

CAVES BEACH

25/2/24

Lent 2

CALL TO WORSHIP

Covenant God, God of Abraham and of Sarah, we come before you.

You will keep your word!

Covenant God, God of Amos and of Jeremiah, we come before you.

You will keep your promises!

Covenant God, God of the New Covenant in Jesus, we come before you.

The cross is your trusted sign!

Covenant God, God whose love is sealed in the waters of baptism, we come before you.

Your covenant endures!

Opening Prayer (based on Mark 8:31–38)

We stand with the disciples and listen to Jesus;

we cannot believe that God's Chosen One must suffer.

We reflect with the disciples;

there has to be another way, a way of compromise.

Then, Jesus foretells his death and we are stunned;

we agree with Peter: "Jesus you have got it wrong!"

The heart-wrenching truth comes home to us;

as followers of the Jesus Way, we are called to share the sacrificial path. O God, give us the courage to stay faithful!

Amen.

HYMN 52 Let us sing to the God of salvation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KU3yTLEX6LQ>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Here's our story;

here's our song;

here is the joy of our hearts:

Our God is present in the eye of the storm –

even those storms of our own making.

This God does not turn away,

does not leave us out in the cold –

naked, empty, abandoned.

Our God is with us; never lets us go.
We cry out and know that we are heard.
Which is why we cry out in our heartache
and we cry out in our praise.
for you, God, are with us through thick and thin.
You gather us and bring us to the table
and feed all that is good and hopeful within us –
strengthening us, guiding us, leading us into life.

Gracious God, you reached into Abraham and Sarah's lives and asked them to dream the impossible dream - that you would transform what appears to have been a barren and lifeless situation into one overflowing with promise and hope - and, through faith in you, they believed your promises.

Forgive us, O God, if we never get beyond thinking of your call on our lives as an impossible dream or even as an unwelcome interruption. Faithful God, the apostle Paul emphasises Abraham's complete trust and faith in your promises and how he grew ever stronger in faith, fully convinced of your ability to fulfil what had been promised.

Forgive us, O God, when we find it hard even to hear your promises tempting us to trust the newest and trendiest product to realise our dreams. Merciful God, Jesus revealed the great depth of your love in his determination to defeat evil even when this meant giving up his own life. Forgive us, O God, when we allow the power of evil to flourish because we fear that taking up one's cross would be just too costly an exercise.

Silent reflection on these words

Gracious and loving God, forgive our lack of trust in you;
Have mercy on us and forgive us.
Help us when we hesitate, and strengthen us when we are weak
Breathe your Spirit afresh into our hearts and minds - our lives -so that we
have the courage to follow Jesus wherever he takes us. Amen

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

"Faith was reckoned as righteousness...to us who believe in the One who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death because of our sins and was raised for the sake of our righteousness."
Romans 4:20-25. Hear and believe these words about God's amazing grace, grace experienced through Jesus' sacrificial love, as forgiveness of sins. Amen

READINGS

- **Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16**

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. 2 And I will make my covenant between me and you and will make you exceedingly numerous." 3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God said to him, 4 "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7 I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

15 God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16 I will bless her and also give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

- **Romans 4:13-25**

13 For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. 14 For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. 15 For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there transgression.

16 For this reason the promise depends on faith, in order that it may rest on grace, so that it may be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (who is the father of all of us, 17 as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"), in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. 18 Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So shall your descendants be." 19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), and the barrenness of Sarah's womb. 20 No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21 being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. 22 Therefore "it was reckoned to him as righteousness." 23 Now

the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone 24 but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 who was handed over for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

- **Mark 8:31–38**

31 Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again. 32 He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

34 He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, “If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. 36 For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? 37 Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 38 Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

HYMN 618 What does the Lord require

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wV5TPulkHS0>

SERMON

Many people with an evangelical protestant background can be very wary of any sort of involvement in something called a Lenten journey. This is because it has a history of some high church mumbo-jumbo. It is in fact an invitation to focus on ourselves as we look back on our spiritual journey. By making this journey we are invited to enter into an experience that makes us reflect on where our faith is at today.

