

PENTECOST 13
18/8/24
CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

We rejoice that we can praise you, O God, in the congregation of your people.

We give you wholehearted thanks.

Your covenant is secure, O God.

You have stayed faithful over the generations.

Your principles are right, O God.

You call us to practice justice and to remain faithful.

A loving respect for you, O God, is the wise course.

It will lead us to praise you eternally.

Opening Prayer

In bread and wine, Jesus is remembered:

remembered for his teaching – simple yet profound.

In bread and wine, Jesus is remembered:

remembered for his community – disciples who followed and questioned.

In bread and wine, Jesus is remembered:

remembered for his friendship with those who were poor, despised, and rejected.

In bread and wine, Jesus is remembered:

remembered for his faithfulness, which led to a cross.

In bread and wine, Jesus is remembered:

remembered for his rising, which gives us eternal hope. For Jesus we give you thanks and praise, O God! Amen

HYMN 106 Now thank we all our God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLjJJBFIXR0>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Holy and eternal mystery,

you draw us into your presence

through the wonder and beauty of your being.

Your truth is eternal, and your guidance is sure.

Come, breathe your Spirit into your people

gathered here to worship you.
Open your living Word to us
that we may discern your call on our lives
and be filled with love for one another.
Come, Holy Spirit, and make this hour your own.

Merciful God,
our limited minds find it hard to grasp the fullness of your nature.
Your wisdom is beyond all fathoming.
Your creativity generates all the beauty that surrounds us.
We pray that you will forgive us that, so often, we take all
of your goodness and providential care for granted.
When you come to us, we so often ignore you.
Caught up in the routine of every day, we crowd you out
and are deaf to your voice.
When you invite us into moments of mystery and wonder,
we are blind and deaf to all you are and what you want for us.
Forgive us, we pray.
Help us to offer our time and energy more fully to your mission.
Equip us for the tasks before us
and urge us into your service.
When we find it hard to understand all your ways,
reveal your will and the deep truths of Christ's gospel.
In and through your mercy, we offer our prayer. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Christ is the foundation of our life.
In him is the gift of eternal life.
Know this – by grace, through faith, we are forgiven.
There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

READINGS

- **Ephesians 5:15–20**

¹⁵ Be careful, then, how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to one another, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, ²⁰ giving thanks to God the Father at all

times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ being subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

- **John 6:51–58**

51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” 53 So Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day, 55 for my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which the ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.”

HYMN 256 From heaven you came

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

SERMON

Looking at some of the news stories on TV this week has brought up for me the extent of turmoil in our world. Wars in Europe, Africa and tribal fights in New Guinea causing death and dislocation for so many people. Inflation is causing some people to be worried about losing their homes.

How we act and react in times of turmoil and uncertainty certainly brings up our fears and concerns. This was also the case for the audience that John was speaking to about 70-100 years after Jesus' death. They were under threat from the surrounding community and their teachings were being attacked as cannibalism.

This week we are looking at eating flesh and blood. The passage reminds me of the toddler at preschool. It is interesting how children use idioms before they fully comprehend what they are saying. One little boy was busy talking to his kindergarten teacher as his father arrived to collect him.

The child and his teacher were having a very intense conversation before the child realised that his dad had arrived to collect him.

When they were driving away the father asked his son what the conversation was about. 'Oh' he said, 'I was just chewing the fat on her.' It took some time for the father to stop laughing and try to explain how to phrase that idiom. It should have been chewing the fat **with** her! The child eventually saw the funny side of the comment too and laughed.

In today's Gospel reading John is still giving us his thoughts on the sacrament of communion. He is asking us to chew on some difficult wording. John is seeking to flesh out some very complex ideas so that we can understand the everyday implications of what Jesus taught.

In this part of John's Gospel, we seem to keep going over the message about the elements in the sacrament of communion. John thinks that we need to reflect on it again and again, going deeper and deeper each time. This passage is perhaps more direct and intense than previous passages. Perhaps even more alarming. Jesus words are in fact quite confronting when we dig into it.

