

EASTER 4

8/5/22

CAVES BEACH

Call to Worship

This is the place of gathering.

We gather to celebrate God's love.

This is place of praise-bringing.

We praise God for gifts wonderful and gracious.

This is the place of listening.

We listen for God's life-giving Word to inspire and lead us.

This is the place for building faith .

Joined in community, we can work for God's justice and bring God's peace.

Opening Prayer

The Good Shepherd brings us together.

With joy, we join in community to worship and serve.

As the Shepherd has known rejection, yet you our God care for us.

When the storm rages, in the midst of the struggle, we will be secure.

As the Shepherd has known adversity, yet you our God lead us.

In a maze of tough choices, through the darkest night, our Guide will show us the Way.

The Shepherd has known hatred and abuse, yet you our God, keep on loving.

In life, in death, our Beloved will bring us home. Amen.

HYMN 233 I will sing the wonderous story

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAcpYr9I6Tk&t=19s>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

How wonderful is your world, Creator God,
so intricate and delicate. So vast and rugged.

Breathtakingly beautiful and unexpected,
yet with complex patterns and cycles.

The seasons sing out your praise through their unfolding colours and new life.

Life and death are entwined in a never-ending wave of renewal.

We thank you for your wonderful Creation.

for the sun and moon, the complexity of constellations and planets,
and the deep inner workings of Earth.

You are our Creator! Shepherd us as we travel in your glorious world.

Shepherd and guide,

Draw us to the springs of the water of life

For we wander and lose our way.

Refresh our souls with the Living Water.

We have wandered from you, distracted by thoughts.

We forget to offer concerns to you and share in the openness of prayer.

Constant friend, we lay them down before you now.

We are weighed down

by the heaviness of sadness, grief, and strained relationships.

Help us bear these burdens.

Refresh our souls with the Living Water.

In the abundance of life around us, we still mourn what we do not have.

Guide us to your way of understanding and satisfaction.

For sadly, we are not so easily satisfied.

Refresh our souls with the Living Water.

Worthlessness is like a desert, and self-doubt seems an insurmountable rock.

Please shepherd us with love because we cannot find our way alone.

Refresh our souls with the Living Water. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

God's kindly hand will reach you everywhere,

leading you to the home of belonging.

Rest easy in God's peace.

Drink deeply from the living waters of care that forever flows.

READINGS

- **Acts 9:36–43**

Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity.³⁷ At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs.³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, "Please come to us without delay."³⁹ So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them.⁴⁰ Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up." Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up.⁴¹ He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive.⁴² This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.⁴³ Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

- **Revelation 7:9–17**

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. 10 They cried out in a loud voice, saying,

“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

11 And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 singing,

“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom

and thanksgiving and honour

and power and might

be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?” 14 I said to him, “Sir, you are the one that knows.” Then he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

15

For this reason they are before the throne of God,

and worship him day and night within his temple,

and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.

16 They will hunger no more, and thirst no more;

the sun will not strike them,

nor any scorching heat;

17 for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd,

and he will guide them to springs of the water of life,

and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

- **John 10:22–30**

At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter,²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon.²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”²⁵ Jesus answered, “I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me;²⁶ but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep.²⁷ My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.²⁹ What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand.³⁰ The Father and I are one.”

HYMN 10 The Lord’s my shepherd

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAqPZQeDcFs&t=7s>

SERMON

How many of you have ever herded sheep here in Australia?

They tend to mill around in a mob and it takes some effort to move them in the direction you want without having some assistance, like a sheep dog. I can remember many times traveling on a country road when you suddenly come across a mob of sheep milling all over the road. It takes forever to get through the mob as they are not interested in moving to let you past.

When we start to look at sheep from the Biblical perspective we have a very different dynamic. From birth those sheep were bonded to follow their shepherd wherever they were led. The story is told of a group of shepherds getting together for a celebration. Once it was over each shepherd called to their flock and walked away with only his sheep separating from the massive flock that had mixed together.