When writing to the Christians in Rome Paul very clearly tells the faithful that God is prepared to accept us and therefore extends grace to us. This is not achievable through hard work or blind obedience to some human laws. Paul tells us that God’s acceptance does not need to be earned at all.

What some people seem to forget is that acceptance is already in place. God has always been ready to welcome us and bring us into His family full of grace. In fact all we have to do is put our trust in God. This offer is a free gift coming from God and ignores all those things which we might think makes us ineligible.

Looking further into the passage from Paul we can also see plenty of reasons to remind us that the abundant love offered by God includes His eagerness to forgive and accept us. This does not allow us to cop out on the simple efforts we need to make to remain in faithful obedience to God's call.

To illustrate this simple trust Paul takes the example of Abraham from the Old Testament. The 'simple' faith that Abraham showed included being prepared to set out into the unknown blindly following God's calling. This 'simple' faith carried through to relying on God's promises even when it seemed completely futile. Who would have considered his wife giving birth at such an advanced age.

We need to reflect on this faith as we look around us at a world that seems headed for wars and conflicts in almost every direction. In the middle of this hopelessness and despair I can admit to sometimes being hard pressed to hold onto the idea that Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, cleansed the world of hatred, hostility and death. It is hard to undertake the sort of vulnerability required of me to progress my willingness to care for people in the message from Christ with that idea at the back of my mind.

So how do we cope with a world where everything we hope for seems to be overwhelmed by demonic pressures. Praying for world peace at this time seems very similar to that prayer offered up by Abraham wanting his wife to bear him a child, even at her advanced age.

No matter how earnestly we hope and pray for it and no matter how many people are calling for reconciliation all the odds seem to be stacked against an end to bloody conflicts.

In the light of this what does it mean to persevere with a faith?

If we look at the Abraham story we are drawn into trusting that God will fulfil His promises. For Abraham it meant that he and Sarah had a child. This

does not mean that there will be no wars in the Middle East or Africa or even in the countries to our north. God has not promised the disarmament of the world's powers.

All too often in past centuries churches have seen themselves as part of the final unfolding of a world where a nirvana is brought about by peace, love and happiness. The history we have from these forebears and the early church seems to be a bit negative about the rise of justice and peace. We are called to trust God's promise but not to actually implement it. It is not our hard work which will bring about global peace. If that were so it would preclude God from the equation.

Simply put, we are called on to bear witness to Christ's imminent victory by trusting and supporting the One who brings life out of death. We are not God, so we can't bring peace about just by our actions, no matter how well intentioned we are. There is nothing wrong in publicly demonstrating for peace but we do so simply by witnessing our commitment to the Prince of Peace.

If we think back to the people's revolution in the Philippines a few years ago now when the then president Marcos was brought down by people gathering to witness to the alternatives to his actions as the ruling dictator. Maintaining the peace in the face of people who are hell-bent on conflict means that we can refuse to cooperate with those war mongers and allow the Prince of Peace to move through the community shining the unquenchable light of peace in times of darkness and hostility.

This then brings us to the question as to how we maintain our faith in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. It can seem obvious to talk globally about movements for peace but on the other hand, how do I train my natural response to those who are promoting violence and separation.

A violent reaction to those who try to provoke inappropriate responses by me would mean that my wider prayers are not reflected in my personal life. I need to be able to demonstrate genuine love, care and compassion when I am calling on others to do this world-wide.

We need to be able to confront the natural propensity of our emotions to respond with equal violence and hatred by demonstrating our compassion to those things causing pain and confusion. Like Abraham we need to hold

strongly to where our faith leads us even in the face of achieving what seems impossible.

When we take the time to honestly look at ourselves and our lives over the last year, we are called to trust the promise that we are not only seen by God as being righteous as we follow Christ's words for us but also we must continue to follow this path so we can start to be transfigured into the image of Christ. The calling of our Lenten Journey is to renew our commitment to living in the fullness and love which Jesus taught us.

In order to achieve this we are challenged not to just offer some intellectual agreement but to offer our full cooperation to the One who will break through our defences and guide us into the terror of the unknown. It is not about us earning salvation but it is about accepting the bountiful gracious gifts of God's love and mercy.

