

PENTECOST 21
17/10/21
CAVES BEACH

NOTICES

I want to reinforce to you that my story about a TV personality last week was just that. It was made up to try and put a modern slant on a story that we have heard so many times that we might need to rethink the concept. Sorry to those of you who took it literally. There is no way that I would turn people away from our community.

As the COVID restrictions ease and NSW becomes closer to the 80% double vaccination rate, Church Council has been considering our options for returning to face-to-face worship services. It is the opinion of Church Council that we delay our return until we can all return together and continue to remain open. This means careful monitoring of the changes taking place day by day. While the 80% rate may be achieved earlier than anticipated, it appears that our friends down Summerland Point will not be able to return until the travel restrictions on Greater Sydney to regional areas are lifted, at this stage it is thought to be 1 November 2021. The first Sunday after that will be 7 November 2021. It is our intention to start planning to return to face to face worship on that date. We must stress that the changes to restrictions are forever evolving and we must be prepared to be prepared to be flexible in our approach. The next few weeks will be an indication of what it is going to be like in the "new normal" world. Changes to COVID positive numbers will be a significant indicator as to whether the "new world" can be sustained. So be prepared that plans can change. We will keep you posted.

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 peace justice worship ministry

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

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dv2BqFgm6_M

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

God of all hopefulness, God of all care,
we give thanks that your infinite patience waits for us,
your infinite compassion comforts us,
and your infinite love envelopes us.
We see the life you long for us to lead,
but so dimly, so often,
but you never give up on us.
We build certainties out of our wishes
and they collapse again and again,
and you care for us.
We think we know your love and then,
it comes to us again and again
in new ways we could never have imagined.
For all your love and faithfulness,
we seek to live in thankfulness.

God, we read the gospels,
we know that Jesus was no respecter of rank or privilege.
We know that he lived in the true knowledge
that every person he met was the very image of you before him.
We know he welcomed all as you welcomed him.
We know this and yet...
We find it so hard to abandon false hierarchies amongst us.
We find it impossible to live without ranking ourselves against 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,
our pettiness, our smallness in your infinite world of goodness.
This is our humble prayer.
Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Listen up, community of faith! Forgiveness is yours!
It comes free, unconstrained and abundant, on this day and on all days.
AMEN

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

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, "Grant 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 grant, 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; but 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 342 When I survey the wonderous cross

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EikGeNuoBA>

SERMON

I was reading the other day about a pastor travelling to 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 the love of music was common to both.

It was apparent that the differences were especially obvious when it came to egotistical behaviour among some of the opera people. Of course 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. Despite having no important role in the production they always wanted to be in the front row 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.

Instead of looking at the story in the traditional way, perhaps Jesus is in fact challenging us in the way that we look at others. Perhaps Jesus is in fact not rebuking James and John. Jesus

may be affirming their commitment. He tells them that they cannot know the full cost of following Him and the position in glory is not His to grant. There is nothing here about disapproval of their efforts.

It is rather the reaction of the other 10 disciples that is highlighted. Is it in fact the 10 who are being addressed? Look at the passage again in this light. It can then become so obvious. Those 10 disciples were complaining about James and John and their arrogance in asking Jesus a favour while at the same time they were just sitting back and expecting everything to be served up to them on a plate.

Perhaps Jesus was in fact rebuking those 10 disciples for their lack of drive? In the past Jesus has rebuked prima-donna style behaviour. In Mark (9:30-37) Jesus had caught his disciples arguing about who is the greatest and He did not like this sort of talk. So we must be careful not to link up the previous passage with the question asked by James and John. They were not seeking to be the greatest. Jesus does not react as if this was what they were seeking. Perhaps it was in fact just two disciples looking to enthusiastically express their support of Jesus ministry. They are wanting to be in the movement for the long term no matter the cost. They are expressing a willingness to follow Jesus everywhere and join Him no matter what the cost, right through until glory.

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 Jesus and His teaching as well as them being prepared to endure whatever was ahead.

