

EPIPHANY 3

23/1/22

CAVES BEACH

Call to Worship

Look for the signs of God's presence.

There is celebration in the air, joy abounds!

Look for the signs of God's presence.

The lonely are noticed, community grows!

Look for the signs of God's presence.

The oppressed are freed!

Look for the signs of God's presence.

Those who cannot understand receive insight!

Look for the signs of God's presence.

The suffering find compassion, the bereaved find comfort!

Look for the signs of God's presence.

God's Word is taken to heart. Faith is alive!

Opening Prayer

You call us together,

As a Christian community.

You inspire us to prayer and praise,

As brothers and sisters in the faith.

You challenge us to listen and learn,

As searchers for the truth.

You invite us to support each other,

As compassionate friends.

You confront us,

With the injustice of our neighborhood and nation.

You send us out,

To show the face of Christ: the face of a hurting world. Amen.

HYMN 210 O for a thousand tongues to sing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-dEfvz6Vms>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Based on Psalm 19

Everything, all creation and all places in heaven and earth, speak of God's glory.

Each day speaks of you God,

each night declares what it knows of you,

not with words but in a language so clear it cannot be ignored.

Your word is as consistent as the orbit of the sun,

it revives our soul and illuminates what is fundamentally wise

in the most accessible of ways.

It is more precious than gold and sweeter than honey

and those who hold on to your word

find strength and unexpected reward in doing so.

Hear this song of praise, Creator God,

may my words,

those spoken with my voice and those unspoken in my heart,

be authentic and a true representation of my love for you,

the one who restores and redeems me.

Today as the scripture is opened before us and read in our presence, we are invited to contemplate the ways in which we consider and process what we hear.

What filters are we putting on the words as they travel into our hearts and minds? Are we opening ourselves up to transformation and new insights or are we using them to verify a point of view that we have already settled on? Are we thinking and discerning ways in which the Spirit is moving within us and our community, or have we closed that door?

In this time, we are invited to quietly, and intentionally, reconnect with the word of God as we consider how we let it manifest in our lives.

(Hold a period of silence)

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

God speaks to us when we are open to hearing, and when we aren't. It is the nature of God to be in relationship with us, restoring and encouraging us to be our best selves. Through this grace we are enabled to live lives of authenticity and compassion.

Thanks be to God.

READINGS

- **1 Corinthians 12:12-31a**

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many members, yet one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, the

members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; 24 whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, 25 that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

- **Luke 4:14-21**

14 Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. 15 He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth

16 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me

to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,

19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

20 And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

HYMN 442 All praise to our redeeming Lord

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGOxFpcQk44>

SERMON

I was reflecting the other day about all the drama surrounding the start of the Australian Open tennis tournament. This media scrum seemed to be all about vaccination against Covid 19. On the sidelines we had demonstrations centred on national pride for people from Serbia and refugee people who have been locked up for up to 9 years. On top of this people were holding street demonstrations over the weekend against vaccination and the rules surrounding them.

It seemed to me at times a bit like the fervour which can surround religious differences. At different times people can get very fired up about religious issues. They soon become hostile with those who hold a different opinion. They seem to want to name those who don't fully agree as sinners who need to be shamed and called into repentance until they agree with their opinion. Much like the fervour which surrounded the hyped visa issues in Melbourne.

A bit over 100 years ago people accused of being witches and heretics were burned at the stake. People who did not convert to Christianity were simply slaughtered.

At the same time it was not long ago that we were being bombarded with stories about the horrible violence being inflicted by a group called Islamic State. This fundamentalist twisting of Islam was very brutal with anyone who did not comply with their dictates.

The idea of some purifying war being fought to force people to comply is not new. It is not just nationalistic fervour, not just Christian fundamentalist purging nor even a twisted interpretation of the Islamic faith. For so many years we have been told that it is 'my way or the highway to hell.' To avoid hell we had to believe what we were told by some powerful people no matter how contrary it was to Jesus' teachings. To reinforce this people were publicly made an example of to the point of death. We were taught to avoid such people at all costs so that we were not corrupted by their ideas.

In today's Gospel reading from Luke this whole concept is turned on its head. In His first outing in His home synagogue Jesus sets out His agenda very clearly. He quotes for the prophet Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

To reinforce this passage Jesus goes on to say something along the lines of passage sets out what my ministry will be about. It has started so please get on board.

Next week we hear about the reaction of the people in that synagogue as they run Him out of town. It is interesting to reflect here as to who Jesus criticise or condemn anyone. If Jesus had been attacking the people he was preaching to then perhaps we could understand their reactions. There is no mention of dire consequences or being thrown out of the community for failing to follow His directives.

Simply Jesus just points out that those in need will hear liberating news, the oppressed and the imprisoned will be set free and the eyes of those who are blind will be opened. This certainly doesn't sound like some massive revival message so why the aggressive response for the people. Perhaps Jesus was threatening some unmentioned sacred cows?

Well, believe it or not, there are quite a few things simmering on the surface after Jesus' message was heard.

We are coming onto a Federal Election time within a few months and the political promises are flying in all directions from those seeking to be re-elected. I am sure that all of us have heard the tap-dancing politician who tries to answer a question without making any commitment. "Minister, can you promise that the number of people caught in the poverty cycle will be halved by this time next year?" And the reply: "Well, I can say that our government is firmly committed to doing the right thing by all Australians and that our policies are the only effective one which will bring out the best outcomes in these difficult times, blah, blah, blah." I assume that is NO!