Some of the readings that we have today are often used at funerals. The Gospel has the image of Jesus as the ‘Good Shepherd.’ A Shepherd who lay down His life for us.

The Psalm that we sung has the image of constant support in times of trouble.

When the Revelation of John was written Christians were being subjected to widespread persecution by the Roman Empire. The Roman Emperor had demanded that he be worshipped as a god. Christians could not do

this and consequently many had been subjected to horrific deaths such as being thrown to the lions or being crucified upside down. Many others had endured terrible torture in an effort to make them worship the Emperor.

Consequently the underlying theme of Revelation is to encourage the faithful to hold on through persecution so they could remain faithful to the one true God and His Son, Jesus Christ. In this respect John is telling his readers that those who remain faithful, no matter what they endure, will meet with God and it will be worth all the suffering. In the end they will be brought before God with no sign of the wounds and torture they had suffered in life. They would be treated like conquering and victorious heroes.

In the passage I read from Acts we have the only account in the New Testament of an apostle raising someone from death. In this case it was a woman called Tabitha, also known as Dorcas. She lived in a town called Joppa, which is called Tel Aviv today. One interesting aspect here is that Tabitha is the only woman in the New Testament to be called a 'disciple'. From this passage we also learn that she was a compassionate and caring person.

The story continues with the widowed women of Joppa welcoming Peter. They show off the clothes that Tabitha had made for them. These women were very worried about what would happen to them as Tabitha was dead. They felt vulnerable as they had depended on her charity.

While the passage opens with death we see here the power of the Risen Lord through Peter's ministry. Peter simply says 'get up,' the same words that Jesus used when He raised the daughter of Jairus. The healing power of Jesus continues long after the resurrection. Tabitha was alive again.

In our world we so often are overpowered by the harsh realities of life and death. Death means an end, not a new beginning. So let's be clear that in the ministry of Peter we see that death is no longer the end.

This brought me to think about where in our lives have we allowed things to die off. This passage reminds us that when we are exposed to the life-giving Gospels simple words are spoken there is new life for the dead and Easter leads the way to new beginnings.

We just have to look at the story of old Tabitha being raised to life. This is the Easter message. The poor now had someone who moved among them bringing words of hope and new beginnings. Death in whatever form it presents itself had been defeated. So, does this still apply now?

There is a story which a colleague tells about a contemporary message of death being defeated. It is not a story about people being raised from the dead but rather about how death does not have the last word.

There were two women who had been friends for about thirty years - they were young marrieds in a beachside suburb of Sydney - they did lots of things together and their children grew up with a lot of interests in common. Mainly, sun and surf in the summer and snow and skiing in the winter. One of the women, Meg, had two sons, the other, Nonie, two daughters.

Two significant things happened in the life of the younger daughter when she was nineteen - she became Australian ski champion - and - she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. After seven long years fighting the disease, Sally died.

The younger son of the other woman was also a keen skier but his first love was the surf and he was a member of the local lifesaving team. He became a beach inspector - but the sun that contributes so much to life, unfortunately can also contribute to death - because Brett died after a two and a half year struggle with melanoma - caused by the sun - two weeks after his friend Sally.

Most of the young mourners at Brett's funeral had been at Sally's funeral just two weeks before and a majority of the people after the service for Brett were immobilised with grief. But the two mothers, having been brought even closer now through their shared tragedies, had organised a cuppa and sandwiches at the church after the funeral service and they helped serve it to their children's devastated friends. They freely chatted with their children's grieving friends about the life giving message that applied despite the tragedy of death. Both children before their death had sought share the comfort that their faith had given them even in the face of premature death. Like the passage from Revelation they would no longer be torn apart by illness.

In a strange, but deeply meaningful way, through the compassion and the actions of these two mothers, death did not have the last word. The mourners saw hope in life through the actions of these two women ministering to others in their time of uncertainty.

The minister said: I remember speaking to a number of those young people over that cuppa and they were questioning the reality of their lives, the reality of life itself. It became a wonderful opportunity to share hope and light in the midst of darkness. How does one live life to the full in the midst of all its fragility, and how does our faith inform our living and indeed our dying?