This then leaves 10 disciples muttering among themselves about these upstarts. It is in this context that Jesus calls out the other disciples about trying to be involved in power games.

This leaves me to ponder and reflect, as I have on many occasions taken the traditional approach and criticised James and John. So here I am challenged to ask myself why??

Why was I so ready to jump on the band wagon attacking James and John?

What is it that has grated on the 10 disciples and me?

Why were we so ready to attack them when perhaps it is me that needs to rethink the situation?

I need to take a good look in the mirror. Why have those two disciples got under my skin?

There is no doubt that I am fully committed to Jesus and wanting to live by His teaching. But is the commitment expressed by James and John such that it makes me look a bit half-hearted?

Are they just a bit too over the top, too extravagant, too exuberant?

Am I being left behind here?

Rather than rising to the challenge is it just easier for me to criticise those two and tear them down to the lowest common denominator?

After all they are not any better than me, or the 10 other disciples. Aren't they just prima-donnas seeking attention which they don't deserve?

It is here that we 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.

Was it that the 10 disciples had luke-warm passion and feelings of not being able to keep up?

Were they trying to drag these two down to their level so that they could lord it over them?

Was there an effort to make those two conform to the lowest common denominator?

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.

Do you like good food? A real 'spiritual hero would spend days and weeks fasting. OR Do you want to be especially close to Jesus as if you were one of His trusted followers? A real spiritual hero would avoid any unwarranted enthusiasm and keep a refined and lofty reserve away from worldly things.

I don't think so!!!

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 instead of 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 ...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCAdWs-ZyEk>

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 everyone, This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

I would to share a poem with you.

It's called: I'll Trust Him: The way ahead of us is uncertain. There's a mist before my eyes.

Of tears I've shed through many a night and day. And yet I know my saviour will make a path for me.

I'll walk with Him till sunlight shines again. Through every trial I'll trust Him, for He alone is true.

He rules the universe with power and might. To me He says, "Now come child and lay your burdens down."

His yoke I will take, it's easy and it's light. As each day I lift my face, behold His tender glance.

My lips sing praise, for His great love I feel. He gives assurance to me.

His joy and peace I know.

In worship now, before my Lord, I kneel. Amen.

From 1 John 5: 14-15. This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have, what we asked of Him. Amen.

Let us pray,

Lord Jesus, give us the grace to hear your voice, and the strength to continue working for your kingdom in this time of the pandemic. We pray for those who today suffer the loss of a loved one, or who suffer from the absence of work, for those who have been missing seeing their loved ones because of border closures and so on. Lord we lift them all up into your loving arms so they know they are loved, cherished, comforted and protected by you with Your grace and mercy and unfailing love which endures forever. Amen.

To our brothers and sisters who are directly or indirectly affected and whom are suffering due to the pandemic. We pray that God's healing hand may rest upon them. To the medical doctors, nurses and supporting staff who are in the frontline of the fight against Covid19, may the Good Lord sustain and inspire them to render their life saving services with due care, love and compassion. We pray that you keep them safe, guided and protected with the shield of your great unfailing love. We pray that your spirit will keep them strong in their faith, hope and love with courage and perseverance. Amen.

Father help those who are hurting today so they may see and know Your loving presence in their darkest hours. And Lord, we pray for all our nation's leaders. That you give them Your strength, guidance and wisdom in their daily decisions with compassion and a conscious heart. We pray, Amen.

We pray for all our congregational brothers and sisters in Christ, whom are waiting for or are recovering from surgeries. Lord, we lift them all up into your loving arms for healing so they know and feel comfort from your great unfailing love, which endures forever and never lets us down. In His precious name of Your beloved Son, Christ Jesus. Amen.

Thank you, "O" Christ, for this feast of life, we are fed by Your love, we are strengthened by Your life. We are sent forth into this world to live, Your way, and share Your joy. You are the vine, and we are Your branches.

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore as we pray together.

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 640 Kneels at the feet of His friends

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZjFNpoEy8mY&t=3s>

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.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uoLleLFnZv0>