This just emphasises the pertinent point in Jesus' mission statement lies with what He does not say. When you are new to preaching and want to make an impression you can often be drawn into talking about how God is

angry about all the evil in the world and picking up on the old-time revivalists saying how God is coming to change all of this and punish all those who have done the wrong thing.

There are no shortage of things to attack, like the abuse of alcohol or those who will not allow refugees somewhere safe to escape to, or the plight of those who are caught up in civil wars. Then the young preacher comes out with the call to arms for people to donate or even to offer themselves in service to help those desperately in need.

Now as we reflect further we can start to see that Jesus is not taking the easy path to popularity. The passage tells us: “the eyes of all the synagogue were on Him.” Jesus had a prime opportunity to say something to make Him popular and then to possibly follow this up with a miracle. That would have made Him a big name. Here we could see the devil’s temptations from the desert continuing. Jesus in fact edited out those parts which the audience might have been wanting to hear from Him. After saying: “to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” He missed out on “and the day of vengeance of our God.”

As Jesus handed back the scroll with all those expectant eyes on Him there can be no doubt that He was making a deliberate statement. Those who were looking on in the hope that their enemies would be crushed and destroyed only received the message of good news and freedom along with the restitution of sight and welcome to the foreigners. If you want an idea about how this might go down think of what it might be like to turn up at an Australia Day next week with a sign welcoming people from a terrorist background to Australia.

Contrary to the religious thinking of His time Jesus deliberately edits out references to vengeance and punishment and instead puts in its place the gathering of outcasts the people not considered good enough and the downtrodden. These people were seen as being likely to pollute the pure Jewish ideals. Jesus is proclaiming a radically new culture with love and mercy and no limits on acceptance. There are no limits to those who are invited to join in.

Instead of demanding that people measure up to some arbitrary rules the message was that you are all saved, all of you are loved and forgiven so that you are now free to fully grow into the life that God has for you. Equally you are invited to share that love and forgiveness with those around you.

Paul amplifies this when he develops the image that we are all part of the same body. He picks up on the image that community is like a body where different members have differing functions. This was a common debating

point in Paul's time. Those in power promoted this image to prove that lesser people should be happy with their position in society and respect those ruling over them.

Paul takes hold of this image and turns it on its head by saying that all parts of the body are essential for it to function. One part is not more important than another. This radical inversion of a popular theme meant that the community was all inclusive.,

We have all been baptised into Christ's family and there are no exclusions. Jew or Greek, slave or freeman, black or white left or right-handed and so on. We are all different, yet we are part of the one body in Christ.

When we as a community reach out to others who otherwise might feel separated from us we need to recognise that this hospitality make no exclusions based on religion, physical or mental capacity, political ideas or any other reason we might have to separate us from God's family. Paul and the other apostles kept this approach despite nationalistic and religious persecution.

We are simply followers of Jesus seeking to live up to the example of His first sermon in that synagogue. After all the Gospels are about love and mercy being available to everyone, no favourites and no special entry requirements. At the same time you can be killed for this approach and it can be hard to love some people, especially those who might be a bit different to us. God's ultimate self-revelation in Jesus shows us the true nature of God.

HYMN 618 What does the Lord require

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMPL6bRUFzE>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

Spirit of peace and justice, as we release these gifts into the world, we pray they become vehicles of righteousness and compassion.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE (Lieza Steele)

Good morning everyone,

Hard times are inevitable in this life. We will lose loved ones. Some of us will face difficult ailments. We may even be wrongfully accused or mistreated. The range of human suffering is broad, but God is a refuge for those who trust Him.

We can often feel bewildered during calamities and trials, but having an eternal focus lifts us from despair. God is still the sovereign Lord of the universe. The key to dealing with difficulty lies in trusting the One who is in control of all things.

Our natural impulse is to respond in fear and panic, but the Lord says to trust in Him through the trouble. He also tells us to surrender what we think is right, submitting instead to His plan. Unless our focus remains steady on Jesus, circumstances will overwhelm us.

Now I would like to share something that has happened to 4 members of my family. My daughter and two of my granddaughters have been sick with COVID. Thankfully all 3 have now recovered but my eldest son Andre who is only 48 years old just over a week ago suffered a stroke from a large blood clot in his brain which was caused from the covid virus which thickened his blood which in turn formed the blood clot. He lives in Blayney but thanks to the Lord he was in Orange base hospital within 90 minutes. That same evening he was air lifted by helicopter to the RPA in Sydney and operated on overnight. His left arm and leg he can't use and he is left handed. But is managing well using his right hand texting me which is improving every day. He is now back in ICU in Orange base hospital getting occupational and speech therapy. By the way all 4 are all double vaccinated. It makes one realise how vital it is to be vaccinated!

I am, oh, so grateful for the faith and trust I have in the Lord. He gave me the strength, His peace, comfort and blessed assurance that Andre will be okay but only in His time, not ours. I feel and know we are all truly blessed by our Lord and Saviour.

From Ephesians 3: 20-21: Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Let us pray,

We thank you for all the frontline workers, doctors and nurses in keeping them strong with perseverance, patience in looking after all the people in their care. We pray Lord, that through all this that every moment of our lives someone will be given knowledge of you, of your will, your great love, your awesome light and your truth through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. We pray this in the precious name of Your beloved Son, 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 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. Amen.

Please join me in the Lord's prayer:

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 207 Jesus shall reign

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5U4IMtvp6bg>

BENEDICTION

Go from here knowing the Spirit of God is upon you, urging you to be good news to the poor, to bring release to those captive, recovery of sight to the blind and to set those who are oppressed free. But go knowing that you do so with the love and support of God and the community of faith.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzDdN-5gmuU&t=22s>