

**EASTER 3**  
**14/4/24**  
**CAVES BEACH**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

God's Word calls us to thanksgiving.

**"Give thanks to God; God is good, God's love is eternal."**

God's Word calls us to praise.

**"Praise God! All who serve God, all who worship in the Lord's house."**

God's Word calls us to community in faith.

**"How wonderful it is, how pleasant for God's people to live together in harmony."**

God's Word calls us to freedom and justice.

**"God hears the groans of the prisoners, and sets free those who were doomed to die."**

**Opening Prayer**

Surprise us, O most glorious God!

**Surprise us with your message of hope, when the world seems a hostile place.**

Surprise us, O most caring God!

**Surprise us with your sustaining presence, when we do not know where to turn.**

Surprise us, O most challenging God!

**Surprise us with your way of justice and truth, when the easy way beckons.**

Surprise us, O most revealing God!

**Surprise us with the face of Jesus Christ, in the most unexpected of persons. Amen.**

**HYMN 209** And can it be

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dC8HSEKtuio>

**PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION**

Lord Jesus Christ, the light of your love shines on, illuminating the places where you are present. As the bewildered disciples pondered the stories of your appearance, you penetrated the darkness of their fear and doubt with your word of peace.

You showed them the appalling marks of evil pierced on your hands and feet.

You opened their minds to understand why you had to die to defeat such evil and death.

Increase our understanding, we pray and open our minds and hearts to receive you, Lord.

Speak your word of peace to us and let your love shine on any dark areas in our lives.

May this worship which we offer in your name, be a worthy response to your love and your sacrifice for us.

God of reality,

our gospel text for this week

tells us that when they saw Jesus after his resurrection,

the disciples thought they were seeing a ghost.

They could not distinguish reality from unreality.

We are often the same, God of truth.

We so often live as if how others categorise us,

and how we talk about ourselves in our own minds is the truth of who we are.

We too often think that our gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, and income level define who we are.

We so easily take the counterfeit for reality.

Forgive us and give us the wisdom and courage

to see truly and to live fully

in the reality that all of creation comes from you

and that we are your offspring.

Amen.

## **WORDS OF ASSURANCE**

Friends,

we are loved by the God of the universe.

This is the truth of our lives.

We are loved.

We are forgiven.

Know this is true!

## **READINGS**

- **1 John 3:1–7**

1 See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. 3 And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. 4 Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

- **Luke 24:36b–48**

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 37 They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. 38 He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." 40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41 Yet for all their joy they were still disbelieving and wondering, and he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate in their presence.

44 Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 46 and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things.

**HYMN 658** I the Lord of sea and sky

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zr9SMm1gll>

## **SERMON**

This week we continue to look at the resurrection it this week we move from looking at John's view of the gathering in the upper room to seeing how Luke recalls that event.

Many parts of the Christian community can become deeply divided when their discussions turn to describing how they read and interpret the Bible. This really comes out when we try to discuss controversial ethical and social issues, like sexuality and abortion and drug reform.

Most of these issues then come back to how we view and interpret the Bible. One of the harder things is when we rely on our interpretation of the Bible to support our arguments in these debates. People who are engaged in these debates then turn on their opponents criticising them for their differing interpretations.

One pastor received this email which I think sets out clearly how people can try to make those with differing opinions wrong:

“I don’t think you should label yourself as an ‘Evangelical Pastor’. Evangelicals are basically the only remaining group who come totally and utterly under the authority of the Bible. Every year more and more churches and pastors slip further and further away from the Bible and slowly add and change more and more of it to suit their desires and needs. ... You comments on (***the issue of the time***) automatically removes you from being evangelical. Why? Because you are upholding a view that is against the Bible. Simple really.”

This sort of argument seems simple, but is it true? That pastor was challenged for ‘twisting scripture’ to suit himself. Some people also think that others selectively quote from the Bible just to support their pre-existing opinion. It is not uncommon for me to hear people say that they take every line of the Bible literally. They say that this means that they consider that their opinions come from an unbiased understanding of the Bible.

On the other hand it does not take long for these people to selectively quote from the Bible to declare something is forbidden by scripture. What does escape their consideration is the fact that at the same time they are disregarding vast tracts of the Bible which don’t suit their views.

The reality is that we all look at the Bible selectively, no matter how deep or shallow our Biblical knowledge is. We all tend to select the parts which best suit our perspective.

As the followers of Jesus we really should start out by looking at how Jesus regarded scripture. In today’s reading we heard:

“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 46 and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things.

We hear how Jesus is opening the disciples up to understand scripture. This tells us how Jesus approached scripture. This passage doesn't tell us that the Bible opened their minds to understand Jesus. In fact we can hear Jesus say that we don't begin with the Bible. This doesn't mean that the Bible has no authority, rather we are told that the authority comes in and through Jesus.

We when we read and study the Bible we need to look at it as Jesus centred. Jesus doesn't tell us that everything in the laws of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. That would be a selective view of the Bible ignoring the teachings of Jesus.

When asked about His opinion as to what was the most important commandment in the Bible, Jesus saw this as a loaded question. Some of the audience would have suggested that all the Commandments were equally important. To deny this would have left Jesus open to charges of blasphemy.

Jesus simply quoted this fundamental command: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Jesus then goes on to advise us that all the rest of the laws and prophetic passages are to be considered in the light of this Commandment.

Elsewhere Jesus does approach scripture selectively. In His sermon at the start of His public ministry Jesus gets into trouble with the locals when He selectively interpreted a well known passage from Isaiah. This passage refers to the Spirit of the Lord being on Him as He preached and proclaimed the year of the Lord's favour. We can note here that Jesus edited out the reference to the day of vengeance.