How does our faith influence our approach to life? Even in the midst of a world where death is all too common why is it that we can live as triumphant people. It is sometimes hard to explain to others that no matter what life throws at you it is still possible to hold on to the certainty that the living Christ is with you.

A lot of people approach their faith as a noun. However I see it as a verb, as faith is not a static thing but a constantly evolving experience. A living faith is a matter of allowing a personal God to live in us. This then lets God constantly shape and mould us to deal with the world in which we live.

God can help us to adapt to face the challenges that we encounter as we go through life. As we leave the future in God's hands we are not opting out of the real world but rather allowing the Holy Spirit to give us the confidence to engage that future.

The author of Revelation, John, spoke words of hope which gave his contemporaries strength not just to but defeat the fear of death but to live fully in times of persecution.

Peter, in our reading from Acts, spoke words of life to Tabitha. Those words defeated death.

These two mothers spoke words of such assurance to their children's friends that their fear not only of death but of their own frailty was lessened.

Today's readings spells out for us the marvellous truth that faith in God raises us up into hope, into significance, into freedom, into the future ... sometimes against all odds.

Because I live, says Jesus, you also will live. His life - in us.

HYMN 152 Joyful, joyful, we adore you

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMY3ivdNzwE&t=8s>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

God of wonder, may this add to the life and wellbeing of your realm.

Show us where we can support and offer care to others through the gifts we bring today. Let us not waste our resources but use them for your care, for we are thankful to be able to share in your name.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

There are some people who believe in God and have had their prayers answered but yet discount the miracles that God performs every day. Are we one of those people.

This leads me to remind us of the old fashioned song: I believe in Miracles. It says this

I believe in miracles, I've seen a soul set free;

Miraculous the change in one redeemed through Calvary.

I've seen the lily push it's way up through the stubborn sod,

I believe in miracles 'cause I believe in God.

Let us pray: FATHER God, powerful God, ever present God, all knowing God, we praise you for answered prayer. You work miracles in people's lives and we have seen it happen time and time again. Lord it is because of this that we approach you each Sunday with our prayers of the people.

We thank you that you answer prayers in your own special way and ask that you hear the concerns and prayers we have for today.

There are people we know and love who are unwell, we ask for your special touch on their lives, bringing wholeness again. One of the members of scenic Court has had an accident, please help Helen to be calm and allow her body to knit again by your power.

We also ask for your abiding presence with our aged people who are unable to attend worship now. Please bring blessing and peace to them. We also hold up to you Jenny Fitchett a member of our Bible study group. Jen has had health problems for many years and we have seen you work miracles before and marvel at you miracles again this time.

Lord God, many mothers will be blessed today with special attention from families. We think of many mothers in war torn Ukraine who are devastated because of losing families, husbands and children. Some children have lost their mothers. Compassionate God, is it possible that you could bring comfort to the needy in Ukraine and bring a speedy end to the war with Russia.

Father God the media seem to have shifted their attention to the Federal election and away from Covid 19. Please give guidance to the voters in Australia so that the right people will be elected to parliament.

Please give wisdom to our Church council as the members attempt to plan for the future activities and direction of our Church. Give wisdom and insight to our minister Mark as he leads us in worship each Sunday and guide him in ministry to us in other ways.

We also pray for Jan as she takes a well earned holiday away from the affairs of the church and may she be relaxed as she travels on her journey. Return her safe to her home in due course. Again dear Lord, we would thank you for answered prayer and we pray this in Jesus name who taught his disciples to pray:

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 690 Beauty for brokenness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D81ZD1NDPyE>

BENEDICTION

God is present all the days of your life.

Step out and explore the world around you.

Feast on the delights before you.

Share what comes to you

and receive what is offered to you.

Goodness and kindness shall follow you,

as God shepherds you, feeds your soul and restores your being.

Creator, Sustainer and Friend are with you

all the days.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzDdN-5gmuU>