

PENTECOST 18
26/9/2021
CAVES BEACH

NOTICES

Not a lot to report this morning. Jan spoke to Mark on Friday and he is making steady progress in his recovery. He wishes to thank everybody for their loving prayers and support during his time of surgery and recovery. He is not ready to return to work yet, so you will have Lu and Jan for at least another Sunday after today.

CALL TO WORSHIP

You call us to worship, O God; you call us to prayer.

As we express our thanks, as we pray for the troubled, as we confess our shortcomings, you hear us.

You call us to worship, O God; you inspire us to praise.

As we sing the hymns, as we respond in the psalms, you join with us.

You call us to worship, O God; you call us to hear the Word.

As we listen to the scriptures, as we are touched by the Word proclaimed, you speak to us.

OPENING PRAYER

If God is with us,

we will be able to bring our thanksgivings in prayer, but also our worries.

If God is with us,

we will be reminded of the happiness of children, but also hear the concerns of older folk.

If God is with us,

we will be able to consider the needs of our own faith community, but also the needs of the oppressed far from here.

If God is with us,

the impact of Jesus' teaching will come home to us, but his death on the cross will face us with new realities.

If God is with us?

God *is* with us! Amen.

HYMN

Holy. Holy, Holy Lord

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

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

With praise and thanks, Loving God, we welcome our time together.

As your people, we learn how to live your way through friendship and worship.

You have created each of us as a significant part to the body of Christ.

We thank you for the gifts that each brings.

We thank you for the delights of all your creation.

May we value all these gifts that nourish our understanding of you.

Your peace and grace offer renewal every day.

Our praise and thanks to you!

God of constancy and faithfulness, we find it so hard to be honest with ourselves. Either we over-estimate our gifts and abilities and become proud, or we under-value our contribution and worth, and become depressed. Forgive us for our wrong evaluation of ourselves, and our comparisons with others.

God of constancy and faithfulness, we find it so hard to be honest about ourselves. Either we rationalise our hurtful and selfish responses to others, or we blame others for our own shortcomings. Forgive us our sin, and our rationalisations of it.

God of constancy and faithfulness, help us to live honestly: with ourselves, with others, and with you. Amen

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

To those who come in search of forgiveness, God offers the sure and certain hope of wholeness. God faithfully forgives and cleanses us. Live faithfully as a disciple of Jesus Christ, trusting the constancy of God's love for you. In the name of Christ, our saviour and redeemer, our sins are forgiven. **Thanks be to God.**

READINGS

* James 5: 13-20

¹³ Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. ¹⁷ Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

¹⁹ My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, ²⁰ you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's^[a] soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

* Mark 9: 38-50

³⁸ John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." ³⁹ But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. ⁴⁰ Whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

⁴² "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell,^[a] ⁴⁸ where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

⁴⁹ "For everyone will be salted with fire.^[a] ⁵⁰ Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it?^[a] Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

HYMN

I Know Not Why God's Wondrous Grace
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RpJ9oyxyvhs>

SERMON

When I read the passages from the lectionary that are given to us for our scripture passages today, and I pondered on what I might share with you this morning, I kept on turning to the passage from James' letter, chapter five. So trusting God's blessing, we will head there this morning and see what we can learn.

But first, I think some brief comments should be made on the rather terrifying gospel passage! We hear that it would be better to go through life without a hand, foot or eye rather than having two of each and go into "hell". It is helpful to realise that the word hell there, is translated from the word "gehena". Some Bible translations just leave it as the word "gehena", because that was the proper name of the Jerusalem city dump. It was in this dump that the fires burned constantly around the clock - they are never quenched as Mark says. So Jesus is not speaking of the afterlife, or hell as punishment after death. No, he is saying: don't let our lives be like rubbish, worthy of the fires of the city dump. And he goes on to say that rather, we should be "salted with fire - have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." So as an overall comment regarding the gospel passage today, I suggest that our Lord is challenging us to examine and order our priorities, or in other words, to set aside whatever it is that gets in the way of our following him as true disciples.

Now let me go with you to this passage this morning from James, and I am particularly wanting to put the magnifying glass on three verses, verses 14, 15 and 16: " Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sin will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective."

