

**EPIPHANY 4**

**30/1/22**

**CAVES BEACH**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Gathered as a worshipping community,

**We respond to God with prayer and praise.**

Gathered as a learning community,

**We respond to God by listening for God's Word.**

Gathered as a compassionate community,

**We respond to God with acts of caring.**

Gathered as a serving community,

**We respond to God as we identify the powerless and stand beside them.**

**Opening Prayer**

Living God, in the turmoil of our world,

**We come before you,  
searching for calm and understanding.**

In the uncertainty of our faith community,

**We come before you,  
searching for a confident way with Jesus.**

In the ups and downs of family life,

**We come before you, searching for joy together.**

In the time of individual challenge,

**We come before you, searching for faithful resolution.  
Amen.**

**HYMN 217** Love divine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGGcqhKShQ8>

## **PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION**

Creator and maker of all,

We give thanks for your steadfast kindness that stretches from the beginning of time and throughout all of creation.

With your word, you have provided for all living things, there is shelter and nourishment, beauty, and ingenuity.

We have been known by you before we were formed in our mother's womb,

you are always by our side, inclining your ear to hear our concerns, standing with us in times of trouble, holding out your hand to us when we are in need.

You are there in our celebrations, cheering us on, delighting in our successes and our joys.

We know we are loved.

Now is the time to speak the truth from our hearts:

none of us is blameless, each of us has erred

on the side of caution, or expediency, or self-preservation.

How good it is that you are saving us, loving God,

from ourselves and our own foolishness.

Even with our failings, we know we can examine ourselves without fear.

The wisdom of God lies in the foolishness of kindness,

the compassion of second chances and the mercy of steadfast love.

Here we will not be judged, but rather loved back into the fold of confidence,

and restored to try again to do those things which honour love

and make peace and bring comfort.

How good it is that you are with us, loving God,  
trusting in who we might yet become without holding against us  
anything we already are that falls short of your hope or denies your truth.

### **WORDS OF ASSURANCE:**

God is pleased to welcome us when we return with humble hearts.

God does not despise our weakness but turns our hope to strength.

Therefore, let us boast in this and this alone: we are forgiven; we are loved.

**Thanks be to God.**

### **READINGS**

- **Jeremiah 1:4-10**

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,

5 “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
and before you were born I consecrated you;

I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

6 Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am  
only a boy.” 7 But the Lord said to me,

“Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’;

for you shall go to all to whom I send you,

and you shall speak whatever I command you.

8 Do not be afraid of them,

for I am with you to deliver you,

says the Lord.”

9 Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said  
to me,

“Now I have put my words in your mouth.

10 See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,

to pluck up and to pull down,

to destroy and to overthrow,

to build and to plant.”

- **1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. 9 For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; 10 but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13 And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

- **Luke 4:21-30**

Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”<sup>22</sup> All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?”<sup>23</sup> He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’”<sup>24</sup> And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown.”<sup>25</sup> But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the

land;<sup>26</sup> yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon.<sup>27</sup> There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.”<sup>28</sup> When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage.<sup>29</sup> They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff.<sup>30</sup> But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

**HYMN 611** God of grace and God of glory

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

## **SERMON**

I was wondering this week as I looked through the readings set by the lectionary whether there had ever been any discussion in this congregation in recent times about prophesy. There are quite a few churches which promote people speaking a prophetic word from the Lord in some unknown language. They call it prophesy.

Also there are a lot of people who say something to the effect that the Lord has spoken to them about some issue. They are often anxious to pass this wonderful idea on to anybody who will listen.

Over time people have become a bit jaded about the real value of the prophesies which are sprouted so prolifically. It is certainly worthwhile to be wary of such utterances but we equally need to be able to sift through the issues to make sure that we are not missing some vital message. As the saying goes: ‘we don’t want to throw the baby out with the bath water.’

Perhaps there is some substance to prophesy especially where we are not being led astray. If we reflect on all three readings this morning then we can start to see that there is a theme of prophesy.

In the reading from Jeremiah we have the passage about God calling out to Jeremiah and giving him the role of being a prophet for Israel.

“The Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me,

“I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you.”

Despite the desperate pleas of the young man about his lack of public speaking skills he is assured by God that He has been with him since conception and will continue to always be there to support him.

Then we come to Paul's first Epistle to the faithful in Corinth. Here we are caught up in a passage that is so often associated with weddings. It is often read without any reference to the underlying theme of love as the point which gives life to real faith. Here prophesy is referred to with the emphasis being on love not empty threats. "If I speak in words of prophesy, but do not have love, I am nothing."

Lastly we come to the Gospel reading from Luke. Last week we heard about the scroll being opened at the words of Isaiah. Today we move on a bit to hear about the sermon that Jesus preached. This sermon obviously brought out a great deal of reaction in the community. The community ran Jesus out of town and to a cliff face. It is prophetic that Jesus had said that 'no prophet is accepted in their own hometown.'

We have three passages about prophesy so where are we heading today?

Prophecy!

What is prophesy and how do we deal with it?

Away from the Bible the word carries the connotation of predicting the future. In this context a prophet is someone who can tell you what is going to happen at some time in the future. A bit like a fortune teller!

In the Bible a prophesy does sometimes refer to future events but that is not the prime focus. In the context of the Bible a prophesy is a message direct from God and the spokesperson in simply passing on that message. It is a vital word for that time to address the circumstances facing those people.