Maintaining and renewing and refreshing our faith is not about having all the answers as to how God will bring to fruition the seemingly impossible. It is about believing that God can make it happen. It is about trusting a God who is bigger than the obstacles that exist. We need to allow ourselves to be whatever God calls us to be.

I feel very inadequate at some of the tasks which God has called me to take part in. In retrospect I can recognise that God has a bigger plan for each of us.

Even Abraham could not foresee the future. I am no more called to understand how it happens that Abraham could all those years ago. Biology for senior citizens and the reproductive processes was beyond Abraham. Like Abraham I am simply called to allow myself to hear God's calling in the face of insurmountable odds.

As we undertake this Lenten journey together, each of us is being called to take new steps into the experience of God's transfiguring mercy and love. And many of us will be called to journey in directions that bring us up against things that stretch our capacity to believe that things are not hopeless and that God will reconcile all things in Christ.

As we gather each week we receive the witness from those who have gone before us that even the tragedy of the torturous killing of Jesus at the hands

of people like us cannot derail God's project of reconciling us and our war-weary world.

But in the most stunning demonstration of God's generosity his broken body actually becomes the bread of life that nourishes us for the challenges of the unknown road ahead.

HYMN 607 Make me a channel of you peace
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2svZhZT6Pro>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

Our lives are defined by generosity, mercy, and grace. Let's give from this place with our offering.

God of love, thank you for the gifts that you have given us. Keep shaping us as a gift-giving community. Bring blessing through these offerings today. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE Leiza Steele

Good morning everyone,
These prayers were a bit of a challenge for me but with Gods love and guidance I managed to get them done.

This week for me has been all about God's promises. Which he always keeps and fullfills no matter what, and know we will receive Gods promises through the righteousness that comes by faith. So we pray and ask, believe and we will receive in His time, place and in His way. Thanks be to God.

I know God is faithful; he will bring a release from the weight of our worries. So let's hold on to the perspective that God is at work and that we keep our eyes fixed on Him with our trust and love. Thank you, Lord.

Let us pray,

We pray for those in Ukraine, fleeing to places of safety with suitcases packed with ordinary things of life so they may live simply. Their lives suddenly coming down to one small suitcase, dragged through the snow, rain and the bitter cold.

Lord, we pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ who have been caught in the crossfire in both Israel and Gaza. O Lord, please preserve life and shelter for those who own and proclaim your name in those lands. We pray

that the peoples of Israel and the Middle East will find everlasting hope in you. And in the land of your Son's redeeming death and resurrection, turn hearts to look to the Saviour and live.

Lord God, we pray for everyone in the world. Lord, you know each one of us as you created us in our Mothers womb and gave us all individual and unique gifts. And you have plans for each one of us which will help us prosper and grow. Lord, you know where our hearts stand with you. Loving God we acknowledge that we are blessed in this land as you have given us peace and freedom. In this country we have a society with a rich variety of people that have come from many lands. We thank you for the church in Australia. Inspire us to promote the unity of your church as we pray for all congregations and its clergy. We pray for the Federal and State Governments of this country and for all the positions of authority. We pray that they may govern wisely and justly so that all may live in peace and safety.

Lord, we pray for all who are suffering in all of the war torn countries, domestic violence, persecution and injustice. All who are in fear of their lives. Lord, comfort them when they are in pain. Give them your peace when they are experiencing anxiety or fear. And give them your strength when they are weak. Lord, guide them to safer places. Lord, help them know you are with them always. That you never give up on us. Thanks be to God. In the precious name of your beloved son, our amazing Lord and Saviour, Christ Jesus. Amen.

Please join me in the Lord's 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 411 Filled with the Spirit's power

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aF8wLOyjIWE>

BENEDICTION

Jesus is courageous and ready to lead us.

He shows us how to embrace the world as it is –
warts and all –

with compassion, with love,

with a heart that breaks

but never stops beating

for you,

for me,

for the whole cosmos.

So, enter into this love.

Become one with it.

Let it shape your imagination and your will.

And follow in the footsteps of Jesus, who goes before us all.

May you find your way into Godly aliveness.

May you be held by Jesus' affection,

and draw from deep wells of Holy Spirit joy and creativity.

Go in peace!

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