

PENTECOST 16
12/9/21
CAVES BEACH

NOTICES

Some members of the congregation have been asking about how to make their offerings. With the restrictions being as they are, it makes it very difficult to collect from people in their homes. It is suggested that each week as you view or read the service you put your offering aside in an envelope and put it aside somewhere safe and we will collect it all when restrictions allow and/or we return to Church. The alternative is that you can have the money transferred to the Church bank account. This can be done as a one off or you can have a nominated amount taken out of your bank account each week or whatever period you chose. If you are not familiar with Internet banking, your local bank would be able to help you. If you do wish to transfer money to the Church account contact Jan or Jeff and they will give you the details of the Church bank account.

Those who have recently had surgery, Rev Mark and Marie are both home recuperating. Chris Kessey is scheduled to have surgery this Tuesday, Beryl Smith was having surgery to reskin the scar on her leg. George is due to have heart surgery in the next few weeks. So we ask continued prayers for all of them.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Even though we are physically apart, we gather for worship:

a sign that we are faithful to God.

Even though we can't be together, we offer each other our friendship:

a sign that we trust and support each other in the faith community.

We listen to God's word to us:

**a sign that God, who has spoken in times past,
still speaks to the people of God.**

We resolve to serve the living God:

**a sign that our faith has meaning and purpose for good,
meaning and purpose for ourselves,
and meaning and purpose for those in our community who have practical
and spiritual needs.**

OPENING PRAYER

At the dawn of a new day, you are with us, O God,

filling us with hope, giving us a clear vision of the way to be taken.

In the heat of the day, you are with us, O God,

**strengthening us in the struggle and encouraging us when the way ahead
is rough and testing.**

In the cool of the evening, you are with us, O God,

**calling us to thanksgiving, enabling us to reflect on our experiences along
the way.**

In this service, you are with us, O God,

calling us to follow Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life. Amen.

HYMN Great is Thy Faithfulness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IiQzzc41z5Q>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

We thank you, O God, that even though you are the God of the universe,
the great Creator, we can believe that you still long to know us.

We thank you for all the signs of new life in our world,
especially as we look around our gardens with the profusion of colour
as Spring brings forth new leaves and flowers.

Thank you so much for our re-creation through the working of Christ Jesus
in our hearts and lives.

Thank you for the many people in our world who are generous in the giving
of themselves, their time and their money for the good of others.

Thank you for the ones who have chosen, often at cost to themselves,
to work for justice in our world, and to share the message of your love and grace.

(Pause)

We are sorry that we ourselves are often so slow to learn the truths that come to us from the
Scriptures, to live in ways which reflect your love, and to give glory to you.

We come to you humbly, loving God, admitting our need for forgiveness.

Forgive us, for our failure to love. We find it hard even, to love the people closest to us, and the ones
who are like us in their outlook and expressions of faith.

How much harder we find it to love those who are different from us.

Forgive us Lord, for making negative judgements.

We come repenting of wrong attitudes. We ask for your forgiveness, and for your enabling, that we
might love with that same love you have for each of us. Amen

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

God's grace is freely available for all who come in faith, who acknowledge their need for forgiveness,
and willingly accept it as gracious gift from Jesus Christ.

God is gracious and welcomes us again and again. God gives us a fresh start.

His Spirit of gentleness will hold and keep you, and Jesus will be your companion on
your life's journey. So, we go and live Jesus' way: loving, as he has loved us.

In the name of Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven.

Thanks be to God!

READINGS

*** PSALM 19**

¹ The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

² Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.

³ There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;

⁴ yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,

⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course
with joy.

⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its
heat.

⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the
simple;

⁸ the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear,
enlightening the eyes;

⁹ the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.

¹¹ Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

¹² But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults.

¹³ Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

* MARK 8: 27 – 38

²⁷ Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" ²⁸ And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." ²⁹ He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah."^[a] ³⁰ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹ Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel,^[b] will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸ Those who are ashamed of me and of my words^[c] in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

HYMN Lord Jesus Christ, You have Come to Us

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uKsbd5UqKkc>

SERMON

Today the scriptures invite us to consider hearing God's wisdom. Life is full of choices, of differing priorities. How are we able to find God's way for our lives when there are so many voices, so many ways of thinking out there? Where and how do we hear God's wisdom?

Does God just zap us and then we know what is right or wrong, or the best way to go? Does he zap other people - though not you or me? Maybe we haven't had enough patience to wait and so we just got going in our own direction.

We so often find ourselves praying for wisdom in certain situations. We are uncertain of what to do, and pray to God for His guidance and wisdom. Most of us are older Christians and this is now just the way we do things.