In the reading from Luke today Jesus is not bringing a message about the future. Jesus is looking back and interpreting the message for the congregation. As a representative of God, this is prophesy. Most of us might even think of this as simple preaching.

In this context preaching and prophesy are virtually the same thing. Not all prophesy comes in the form of sermons but all preaching should aim to be prophetic, an authorised word from God.

Preachers are not the only ones who should be prophetic. It is equally a task of the church as a whole and we as individuals within it. As a community we are charged with living out and promoting God's message to everyone.

But what about well known individuals? In our multi-media world today we need to be wary of self-appointed and self-promoting prophets. How can we discern those who really carry God's messages to us today?

There are probably five things to look for to help filter out the fakes.

FIRSTLY, any true prophet is appointed by God. A self-appointed prophet is in fact a contradiction. We can only speak on behalf of someone when we have their permission to do so. This might seem a bit confusing as we don't regularly have broadcasts from God nominate prophets.

However there are probably two things to look for here. Do these people regularly spend time in prayer, contemplating the scriptures and taking time to listen to God? Also they will have been readily identified by wise and thoughtful people within the community who recognise the strength and depth of their message. This does not necessarily take into account the ruling elite of the church or community who will often be the people being challenged by God's message.

SECONDLY, as we see in the passage about the prophet Jeremiah, the prophet is likely to be reluctant to take up this role. Like Moses, who protested and tried to persuade God that he was not the right person for the task God had for him, prophets seem unwilling to undertake that role.

Most self-appointed prophets can publicly talk about their reluctance but the real prophets have an aura of ongoing reluctance and almost seem hesitant to confront and denounce others. If they relish this role then perhaps they are not the person we need. A true prophet seems to find the correcting of others a difficult task and one that they would prefer to avoid if not for God constantly lighting a fuse within their very being.

THIRDLY, we can learn that a true prophet doesn't just openly correct and oppose those in their sights. To Jeremiah, the Lord says, "I appoint you to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." The role of a prophet is equally to build a different atmosphere and to plant new and fresh ideas. True prophets can be recognised by the fact that they can be seen to be constructive in their words and actions.

Where something has to be knocked down then they will happily set out what is needed in its place. Their vision includes new and life-giving directions for the new reality. We must bear in mind that that God seeks to bring out the best for us with it being based in what is true and worthy, not just clearing the decks without having something to replace it.

FOURTHLY, on reflection we can see that true prophets are easily recognised for their graciousness. Jesus' basic message was gracious and positive and affirming. In His case the sting came when He would not support their ideas that God's grace was not just for them as a privileged people, but was for everyone, no exceptions, no favourites! There was no question about Jesus' graciousness; it just went too far for that congregation's liking.

FIFTHLY, we need to turn to the passage from Corinthians where it says: "If I speak in words of prophecy, but do not have love, I am nothing." If we look carefully we can see that true prophets do not treat people with disdain and do not have contempt for the whole community. A true prophet is motivated by love; love for God and love for the community to whom they are speaking. We are not looking to the person who says: "I am speaking this in love," then speaks in farcical terms of contempt and bitterness that seeks to take down the good in the community. The Apostle Paul is not going to let us get away with cheap-words of love. That's why he goes into such detail to describe love. And he didn't mean this as a wedding reflection either. This is about the nature of love in the church, in the body of Christ, including the prophetic community.

"Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful... It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

Let's reflect on the implications of that for our topic.

The true prophet is patient; the true prophet is kind; the true prophet is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. True prophets do not insist on their own way; they are not irritable or resentful... True prophets bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things.

In the Bible we are told that we will recognise people by the fruit that they produce. So ultimately, not only is it those who love patiently, kindly, gently and humbly who we will look to and trust as bearers of the word of God, but it is those who truly love, who are likely to be bearers of the Word. This happens even when they are not imagining themselves as prophets or being conscious of any special calling and anointing to the task.

Love and truth go hand in hand. True prophesy is inseparable from love, and while subjects of prophesy will pass away, love remains. And this, I trust, is a prophetic word of the Lord.

**HYMN 319** Child in the manger

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

## **PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING**

God of freedom, we stand with those who are seeking to right wrongs and upset the pathways of disadvantage. May what we offer today be a sign of this solidarity and our commitment to your good news. Amen

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

We pray for those who enlighten us to our own lack of vision, truth-tellers who tug at our conscience and call us to be more aware, to notice the overlooked and to pay attention to those who are excluded.

We pray for those who step up and call out unjust group thinking, who shine light onto entrenched unjustified prejudices that have long been kept silent, and who do the hard work of breaking them open and dismantling them.

We pray for those who call us to acts of courageous compassion, to not be intimidated into thinking change is not possible, who urge us to hold on to the vision of what the realm of God can look like.

We give thanks for those who use their opportunity and advantage to benefit the whole of creation, who refuse to give up on the earth, who respond to her needs and who generate new ways to care for and live in with harmony with her.

We pray that we might all seek to live faithfully and in peace with one another, overlooking our differences, celebrating our similarities, and nurturing our connections.

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 658** I the Lord of sea and sky

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

### **BENEDICTION**

Go from this place holding onto the knowledge that we are the cherished children of a loving God. Draw strength from this, let it pervade the way you live in world.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH\\_HdkWs74&list=RDliH\\_HdkWs74&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH_HdkWs74&list=RDliH_HdkWs74&start_radio=1)