

**PENTECOST 5**  
**23/6/24**  
**CAVES BEACH**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

God never fails us;

**in the testing times, God is there.**

God gives us strength;

**in our moments of weakness, God is there.**

God is our companion;

**when we feel alone, God is there.**

God is to be trusted;

**when we do not know where to turn, God is there.**

**OPENING PRAYER**

In our strength and in our weakness, we worship you, O God.

**You will use us when we are strong and support us when we are weak.**

In our youth and in our mature years, we worship you, O God.

**You are with us in laughter and in play when we are young;  
you give us wisdom as we grow old.**

In our doubting and in our faith, we worship you, O God.

**You will inform our doubts and confirm us in our Christian faith.**

In our reflection and in our service, we worship you, O God.

**You are present as we pray and you are the selfless spirit  
behind our care for others.**

**In all the contrasts and changes of life, we worship you, loving  
God! Amen**

**HYMN TiS 96** Sing Praise to the Lord!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8typ9tkUac>

**PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING AND CONFESSION**

We give you thanks, God of wonders,

for all of the amazing variety of the world you have made.

We thank you that the earth is alive with the energy that you give it.

We thank you that we are alive in the glorious abundance of your creation.

We thank you that we can be amazed every day by all that lives in and  
around us:

for the complexity of our minds and bodies,  
for the complexity of other species,  
for the complexity of the universe.

We thank you that we can enjoy your creation in all its abundance.  
And especially we thank you for Jesus your Son,  
who shows us who you are in ways which open up new life for us,  
and who gives us new hope that we will survive in all that faces us.

Gracious God, we come before you not only with thanks, but also with humble hearts to confess that we have not always lived trusting you, but rather we have turned away from you often in arrogance and pride. We have disregarded the plight of others, we have wanted more for ourselves while others go without, we have looked after ourselves while disregarding justice and equality, and we have even ignored the love that comes to us from the Cross. Our sin is great, and we come to you for mercy and the forgiveness that Christ has won for us.

### **WORDS OF ASSURANCE**

And so it is to the scriptures we come, where we are assured that, "if we confess our sins God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness". (1 John 1: 9) Therefore, hearing these words, we accept Christ's word of grace to us: Our sins are forgiven. Thanks be to God. Amen

### **READINGS**

- **1 Samuel 17 : 32 - 49**

32 David said to Saul, "Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." 33 Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth." 34 But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father, and whenever a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, 35 I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth, and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. 36 Your servant has killed both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God." 37 David said, "The LORD, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine." So Saul said to David, "Go, and may the LORD be with you!"

38 Saul clothed David with his armour; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. 39 David strapped Saul's sword over the armour, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these, for I am not used to them." So David removed them. 40 Then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the wadi and put them in his shepherd's bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine. 41 The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. 42 When the Philistine looked and saw David, he despised him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. 43 The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. 44 The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field." 45 But David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. 46 This very day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head, and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel 47 and that all this assembly may know that the LORD does not save by sword and spear, for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand." 48 When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. 49 David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground. 35 On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." 36 And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. 37 A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. 38 But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion, and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" 39 And waking up, he rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Be silent! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. 40 He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" 41 And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

- **Mark 4 : 35 – 41**

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**HYMN TiS 162 Thank You for Giving Me the Morning**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sawzPjjV7Oc>

## **SERMON**

We have two very well known passages of scripture this morning, so we are going into familiar territory. But although we know them very well, they will speak to us differently today, because our own particular circumstances will have changed since we last heard them on the three year lectionary cycle. So the question is: How will God speak to each us today, I wonder?

We hear of struggle and determination in both these passages. It is very obvious in the combat between David and Goliath, and then in Mark's Gospel we have the struggle of the disciples against the sea. And in both passages, in both circumstances, we have those who are struggling reaching out to a Source beyond themselves for help - David as he faces Goliath, and then the disciples as they face a treacherous sea.

And you and I this morning? Or any other morning this past week? How are we going with our struggles? All those daily issues that can get us down, hit us hard, come out of the blue? I've certainly had a few of those myself this past week. How are we going with the difficult decisions that need to be made, what do we do when we feel we have no choice in a matter that concerns us?

I'm not going to dwell on David and Goliath for long. It is a short Bible story that probably all of us learnt as kids. And we learn that the little bloke won. - good on him we say! And that is the point of the story - yes? Wrong! The point of the story is that God has won! Think about it: David knew his limitations, but Goliath? Well, he didn't. He was just a boasting bully - a crude giant of a man, coarse and insulting. David? Well, the king's armour didn't even fit him. "I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them," he said - and he immediately removed them. It is in these words that we hear of David's trust: he chose instead to wear divine armour - it cannot be seen, but never-the-less he girds himself with it. He knew, like we gradually learn through life, that our own resources are limited, but God provides spiritual resources - and be assured it is God's provision that matters when we have battles to be won.

