

**PENTECOST 25**

**14/11/21**

**CAVES BEACH**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Times are changing.

**In the midst of change, you are the rock, O God, the place of security.**

Times are changing.

**In the midst of change, you are the strong one, O God, the source of courage.**

Times are changing.

**In the midst of change, you are the One longed for, O God, the root of peace.**

**OPENING PRAYER**

God has filled my heart with joy;

**we are happy at all God has done.**

God's love goes beyond imagining;

**God's greatness is beyond understanding.**

God restores life and hope;

**God gives a sense of self-worth to the poor and provides community to the lonely.**

God stands in solidarity with the faithful

**and works to bring light to the dark places.**

In the coming days, God's purposes will be fulfilled;

**All the kingdom of God's Chosen One will triumph! Amen**

**HYMN: TIS 52 – Let us sing to the God of Salvation**

## **PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION**

Loving God, following the great flood came your sign, a bow in the cloud. That bow had no arrow. It was a bow that contained no threat. The coming into the world of your Son, Jesus, was the coming of peace. A life that contained no threat, except to those who would control and manipulate. His coming was a sign of peace. We, who seek to be your people of peace, give you thanks for the signs of your love, your hope and your peace all around us and among us. For all your great blessings, God of love, we give you thanks.

Today, God of love and infinite patience, we seek that patience that comes from you.

We who act as if we know what is going on.

We who are so sure of our actions and sure of our motivations,

we who are so sure of being right.

We need your graciousness. We do not know as much as we like to think.

We do not hear all that we should. We do not see as far as we need to.

We are so limited while we act so limitless.

Forgive us. Forgive us for arrogant knowledge.

Forgive us for the damage our arrogance and certainty does to others and to ourselves.

Forgive us for not being humbled by the glories of your world every morning

and the complex beauty of it every night.

Forgive us for not resting in the great mystery of your love.

Now in silence, let us be still before God, that we might allow the Holy Spirit to speak to us as we make our personal confession.....

## **WORDS OF ASSURANCE**

Friends of God, there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God given to us through Jesus Christ. St John writes, “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1 John 4: 10) We believe therefore that God is with us, God is within us, and we need only quieten our minds to know the presence and the forgiveness of God in this and every moment. By God’s grace, through Christ, our sins are forgiven! *Let us acknowledge this by saying together:*

**Thanks be to God!**

## **READINGS**

### **\* Hebrews 10: 11- 25**

<sup>11</sup> And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. <sup>12</sup> But when Christ<sup>[a]</sup> had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, “he sat down at the right hand of God,” <sup>13</sup> and since then has been waiting “until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.” <sup>14</sup> For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. <sup>15</sup> And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying, <sup>6</sup> “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds,” <sup>17</sup> he also adds, “I will remember<sup>[b]</sup> their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” <sup>18</sup> Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin. <sup>19</sup> Therefore, my friends,<sup>[c]</sup> since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

### **\* Mark 13: 1-8**

**13** As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” <sup>2</sup> Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.” <sup>3</sup> When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, <sup>4</sup> “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” <sup>5</sup> Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. <sup>6</sup> Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’<sup>[a]</sup> and they will lead many astray. <sup>7</sup> When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. <sup>8</sup> For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will

be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

## **HYMN: TIS 164 - The Great Love of God**

### **SERMON**

Is it just me, or are you also seeing changes in Australian society that seem to be further and further away from acknowledging the Christian faith? Jan and I were commenting the other day that the regulations for people during this pandemic seem to be given out on the news broadcasts for everyone except those of us who gather for worship. And then the way Christmas is viewed is changing too. Of course it is wonderful to have a special family time, but the foundation of Jesus' birth seems to be more and more lost in the advertising hype.

This secularisation of life around us being on my mind, I suppose determined where my thoughts to share this morning will run. Particularly the reading from Hebrews provides us with a lot to think about regarding our faith and what we need to hold onto tightly.

In fact, both the two scripture readings we heard just now, which have been provided from our lectionary selection today, are very apt, even though they were written first for people who lived about two thousand ago. By content both passages are linked together in that they both speak about the Temple in Jerusalem, and by implication they both speak of enormous change that will, or has already occurred. As people look towards a future which will affect how they worship, these passages confirm that God has that future firmly in hand. That was what the early Christians needed to know back then. And we can take note of its relevance for us today.