Even when the congregation started to mutter in discontent, Jesus leaves no doubt that He is doing God's work. Jesus went on to quote from other passages to affirm that God's favour even extended to those who were only interested in the vengeance part.

In retrospect we can see that Jesus goes out of His way to show that God extends unconditional love without the need for vengeance. God is not sitting back waiting for the day when He can destroy all those who have failed to measure up to some law.

This sort of controversy was no stranger to Jesus during His ministry. Jesus keeps preaching about and living this message right up until He was hanging on the cross. Here is Jesus just days after His crucifixion continuing to interpret scripture and opening His followers' minds so they can take over His work.

Jesus did not come to reinforce some particular party line when it comes to scripture. Jesus encouraged His followers to fundamentally reconsider the old ways of looking at scripture. Jesus' message was that the people of those times had misunderstood God and the scriptural passages which supported those views were wrong.

When we reflect on the Bible as a whole we can look at it as an ongoing revelation of who God is and what are God's expectations. In doing this we can also see that there are differing views from the various writers.

For instance the book of Job in the Old Testament is based around an hypothetical argument between those who think that all suffering is inflicted by God and those who consider that all too often it is the innocent who suffer. In this debate both sides express their approach and it is only towards the end of the book of Job that we clearly hear God tell us that those who consider suffering is God's judgement are wrong.

Throughout the rest of the Bible there are very few sections which offer us a summary as to which argument should be preferred. For us there is a simple response to this dilemma. JESUS!

If we genuinely want answers to our questions about what God wants and how God views things we need to look at the Bible through the guidance which Jesus left us with. Just as we read in Luke this morning Jesus opens

our minds to see the full picture given to us in scripture and to understand what it says about Jesus.

Through the presence of the Holy Spirit it is the risen Christ who provides us with illumination on these issues. Here we need to understand that the Bible is not the 'last will and testament' of a dearly departed god. What we need to consider is that we are not debating a will but we are invited to enter into a living document through the guidance of the risen Christ's Holy Spirit. Is Jesus our living Lord or do we just think of and commemorate the legacy of a dead person?

We can all easily attest to the 'living Jesus.' The radical life given to us even today through the Holy Spirit is the key which unlocks the Bible for us. Here we can see God is the one who defeated death. God is about life and growth and hope. Thinking back to how Jesus appeared in that locked upper room His followers saw those wounds of death, not as a final outcome, but as evidence that death no longer is something to be feared as it had been defeated.

Those wounds are now reference points which evidence that victory. Even as He was considered the lamb sent to be slaughtered He lives and reigns forever. Jesus suffers in every death yet that has no power to stop Him living, loving and forgiving. . "The Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead, and repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all."

The Holy Spirit gifted to us by Jesus and God can open our minds so that we can gain insight through reading the Bible. We have the option to decide between those passages which portray death or build on those which are all about life. When biblical texts portray God as a god of vengeance, as a god who demands payment in blood, as a god who would willingly consign anyone to eternal death, then we can be as selective as Jesus was.

Whenever the Bible portrays a god who does not look and act and live and love like Jesus, we can safely conclude that it is telling us some true things about our false perceptions of God, but it is not telling us the truth about the God who is made known to us in Jesus.

The reality is that if we try hard enough we can justify anything by selectively quoting the Bible. However we can't justify anything which goes against the teachings of the risen Christ. Christ only ever speaks of love and grace and forgiveness. This is why we give extra prominence to the readings we hear from the Gospels over the readings we hear from the other parts of the Bible. It is not that the Gospel writers were perfect either, but it is that in the Gospels we have the primary witness of Jesus, and so we come closest to the primary revelation of God, which is Jesus himself, crucified, risen and alive and speaking forever to all who will follow him.

As time goes on and I deepen my knowledge and understanding of the Biblical witness it constantly allows me to share Christ's life changing ways. I hope and pray that that is increasingly true for each of you too.

But, to use the words of the email correspondent I quoted earlier, I do not intend to become someone who is totally and utterly under the authority of the Bible. I want to live totally under the authority of the risen crucified Christ who will use the Bible as one of his ways of speaking to me. Jesus can open my mind to understand the scriptures, and most importantly to discern and understand those parts which are about him, about life, about love, about mercy, about the one who is not a dead hero we commemorate but the living Lord we worship.

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

### **PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING**

God is generous in all that God does in making and sustaining this world of wonders. Let us participate in that generosity and give in love and hope.

God of love,

take what we give here as you take us,  
in love, grace, and care.

May what we give here

and what we give in other ways and places

be for a flourishing of a world of truth and goodness for all.

Amen.

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

God of truth,



we are a culture in crisis.  
We can't tell what is real from what is not real.  
We are assaulted by leaders who pride themselves  
on manufacturing lies that they peddle as truth.  
We are overwhelmed by artificial intelligence  
that can imitate in such detail  
that we cannot tell the counterfeit from the real.  
Many of us are so busy shaping our image on social media that who we  
really are is lost in our own fantasies.  
We are losing ourselves, God of truth.  
Today, we pray for the patience to seek truth  
when we are inundated  
with half-truths, manipulation, and lies –  
when we are not sure what to believe and what to doubt.  
We pray for the courage to call out lies and call for truth.  
We pray for clarity  
so that we will be able to do as Jesus called his disciples to do,  
to see and touch truth.  
We pray for those among us and in our families who are suffering.  
We pray for an end to all violence, especially in war and domestic disputes.

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 618** What does the Lord require  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMPL6bRUFzE>

**BENEDICTION**

Let us go into our day in hope  
for a day when all will touch and see the truth of God and God's world.  
Let us go into our day in joy,  
knowing that the truth of God and God's world is always there for us to  
experience.  
Let us go into our day in love,  
as companions to each other,  
so that we might guard and guide each other in God's world.  
Amen.

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