Now when I read the Gospel passage, my mind went back to the time I used to run a Kid's Club at Stroud Road, which is a little village out of Stroud on the way to Gloucester. I taught scripture at the school and the children would come across to the community hall later on for Club one afternoon each week. So for that gospel passage we have just heard, we needed to be in a boat of course. That was a piece of carpet that we all crowded onto, and then I put string around the sides for the rails that the children could hold onto. Given my canoe, dinghy and boat experiences in the seas around the Papuan Islands, it didn't take much from me to whip up a storm in their imaginations. But the thing I remember best was me trying to be serious as I told the story to these disciples who were these kids, while the little boy who was Jesus, and lying in the back of the boat (on the back of the carpet), - he began to take great delight in snoring just to prove his point that Jesus was very definitely asleep!

So what do we take into ourselves from this story now we are not kids but adults? I'm sure you have pondered it many times. We even have sayings like, "We are all in the same boat". Even the World Council of Churches has a boat as its symbol of oneness. The point is that this is a miracle story, with a great deal of symbolism within it. And there are a number of aspects in the story from which we may glean some helpful insights for our own everyday living as we do battle with the storms, or squalls, that can batter us day by day. These can come up very unexpectedly as you well know.

And although we can find great comfort in the symbolism, we need to keep in mind that in reality storms and turbulence in our lives do not cease just because you share God's life and love. Let alone our difficulties, Jesus himself experienced the distress of Gethsemane and his death on the cross. There is no magical escape. Over past years when interviewing parents when they have brought their children for baptism, I would remind them that the sacrament of baptism had nothing to do with guaranteeing a life free of difficulties - life is not a bed of roses - rather it's about fighting the good fight and keeping the faith as we journey along the years of life we are given with all its problems and joys.

And so Jesus didn't prevent his disciples from sailing into the storm. And neither did he stay awake wondering what was going to happen. Rather, he let his friends find out for themselves what trusting God might mean. We are just like those disciples - we too cry out in the night and daytime too: Why is God ignoring me? Why me? we say. And we want to shake Him, wake Him up and say, Hey I am here, you know!

It is not difficult to find a metaphorical story when we read this passage. They "go across to the other side" - was it a place of rest, or was it a place of risk being not their own? Anyway, they took Jesus with them, "just as he was" - exhausted due to all the teaching that had just taken place, and hence his falling asleep so easily. Jesus, who here we see, both human and divine. So perhaps they saw a need to get "away from it all"? Note that the text says, "other boats were with him" - not "with them" - but "with him", meaning with Jesus. This indicates what a very difficult time Jesus had getting away from others to have time to himself. Life would not let him. We could ask ourselves, do we seem to always have other "boats" too, trailing behind us? Things that just don't seem to want to let go? Those things we worry about: regrets, guilt, those things we should have done, the fears of what we think might crop up. All those things that linger in our consciousness as we try to get across to "the other side" - often in the middle of the night.

"A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped". A crisis arises - surely we have felt that sense of being swamped - overwhelmed because everything has got on top of us. And God sleeps....God seems to be distant..... and we cry out. "Do you not care that I am perishing?" "Can't you hear me?"

Earlier I mentioned that both our scripture passages today depict people struggling and wrestling with their opponents - David with Goliath, the disciples with the sea - and as they struggle they reach out to a Source beyond themselves for help. When we reach out to that Source, who is God, ourselves, it is then that our relationship with him becomes alive for us. And it is when we specifically open ourselves to God's Spirit coming into our lives and being alive and active in us, it is then that our spirit will be calmed and we will then know the peace that only Jesus can give. As he said to the sea, we will hear him say within us, "Peace, be still". When we are open to Him, God shifts us from fear to trust, from fear to faith.

When we are being swamped, or when we have a giant in our life to deal with, let's not be afraid to admit that our own resources will be insufficient. Because it is then, when we have the courage to admit it, that we will reach out beyond ourselves to God for help. Jesus, the one who never leaves us or forsakes us, is in our boat with us. We can be assured of that. God is the One who is changeless in our ever changing circumstances.

But here is another question to ponder: it is doubtful that Mark would have considered that two thousand years later his text would be treated metaphorically in the way we suggest today, in the way we've just thought about. So what actually was going on for him and the community of faith he was writing for? Mark's gospel is the earliest written, and his purpose was to announce a message - he writes to awaken, challenge, and nurture faith. He is writing his gospel for those early Christians who were being vilified and persecuted simply because they had given their allegiance to the risen Jesus. They risked being hunted down and butchered for their faith. So we can put the storm that threatened Jesus and those twelve disciples, as being used by Mark as a symbol for the storm of persecution that threatened both Mark himself, and his fragile community of faith.

