guidance in continuing to seek ways to appreciate the similarities and value the differences that build

A diverse and responsive church, locally and beyond.
Lord, in your mercy, hear their prayers.

Lord, Thank you for keeping us all safe and hidden from the
darkness of this world in your
amazing arms of light, love, grace and mercy. Thanks be to God.
In the name of your beloved Son, Christ Jesus.
Amen.

Please join me in singing the Lords prayer.

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 342 When I survey the wonderous cross

BENEDICTION

God calls us to courage.
God calls us to step into the unknown
with only the trust and hope of God's presence,
with only the role of the servant to guide us.
So, let us go in courage.
Let us go in hope.
Let us go in trust.

Let us go in God.
Amen.