There is the story of a little girl listening to the wording of the communion sacrament and she suddenly thought about the following words literally.

She reacted strongly when the minister said: "Take, eat, this is my body broken for you; take and drink, this is my blood, poured out for your sins." In the near silence of this solemn moment she called out across the church "OH YUK!"

This brings us to reflect on the wording of this passage and wonder, why does John constantly repeat the message about bread and flesh and blood.

- What does this message have for us today?

It may have had a symbolic meaning for the listeners 2,000 years ago, but is it still the same message for us today?

The people listening to Jesus words were becoming more and more unsettled and they were starting to grumble among themselves about this message. Here they were being confronted with the claims that Jesus made about being sent by God but he was adding to this rumbling by insisting that they should eat His flesh and drink His blood. This was not just about connotations of cannibalism but also the consuming of any

animal in this sort of way went against their purity laws for Jews surrounding food and how it was killed and prepared.

They thought that Jesus was trying to persuade them to do things that were not just disgusting but also plainly illegal, immoral and completely unethical. To put it mildly, it was just plain wrong!

In the translations of this passage that we use in church we are in some ways shielded from the raw language that Jesus used. *In verses 49-51, Jesus had spoken about “eating” the bread from heaven, using a very common word (esthio).* When we come to verse 53 Jesus now uses the word *trogo* which has the approach of tearing at or gnawing the food. It carries the concept of a wild animal attacking its prey. It is eating in an urgent way to the point of desperation. It is like the food being consumed is vital and desperately needed for the person to survive.

When thinking about this concept I am reminded about our dog, Phoebe. Even though she is well fed and has treats throughout the day she attacks her main meal every afternoon like she has been starving for days. It disappears in a few gulps with barely time to chew on the pieces of food. I think that she is a bit like an industrial vacuum cleaner! This hunger is the image that Jesus is promoting.

Now we can start to delve into the message that Jesus is sharing with those present. He is emphasising that there needs to be a sense of desperation and urgency when we approach the sacrament and our faith. It is our life blood and without it we are as good as dead. “Unless you do this,” he says, “*you have no life in you.*” It really is a life-or-death matter to claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

Unless we take into ourselves this vital ‘life blood’ we die. In this respect the Hebrews believed that blood carried the life force of any living creature. Therefore, this would have carried a strong meaning for Jesus’ audience.

As I have said before, John’s Gospel doesn’t give us The Last Supper as a separate passage. There is a final meal with his disciples, but it isn’t a Passover meal, and Jesus does not speak the words in John’s Gospel that we hear in the other Gospel accounts. He does not say, “Take, eat, this is my body broken for you. Take this cup and drink from it, all of you, for this

is my blood poured out for the remission of sins. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you remember my death until I come again.”

Instead, John speaks about Christ's flesh and blood in graphic detail. This takes part in John's Gospel well before we even come to the Passion stories. There is an emphasis on the 'life giving' bread in this passage which aims to have us connect with Christ through absorbing His life into ourselves.

Let us look further at this. The key word here is *living* not dying. Later in the passage we have, “just as the living Father sent me” (6:57). Jesus is the living bread, and He is not the dying Jesus. In John's approach Jesus offered Himself not on the night of His betrayal but throughout the whole of His ministry.

For John, Jesus' message is about *abundant life*. (10:10) The emphasis here seems more about getting us to consume more than to fully comprehend the message. We need to absorb the sacrament. It is not so much about theology to be debated and dissected as it is more about an everlasting promise being made part of our being.

The life being offered is not so much about something which we can engage with at some stage in the future. It is about a promise in the present. There is the promise of connection with God who is inviting us into a deeper connection through the *bread of life*. It is not about some action that Jesus took 2,000 years ago as it is not a dream but something that we can receive fully in the moment of consumption as we receive *grace upon grace* (1:16)

Here we are starting to get what John is teaching us. That is what it means to eat Christ's flesh and drink His blood in the present, in the here and now! In doing this we can take on His life force so that we can be *raised on the last day*. (6:64) We can abide in Jesus, and he abides in us. (6:56) And we live in Jesus (6:57) and we can live forever. (6:58)

The part of John's Gospel we have been reading follows on from the feeding of the 5,000. The conversation has been centred on the bread, bringing out the definitions and naming its spiritual significance. The bread has been the means that Jesus used to give us details of His real identity.