You might recall the passage from Mark last week when we spent some time thinking about the poor widow at the Temple who put all she had, two small coins, into the treasury. Last Sunday I also mentioned those first verses of the thirteenth chapter of Mark that immediately follow on, where we hear Jesus pointing to the Temple's destruction. Change was on the horizon: our Lord was already calling men and women to another kind of priesthood compared to that of the Temple - one that mirrored his own ministry. His call has, of course, continued through the ages since - to all who know him, Jesus, as their Saviour and Lord.

The Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed in 70AD by a fire during a Jewish uprising against Rome. Maybe that had already occurred when the Letter to the Hebrews was written because the author of the Letter, who has remained anonymous, is thought to have belonged to the generation after that of the apostles. But even if the Temple had already been

destroyed by the time this was written, there was even so during those years, a resurgence of Judaism which is what this letter is countering. In the passage that Jeff read to us from chapter 10, the author looking back makes clear what people now have to leave behind, and also he clarifies what they are to take with them into the future. We ourselves are leaving behind - hopefully at any rate - a couple of years that have been impacted by Covid and we are moving forward into new times ahead. But that, or anything similar, is not really the issue in these verses of scripture: they are reminding us that as life moves so often into unknown territory, as it did for those early Christians, that we must hold on to what is central to the Christian faith.

Specifically, the author exhorts the new Christians to whom he is writing, to leave behind the old sacrificial system that was carried out in the Temple. He makes it clear that there is now no need for it given that they have assurance of forgiveness of sins through Jesus. He is dismissive of the older tradition - he speaks of the priest of the old system who day after day offered again and again the same sacrifice that could never take away sins. There was no end to that process and worse, it left people still conscious of their sin and alienated from God.

On the other hand, or I should say in contrast to that, Jesus made a sacrifice that neither could, nor need be, repeated. Our Lord's sacrifice on the cross was and is unique - it was perfect, it was made once, and for all. His life and death was an act of perfect obedience, of perfect love. It is only in him that we see fully displayed the heart of God. Looking at Jesus, we can say, "That is what God is like." Jesus alone is the perfect revelation of God.

I wonder if you noticed as you heard this passage of scripture read, that in the old system the priest stood - "they stand day after day offering sacrifices"; whereas Jesus sits - "he sat down at the right hand of God". This too, is significant, because it means that Jesus has come home, his task is finished, his victory is won. The writer in this way is stressing the exultation of Jesus. Jesus is not just a saint, or a hero, or a martyr, no, he is the Lord of glory. People today often say, "Oh I think Jesus was a good man and it is good that he is remembered", but that is not what our faith is about. Our faith is not only about the humanity of Christ, it is equally about his divinity - we are people who believe in one God who always has been, and who is, and who always will be, Trinity: God, who is one Deity of three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Now all this, and more, is said in the first part of our passage from Hebrews chapter 10 this morning. Jesus, is our great High Priest, one who, before God on our behalf makes atonement and offers intercession - especially through his sacrifice at Calvary. The writer is showing how superior Jesus is compared to the Jewish priests who had always been restricted to their repetitive temple rituals.

Now the second part of the passage from this chapter 10 of Hebrews which we heard this morning begins at verse 19 with the delineating word, “Therefore”. It is from this point on that the author moves to the practical implications of what he has written in this letter up to this point. He goes on now to describe how all that has been said about Jesus, affects that fledgling church at this time of his writing to them. He describes the good gifts that they are endowed with. Among the jewels in the treasure chest are at least these three: confidence, cleansing and hope.

These were the gifts of Christ to them, as they are also the gifts of Christ to us.

**Confidence:** The writer says we have confidence to enter God’s presence because Jesus has offered such a complete and lasting sacrifice. When the days ahead are uncertain, for whatever reason, we can gain great strength from remembering our access to God is assured and our prayers are always heard. Most of us in this congregation at Caves Beach are in the older age group. This is not an easy stage of life given the depletion of energy and often mobility, and just one extra knock, which earlier on in life might not have troubled us, can really hit hard. To know that God’s presence is there with you and you have the assurance of prayers heard is vital. I recall a talk I went to some years ago where the speaker was the writer Morris West, himself getting on in years. I always remember him saying that prayer is putting your hand out into the darkness beside you and finding that your hand is grasped by the hand of God. God is present with us at all times - so very close beside us.