But what do the scriptures have to say about wisdom? And is there a challenge for us as we go about our daily lives to consider more carefully God's wisdom in contrast to our human ways of

thinking? And also, what happens when we as Christians have very opposing views to each other, and each one thinks that they are being guided by God? Like, which political party do we vote for? How do we vote in a referendum? Obviously there will be Christians voting both ways who have prayed to be guided by God's wisdom. The current issues on sexuality and same-sex blessings and marriage come to mind as a very divisive issue across the Christian churches at present, with committed Christians in both camps. And surely the whole world needs God's wisdom if the issues of climate change are to be addressed. In that regard it was great that last week there was released a public statement titled, "A Joint Message for the Protection of Creation," which was signed by Pope Francis, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox Church. It is well worth reading if you want a copy.

Now each Sunday there are four passages of scripture that the lectionary provides for us to read and preach on. Usually here at Caves Beach we hear just two of those. I have chosen the Psalm today, which is No. 19, and the Gospel passage from Mark 8: 27-38. Both of which Jan has read to us.

Let me turn to Psalm 19 first, and to the very last verse (v.14), "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer." There we find out what the psalm is and what it is for. In that he speaks of his words and meditation being acceptable, then this psalm is an offering to God at the sanctuary. It was composed for an act of worship, during which it will be said or sung. Through these words, the heart of the psalmist finds voice and so his thoughts, his meditation, is presented to God. So this psalm is a prayer and an offering to God.

I'm suggesting that if we come to understand something of this psalm, then we ourselves might come a little closer in understanding how we might open ourselves to receiving God's wisdom when we are needing his guidance.

The psalmist considers three basic concepts: first, God's creation; next, the Torah, or Law; and then the human need for divine forgiveness and protection. Let's take these one at a time:

The psalm begins with these words: "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork". And the writer goes on to say the sun is an example of God's glory in that God has put the sun under the canopy of the sky. He says it rises like a bridegroom emerging from the bridal chamber after his wedding night and follows its track across the sky like a mighty man running his course with joy. Its warmth reaches everything in the world, stirring, calling, and supporting life.

I was listening to a doctor speak on the TV the other night, saying that people need to get out of the house during this lock-down. He said it will help us mentally - let the sun on your body, feel the wind, go for a walk even if it's raining he said. It's true, God's creation is a healing place. It seems also to bring a perspective to our problems. For instance, I have always found during a time of bereavement that walking along a beach and watching the steady flow of the waves in and out - the waves steadily doing their own thing no matter what is happening in my life - that somehow helps to steady my mind, to realise that there is an order in creation that is not disrupted, even though my personal life has been. Maybe you have experiences like that as well?

The psalmist moves on, making a connection between what the Creator has created, to the ancient Jewish scriptures, the Torah - the words of instruction that the Lord gives his people. Just as creation, and particularly the sun's warmth benefits all life, so he claims is the Torah life-giving and enhancing. Just as we rejoice because of creation, so the psalmist says the precepts, or instructions if you like, of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. And not only that, but they are clear, they enlighten

the eyes, they are true and are righteous altogether. So we have this teaching here that ancient scriptures enhance and guide human life.

As Christians, we would interpret these verses as referring to not just the Torah which the psalmist would have known, but the content and function of *all* Scripture. God's word as we read it in the Holy Bible, is as the psalmist says, "More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb." Well, you can't get anything much sweeter than that, can you?

But is that sufficient to understand God's will for us? To study and read our Bibles to know the way of God, so as to be sure we are on the right track with our choices in life - sure, that's important. But centuries later, when the letters to the Early Church were written that make up parts of the New Testament, we find comments like this: "But now, *apart* from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed," so obviously there is more! And that is of course because now Christ has come.

Even the psalmist, writing centuries before the coming of Jesus, acknowledged that the words of the Torah, the instructions from God to his people, are not sufficient. He acknowledges that he cannot be righteous through the Torah alone. We know this because he speaks to the Lord, calling himself God's servant, that is, one who is dependant on God. "Clear me from hidden faults," he asks of God. He asks God for protection from those who dominate him - he asks for protection from their prestige and power. Essentially, he is acknowledging the human need for divine forgiveness and protection.

And so to his final verse, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock, and my redeemer."

Through this psalm we have journeyed from creation's testimony to our Creator God, and from the value of the Law of the Lord, on to the human heart acknowledging its dependence upon God - and so have we reached the place where our hearts are open to hearing God's voice? To finding the wisdom we seek? We could certainly acknowledge that we have a good foundation in place.