So Mark uses the storm on the lake as a metaphor too, but in a different way to what we have earlier. Another way we can envisage is that he used it as a metaphor for the opposition that confronted Jesus in the course of his public ministry. Jesus had stated from the outset that his mission was to usher in the Kingdom of God, and hence he was up against continual confrontations which we know ended with his crucifixion.

How about we take these words of Jesus into the week ahead: "Peace! Be still!" This command to the swirling wind and buffeting waves was our

Lord's approach to everything that confronted him. The next passage in the gospel tells of the man who lived in the tombs on that other side of the lake who people believed was mad. Jesus confronts the demons and the man is given the gift of peace. Mark throughout his gospel will make the point that Jesus was open to engaging with anyone and everyone, be they antagonistic, religious leaders, public sinners, Samaritan women, tax collectors, ostracised lepers, demons or Roman centurions. This man is the Christ of God, and was ready and able to bring a word of peace to everyone he encountered, even to those who seemed unable or unwilling to accept it.

In such a way Jesus revealed to us a God who is forever there for us, a God who does not run from our honesty, a God who walks with us through the storms of our lives, a God who repeatedly says to us: "Do not be afraid, it is I." This is the God in whom we can place our trust.

The Lord be with you. Amen

**HYMN TiS 644** Safe in the Shadow of the Lord  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iPBbpYlgN9c>

### **PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING**

For all your abundant gifts, O God, we thank you.  
For the opportunity to give from what we have received, we thank you.  
May it be that these gifts will bring peace and be used for the service of your kingdom. Amen

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Our service today has focused on the peace that God can give in our lives as we encounter the difficulties along our life's journey. So we will pray today particularly for peace across our world, our own nation and community, and for our loved ones young and old. We note too, that the Hunter Presbytery Prayer Diary asks us to include in our prayers this morning, Morpeth Uniting Church. They are part of the new Maitland Uniting Churches Regional Mission. They have their Sunday worship like us, and they have a weekly group for mothers, grandmothers and preschool children, along with weekly exercise classes. They also have a fortnightly meeting with visiting speakers and events. So we will pray for them too. We'll include prayers for our own congregation as well of course!



*Let us pray:*

First a prayer for peace in the world: Gracious God, we see such a great deal of conflict across our world at present - so many precarious situations where there is the horror of war, and environmental crises too, all creating so much suffering. We pray for those innocent ones who are afflicted, for those who are forced to flee their homelands, and also for all who endeavour to bring love and care to those who suffer. We pray for negotiations for peace among leaders. In place of hate and retribution we pray for peace and stillness.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers.

A prayer for our own nation and community: Loving God, we thank you for all we have here in Australia, and yet we know there are problems too. We pray for those who suffer mental illness; for those who suffer hidden violence, physical or mental, at home; for those who feel excluded; for those who are homeless. We pray for the provision of adequate services and places of safety. We pray that we ourselves will have hearts open to others in need. In place of anxiety and worry we pray for peace and stillness.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Loving God, we pray for the congregation at Morpeth and the development of the Maitland Uniting Regional Mission. We pray with them, that you will bless their venture of outreach ministry so that it will be a blessing to all. We pray likewise for the ministry of Bec Arthur to our community that it will be a mustard seed growing God's kingdom. We thank you for the opportunities you give to us where we can share your love to others we meet. We pray that your Holy Spirit will be present in our hearts granting each of us peace and stillness.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Compassionate God, we pray for those known to us who are in particular need at present. We thank you that you bring mercy and wholeness and provide comfort to all who are in sorrow, sickness, or any other trouble. We pray that if anxious or fearful, that they will know your peace and stillness within. *(We will have a time of silent prayer now as you name and*

*remember before God those members of our congregation, also family members, and any others you may know who are in need.)* We pray for doctors, nurses, aged care staff, paramedics and all who care, asking that they too, may be given wisdom, patience, gentleness - and your peace.

We ask these prayers in the wonderful name of Jesus, who taught us the prayer we will now sing 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 forever. Amen

**HYMN TiS 613** Lord of All Hopefulness, Lord of All Joy  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNILEI8rkSA>

## **BENEDICTION**

Go now in peace that comes from knowing that we are loved by God who made us.

Go now in peace that comes from knowing that peace and stillness are at the heart of our faith.

We are the community of God, and so we go to live peacefully with each other and with our God.

And may the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

be upon us and remain with us always. Amen

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