**Cleansing:** The writer to the Hebrews also goes on to say that we have an inner cleansing, a heart and conscience held in God’s peace, because of what Jesus has done. Did you notice the allusion to baptism too? -, a ritual that is symbolic of inner cleansing. Perhaps have a look at these verses again in your Bibles when you go home. Again, here the writer is contrasting what the priests at the Temple did with what Jesus has done for us. Again and again, the High Priest at the Temple was required to bathe himself in the laver of clear water, but this was ineffective to remove the real pollution of sin. Only Jesus can really cleanse a person, because his cleansing is not external, but rather by his presence and through the Holy Spirit he cleanses the inmost thoughts and desires. This wonderful sense of having been forgiven and accepted by God permeated the experience of the early Christians. That too is available for us, it being given to us all through Christ Jesus. Then we shall know that peace of God which surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7). And the deep joy which comes with that.

**Hope:** And the writer goes on to say that we have a hope worth holding onto because it is grounded in someone utterly trustworthy and faithful. Hebrews reminds us how great and reliable is the pathway to God which Jesus opened up for us through his own self-offering. Listen again to verse 23: “Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.”

Now there is at the conclusion of the passage we heard Jeff read, a reference to the second coming of Jesus - it is where the writer speaks of "the Day approaching". If you look in your Bibles, you'll see that the word "Day" has a capital "D" so we know it is referring to that event. So we understand that these people thought life was soon going to change for them - just as we know Paul believed it too, you'll remember that he spoke of those who will be alive at the great trumpet sound in 1 Corinthians 15. Obviously we ourselves are now living in a different culture with different issues than the people were then. They lived in their context, we live in ours - the thing we have in common is the desire to share the divine love of God. The author concludes with suggestions of ways his readers could help each other prepare for that, "Day approaching": they were to love one another, do good deeds, keep meeting together, and be generous with encouragement. Absolutely the same goes for us, doesn't it!

Well, there you are: I have taken time this Sunday to share with you this passage in some detail because it contains the basic teachings of our faith. But I always end up throwing in something about PNG: just to say this time, when I came back from PNG to live in Australian society that was when it really struck me that life here was now so secular, and as I mentioned right at the beginning, it seems to me that each year it becomes more so. Does this mean that now we understand the meaning of life differently to many of those around us? What do you think? Surely, we who are people of the Christian faith are convicted that God is present amongst us, that he is at work in our lives and in the world. Surely, we believe that as the world copes with the Covid pandemic, with the threat of global warming, with trauma and tragedy of every kind, that God is present and to be found in everything that happens; that within everything that exists is the life-giving grace of our living Lord Jesus Christ who grants us His peace. And that is his gift to us as we go forward into the unknown from this service today.

The Lord be with you. Amen

### **HYMN: TIS 562 - I'm Not Ashamed to Own My Lord**

### **PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING**

God of all life, may the money and anything else we give, be a sign to us

that you are with us, you are in us, and you want to love through us.

In the name of the One who is your gift to the world, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

God, Jesus's disciples longed to know what was going to happen and when.

we often long for the same.

All of us know that anything might happen in our lives at any time but for some,

the uncertainty of what might happen next is a daily, hourly concern

that overwhelms with anxiety and disconnection

Today we pray for all who live in dread and in trepidation.

We pray for all those in our community who cannot rely on the routine of their lives;

those who live in insecure housing,

those who live in broken relationships in which violence can flare at any moment,

those who must live from poorly paid shifts,

those for whom surprise and the unknown is experienced only as shock and fear.

We pray for a world, not where everything is predictable,

but where every individual and family can live in dignity

and in the care of the world community.

That we might care for each other as you care for us.

May we be united in the one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and love,

And may with one mind and one mouth glorify you:

Through Jesus Christ our Lord who taught us 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 forever. Amen.

### **HYMN: TIS 685 – Lord I come to you**

### **COMMISSIONING & BENEDICTION**

Let us go with confidence into this coming week. Wherever we are, God will be there.

Each moment is an opportunity to serve. Every action an opportunity to love.

Let us go in the power of the Holy Spirit.

May God grant you strength for the journey. May Christ grant you peace in your hearts.

May you ever know the assurance of faith.

May the blessing of God: Creator, Saviour, Holy Spirit, be with you always. Amen

### **SONG - Shalom to You Now**