To build onto that foundation, we turn now to this morning's passage from Mark's gospel, chapter 8, verses 27 to 35, because here our Lord's teaching adds a further dimension. Here we find that following God's way for our lives is not taking the soft option. Now we find the truth in that verse many of us might know off by heart from Isaiah 55: 5, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord".

We hear Jesus putting two questions to his disciples. The first is, "Who do people say I am?" and they offer some suggestions. And then he puts the question directly at *them*, "But who do *you* say that I am?" And what follows in the dialogue that Mark records, I believe, brings us through to what we are exploring this morning: the voice of the wisdom of God.

"Who do you say I am?" The question is timeless and asked of each one of us who call ourselves Christian. Maybe there was a period of silence and then Peter answers, "You are the Messiah." Jesus, we are told, "sternly orders" that they do not broadcast it. Maybe particularly because they were at Caesarea Philippi, which was where the Roman army brought its troops for rest and recreation. "Messiah," meaning God's Anointed One, would have been a dangerous word had it been overheard.

Our Lord's words that follow are very tough, and this is where the crunch lies for all of us. He says, "The Son of Man must suffer." And he goes on to say, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." So what does it mean that we are to

deny ourselves? What does it mean for us that those who want to save their life will lose it? What does it mean for us that we can gain the whole world and forfeit our life?

Today I'm suggesting that we realise that these are warnings that if we agree that Jesus is the Messiah, God's anointed one, then here Jesus is calling us to a life that challenges us and clashes with what we tend to take for granted. We need to be very aware, that when we ask God in our prayers for His wisdom and His guidance, that we are opening ourselves to a very different way to what we might expect or prefer. The way of God's wisdom is denial of self - not the pandering to self. It can take us to places where we do not wish to go. As Peter himself, was to find out.

These hard sayings will point us to deep insights about our lives. Because in these words of Jesus we are hearing the voice of the Wisdom of God. Praying for God's wisdom takes courage and bravery - travelling that journey can take us to very hard places, geographically maybe, psychologically inevitably, and will require us to place our lives firmly in the hand of God who loves us and promises to walk every step of that way with us.

St Paul writing to the Philippians says. "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." Today, and in the days ahead, as we seek God's wisdom upon our lives, may that deep inner peace indeed be yours - be ours.

The Lord be with you.

HYMN Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1Y8Naj3RFk>

PRAYER FOR THE OFFERING

Gracious God, may our offerings be used for the ministry of care that our Church can bring to our community. May we be a community of living words, whose witness speaks of your Wisdom, in our living and being as the people of God. **Amen**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

(Prepared by Bob Willoughby)

Our loving heavenly Father, we know that you are wanting to hear the prayers of your people and are keener to answer them as we are to pray. And so, we ask that you will open your loving heart to the prayers we offer to you this day.

Our heart rejoices in the knowledge that Marie and Mark are home from hospital after their own particular surgery. Keep them in your love as they recuperate. May their home rest be a fast healing process for them. For others that we know who are facing surgery in the near future we pray. We also pray for hospital staff who are under so much pressure in this time of the pandemic.

We also pray for the members of our congregation that each on will keep close to you as they wait patiently for the time when we can all be together again in worship.

Some of our folk are weary, tired and unwell and for these people, we ask your blessing and may they know that your word says that they can be lifted up because 'underneath are your everlasting arms.'

As we pray this prayer, we are aware that other countries do not have the same freedom and support that we have here in Australia. We want to thank you for the state governments as well as our federal

government. Continue to strengthen the Prime Minister Mr. Scott Morrison as well as our Premier Ms. Gladys Berejiklian.

We especially pray for those people who are left behind in Kabul, the Americans and others who were not able to get a flight out before the Taliban closed the Airport. We also pray for the Afghanistan people who are suffering from the domination by the Taliban, for women who are still overlooked for positions in the parliament.

We pray for school children who are facing important exams. Give them patience and we remember the parents of these children as they try to support them.

May we keep close to you today and in the days ahead. Lord I am reminder of the words of a hymn from Charles Wesley:

*Help us to help each other Lord,
Each other's cross to bear,
Let each his friendly aid afford,
And feel each other's care.*

We need all your help through the Holy Spirit's power to sustain our faith in these troubled times. And we offer this prayer, We offer these prayers in the name of Jesus 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 your 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 We are Marching in the Light of God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nB3SrTaEpOo>

COMMISSIONING & BENEDICTION

Go now to live wisely and lovingly in the ordinary events of daily life.
Rest in the knowledge of God's love for you,
and allow God to be your strength and your rock.

And now may the God of love strengthen you,
Christ Jesus give you peace,
and the Holy Spirit abide with you always. Amen

FINAL SONG God be with You till we Meet Again

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