As we digest these passages, we can gradually build on our understanding of who Jesus really is. It is not about simply swallowing the words, rather it is about taking the message into our very being like that of a wild beast devouring its prey. This is the demand that Jesus makes on all who believe. There are no half measures.

Bringing ourselves back to the starkness of the language used, we need to take on the full measure of the meal offered in the way Jesus described it. We are asked to gulp the whole meal down in one go, so that He becomes part of us ... or we die.

Theologian Walter Brueggemann calls this the “hard, deep call to obedience.” Jesus wants all of us, just as He wants to give us all of Himself. There is a full commitment to life in Christ in every aspect of our lives. Nothing less will do.

HYMN 154 Great is your faithfulness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4ox4es1jo8>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

Jesus is the bread of life.

The goodness of God extends to all.

It is through our generosity that God’s vision of equity and justice is extended.

Bread of Life,

receive the offering we bring and the offering of our lives

that the abundance of your provision

may be shared with all people,

and that the common good may be realised

as an expression of your love for the world. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Good morning my brothers and sisters in Christ!

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, as we come before you in prayer today.

we are reminded of your great power and love.

You are the creator of all things and there is nothing beyond your reach.

You are the source of all life and the giver of every good gift.

You are the one who can heal our brokenness and restore our souls.
We pray that you would show your mercy and compassion to all those
who are suffering right now.

Comfort those you are grieving and give them hope for a brighter tomorrow.
Strengthen those who are facing difficult challenges
and help them overcome every obstacle in their path.

Provide for those who are in need and give them the resources they
require.

Lord we pray that you bring peace to our troubled world.
Heal the divisions that separate us and help us to see each other as
brothers and sisters in Christ.

Give us the wisdom to know how to love one another and to work together
for the good of all.

We ask that you would bless this world with your grace and mercy.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Loving God, Thank you for all the blessings and joys in our life.
And thank you for this time when we can bring to you the burdens on our
hearts.

Lord, we pray for everyone going through hard times.

For people grieving the loss of loved ones or broken relationships,
For those who're in a time of transition and find the uncertainty challenging,
For those who long for meaning in their lives and for a sense of
connectedness.

May your grace and light shine on us all.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers.

This weeks Hunter Presbytery Prayer Diary is for the North Lake Macquarie
congregations.

The North Lake Macquarie consists of 2 congregations in Boolaroo and
Warners Bay.

They are currently served by Rev. Brian Brown in supply and are involved
In mission planning this year towards calling a new full time minister.

Their prayer request is for the newly commissioned elders and members of
the Mission Council

and for the North Lake Macquarie Congregations as they formulate

a mission plan for 2024 and beyond.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Gracious God, as the disciples brought others to Jesus
that he might lay his hands upon their lives and bless them,
We offer our thoughts and prayers for the people we bring to you now.
And like the disciples, we bring ourselves as well.
We come to you to whom is able to do much more than we can ever
imagine.
Lord, in your mercy hear our prayers.

We say all this with grateful hearts and minds. In the name of your beloved
son
Our Lord and Saviour, Christ Jesus. 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 155 O lord my God

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdE_NKyY_o0&t=23s

BENEDICTION

As Christ's body and blood are sacraments of life,
we go to share his message of abundant life with all.
We are bearers of the risen one,
whose gospel of loving-kindness transforms and sustains the human soul.
May we be filled with the Spirit's power as we seek to serve with generous
hearts.

May the love of God be in our hearts.
May the truth of Christ nourish our nation.
May the power of the Holy Spirit be in all we say and do.
This day and forever more. Amen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH_HdkWs74