Maybe first of all I will tell a little of my story so that you might understand why I felt drawn to share with you from those verses. When I think about my life's journey it tends to get complicated, but I think I began to realise how very important prayer is in the scheme of things when I was teaching at a place called Bwaruada on Normanby Island off the eastern tip of Papua New Guinea. I was about 26 years old if I remember rightly, and I had gone there to be principal at the school, and also to be company for a nurse who was coming from the U.K. As it happened she never turned up. This was my fifth year in PNG but the most remote place I had yet been - maybe a boat would call once a month. I can remember clearly one day walking along the beach and thinking the two most important things in life to know about were prayer and the meaning of love.

Two years after that I was studying at the University of Armidale and there I became good friends with a woman who was studying too, but so that she could move into a different career because of her illness. That was I think, when I first became interested in the healing ministry of the church, and I read, I attended services, and I learnt as much as I could. And so I learnt how to pray with someone who was suffering and in continual pain.

Once again, some years later I was back in PNG, again a missionary with the United Church there. This time my experience in praying was what we would call exorcism. The person was an expatriate who had become involved with spiritual practices that were not of God. There was no help available for this person - all I could do was pray and of course, in any case, that was what was needed. That experience taught me that God's Holy Spirit is powerful and God certainly answers prayer. Also that mind and body and spirit are one - and these aspects of our life make us the whole person who God has created.

We'll jump a few years, and now I am at Royal North Shore Hospital in Sydney undergoing training with the chaplaincy department in Clinical Pastoral Education, or C.P.E. for short. And it was there that the matter of prayer and faith cropped up. Some students in the group undergoing the training had found that they were coming across patients who were Christian, but those patients had felt that sickness had overcome them because they did not have sufficient faith in God to heal them - in effect, they were believing that they hadn't prayed with enough faith. So they were not only struggling with their sickness but they were carrying guilt. Unnecessary guilt. As I mentioned last week, the scriptures can be misunderstood. You can take verses out of context and use them anyhow. One that comes to mind that is applicable in this instance is from Mark 11: 24, "So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." There are a number of other verses similar.

Please don't think I am speaking negatively about prayer, and advising against being prayerful when you are unwell. Not at all. Rather, I am exploring how is it that we are to pray? How is prayer and faith linked? How do we read the scriptures in the most helpful way, so that we tap into the resources that God gives us for our well-being?

So let's return now to the letter of James and our passage this morning. Verse 13: "Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick?" Now, listen to what James says next: "They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them in the name of the Lord." So, what is this verse implying about faith? That it isn't about having enough faith yourself, but rather we are to call others to pray. That is sufficient because it implies that you believe that God exists, that God is there to help. And if you are too sick to call on others yourself, then others can call on your behalf. That is what we do - that is what scripture tells us to do. It throws any guilt away for a start, there is just no place for guilt! So the *initiative* is from the sick person, but the *response* is from the church members. This is the role of a community of faith and is part of caring for one another. It is what we do. And we know it happens here amongst us. People ask for prayer, and we pray together as a community as we will shortly this morning, and also as individuals in our own prayer times at home. When we pray individually we are praying on behalf of our whole community. When people ring me for prayer I'll call others to pray so I know that it is a church response to the person's need - because it is the responsibility of the church as a whole to minister to the sick person in an effective and ongoing way. We *together* are the body of Christ.

So, as we pray for one another, just how do we pray, and what do we anticipate will be the result of our praying? One way that people often express this is by saying we are placing the person in God's hands for His blessing. Maybe this is particularly the case as we pray for our older friends, as we know that our physical bodies begin to deteriorate more as we reach our later years. Our physical bodies will inevitably eventually give us problems! We have to accept that old age is about decline so healing physically is not necessarily going to happen even with medical intervention, although of course that hopefully will assist with pain management. If that is your state now it is especially helpful to know that as Paul write in Colossians, that our life is "hidden with Christ". If we have given our life to Christ, then he holds it for us, it is secure with him. That is where my faith is to be found - in Christ - meaning he holds it. I have trusted him for my life and my salvation. We do not need to worry about it - there is no guilt of whether we have enough faith, or of whether we have said enough prayers - no, Christ has us secure *in Him*.

I mentioned medical intervention. Prayer goes with it, not in place of it. Of course we thank God for doctors, nurses, for pharmacists. Thank God for those who spent years in research so that you can take the tablets that help you. Give thanks for vaccines that keep us safe from disease. All these are blessings.

When praying with someone who is not well, how do we begin to pray? Mark says we are to be cheerful, so try not to be down-hearted. Begin to pray in a positive way - there is always something to be thankful for. Always - even in the worst of situations. I find myself usually beginning like this, "Loving God, we thank you for your presence with us". And then the Holy Spirit will nudge me as to what to say next. Do we pray for healing from their particular problem? If you feel uncertain, then pray for a blessing. The important thing is that we are giving the matter over to God, and we believe in faith for that person that God's grace is being gifted to them. God's grace is his gift of undeserved love to them - not earned, given freely. And that itself is a blessing of healing.

We read in this passage that the elders of the church also used oil for anointing. There are many references in scripture about anointing with oil. You'll remember the story of the Good Samaritan for instance who poured on oil and wine (Luke 10:34) - the oil for healing and the wine as antiseptic. Jesus himself was anointed with oil by the woman in Luke 7: 46. Back in the Old Testament a king was anointed with oil as a sign that he was a sacred person. And here in James, we hear of the elders of the church praying and anointing. It is seen as a part of that spiritual blessing from God - one way of expressing it would be to say it is an outward sign of our inward belief. I make a practice of always carrying oil with me as I don't know when God might lead me to use it.

And James says confess your sins to one another. My comment to this is that we know that when the scriptures are shared, when we pray together, then trust will more than likely develop. And sharing where there is trust can enable healing. God's leading, and guidance, is always needed in this respect.

And so in closing, I was thinking the other day how we say to young people, "My, aren't you growing up!" Whereas the other morning when out doing my fast walk exercise, a younger woman sailed past me saying, "You're doing well - for your age!" Well, perhaps we should take heart that we all growing in one way or another, no matter what our age! Our growing is never finished. This morning I hope that our worship and reflection today on the scriptures, will help us all, even though life changes, and *through* the changes and challenges that life throws upon us, that we might continue to grow closer to God knowing that indeed our life is safe and secure with Him - in Him - always.

The Lord be with you.

HYMN

Be Still for the Presence of the Lord

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOCfpjLOvC4>

PRAYER FOR THE OFFERING

We rejoice Lord, that you are faithful in providing for our needs. We affirm our faith and trust in you through the offering of our monetary gifts, and the offering of our lives in love and service to you. We ask that that especially through this period of lock-down that your Holy Spirit will live in us enabling our hope to remain alive, and our faith vital, so that we might be the salt of love where you have planted us. Through Christ we pray, Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

(Prepared by Leiza Steele)

Good morning everyone, I hope everyone is keeping well and staying safe.

I would to share a poem with you. (Author Unknown).

It's called The Difference.

I got up early one morning and rushed right into the day; I had so much to accomplish that I didn't have time to pray. Problems just tumbled about me, and heavier came each task. "Why doesn't God help me;" I wondered. He answered, "You didn't ask." I wanted to see joy and beauty, but the day toiled on grey and bleak, I wondered why God didn't show me, He said, "But you didn't seek." I tried to come into God's presence; I used all my keys at the lock, God gently and lovingly chided, "My child, you didn't knock." I woke up early this morning, and paused before entering the day, I had so much to accomplish that I had to take time to pray.

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.

To our brothers and sisters who are directly or indirectly affected and whom are suffering due to the corona virus. 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.

O Lord, Please give all the protestors who are against the vaccine, your peace, your strength in their time of anger and frustration. Lord, help them to be calm, to take a deep breath, to give them clearer minds, which will give them wisdom and understanding and find you amongst all the chaos and violence. We pray in the precious name of Jesus. 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 Name, Amen.

In You Lord, We trust and we shall not be afraid! Amen.

Please remember everyone: When we are weak, He is our strength, always and forever.

Please join me in the Lords prayer:

**Our Father in Heaven,
Hallowed be thy name,
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our sins, as we forgive
those who have sinned against us.
Lead us not in temptation but deliver us from evil.
thine is the kingdom, power and glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

For

HYMN

From Heaven You Came (Servant King)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4963QPHAIM>

COMMISSIONING & BENEDICTION

God calls each of us, and calls all of us.

We are all God's people, and each brings our gifts to the other.

As Christians together, let us pilgrimage with Jesus, listen to the voice of God's Spirit and delight in the Creation that greets us each day.

Let us live in peace with one another.

And now, may the Word of God be in our speaking,

May the love of Christ be in our longing,

May the power of the Spirit be in our doing.

To the glory of God - now and forever. Amen.

FINAL SONG

Halle Halle Hallelujah

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFQOS6CRh3E>