

PENTECOST 9
21/7/24
CAVES BEACH

Call to Worship

Christ is our peace;

we come together to praise and to pray in his name.

Christ is our peace;

we find his calm in the midst of our struggles.

Christ is our peace;

we are joined by him in a caring faith community.

Christ is our peace;

we are challenged by him to oppose fear-making forces.

Christ is our peace;

God's peace, which passes all human understanding.

Opening Prayer

Come with us to the place of rest and quietness, O God,

so that our depths of soul and spirit may know your peace.

Come with us to the place of reflection and prayer, O God,

so that we may receive the renewal that only you can give.

Come apart with our faith community, O God,

so that in the search for a fresh vision we may find the way ahead.

Come with us as we review our skills and talents, O God,

so that we may rededicate ourselves to serving those for whom Jesus cared.

Come with us and never leave us! Amen.

HYMN 569 Guide me, O thou great Redeemer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5j48TLIRb4Q>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Eternal God, it doesn't seem right to think of Jesus as a cornerstone because that suggests something hard and lifeless. Instead, he links us with you and with one another with the opposite - with his risen life and power. We are here praising you today for these gifts of sacrificial love - gifts which inspire us to reach out to others with a similar love. As people so lovingly brought together who were formerly alienated from each other

and from you, O God, so fill us with the desire to break down barriers which exist between people and you. As you welcome us, who once were strangers, as friends, continue to make this church a hospitable place where strangers can become friends. May we always give thanks for the great gift of faith in you, O God. As you reached out to us in Christ, and transformed our lives, so may that transformation be visible through the way we share our faith and welcome strangers into this, your dwelling place

Merciful God, we celebrate the way that you chose to bring unity and peace to people - through the gift of your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. He broke down longstanding walls of prejudice and hostility between Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free. He abolished rules that restricted life and replaced them with the new commandment to love as he did. Where have we gone astray? Walls of prejudice still exist and barriers of racism still hold people back from reaching their true potential. We hear the great message of Jesus reconciling people to you, O God, and to one another, and yet we still hesitate to reach out to people when they are different in some way from us.

Forgive us when we create barriers rather than tear them down.

Jesus has made us members of the household of God and he holds us together through the power of his Spirit. Maybe it is because we like to do things the way that we've always done them that creates barriers and excludes strangers, preventing them from ever having the opportunity to experience the reconciling power of Jesus in their lives.

Forgive us when we fail to take risks for the gospel's sake.

We remember with gratitude how people shared their faith with us so that we are no longer strangers and aliens. So we pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to bind us together in love and peace, building us up as a witnessing, welcoming and forgiving community of grace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:

In Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near and have been reconciled to God through the cross, made citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. (Ephesians 2:13,19) Hear then, the good news that in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Thanks be to God!

READINGS

- **Ephesians 2:11–22**

¹¹ So then, remember that at one time you gentiles by birth, called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision”—a circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—¹² remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us, ¹⁵ abolishing the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. ¹⁷ So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, ¹⁸ for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone; ²¹ in him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

- **Mark 6:30–34; 53–56**

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³² And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴ As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them many things.

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. ⁵⁴ When they got out of the boat, people at once recognised him ⁵⁵ and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and

begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

HYMN 457 The church's one foundation

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

SERMON

After all the drama and pain of last week's passage about John the Baptist we have a completely different experience this week. In his commentary on this week's passage the Scottish Biblical Scholar, William Barclay, says: "The rhythm of the Christian life is the alternate meeting with God in the secret place and serving people in the marketplace." I think that this fits here very well.

We are now entering a completely different stage of the journey with Christ in Mark's Gospel. We are now invited into the inner circle with Jesus and His disciples. So we can contemplate: 'How did Jesus teach His disciples to live in what for them was a chaotic world?'

Living the life that Jesus taught His disciples means having the same outlook and absorbing into our souls the very essence of Jesus' teaching. It is a commitment calling for us to completely surrender to His way.

In today's passage we see how Jesus dealt with constant interruptions. Ever compassionate and welcoming Jesus also recognised to need to step aside at times. In our weekly readings we so often hear stories of Jesus at work but the readings seem to take little notice of Him taking time out.

As I have been saying over the last few weeks Mark liked to intertwine stories throughout his Gospel and this week is no different, apart from the fact that this week we skipped the middle stories of feeding the 5,000 and walking on water. We will look at those stories next week.

Here on the banks of the Lake Galilee we find the disciples coming back to Jesus with stories of their time as His missionaries. On their mission journey they had many wonderful experiences of God's power enabling them to heal people and touching people's inner needs. However the disciples were all tired out and they needed time to rest and recuperate.

They were also hungry because there were so many people asking for their time, even when they tried to stop and eat.

There is one word in Verse 34 which stands out for me and I think that we need to consider it in some detail. The verse says: “*As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had **compassion** for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.*”

Jesus showed **compassion**! This is a common theme throughout this Gospel. It could be just a word but in Jesus’ case it is more than just a word.

Some people might like to look at synonyms to better understand this word. Words like pity and empathy are often used when someone is helping another.

Pity is a word which acknowledges the suffering of another person but it avoids the idea of getting personally involved. It is almost like there is an assumption that the person might deserve their troubles. Perhaps they are less significant people or they are not so important in our lives. We can often see ourselves as better than the person who we pity.

Sometimes we see empathy used instead of compassion. This is more than just pity. However there is still the impression that we are in some way superior or separate from that person. When we come across the phrase ‘to walk a mile in another’s shoes’ we seem to infer that their shoes are not as good as ours nor are they as comfortable. When we empathise with another person we are making it clear that their feelings are not necessarily our views on the situation. We do not take on their pain and suffering.

When it comes to compassion we are in a completely different situation. Compassion has the connection of ‘suffering with’ that person. The Greek verb for compassion is *splag ch nitz omai*.

The root of this word includes the root of the word for intestines. In those times the intestines were thought to be the centre of the body’s emotions. Today we speak of loving with all of our heart. In the Greek of that time people spoke of loving with all of their stomach.

Compassion is something that we feel in the very core of our being. It is what goes through our soul when we see another suffering needlessly. We can relate to needless suffering even in our own lives. It resonates in the very core of our being.

- It is the compassionate feeling that we experience when as a parent we see our child successfully ride their bike without training wheels for the first time, especially if they grazed a knee on many previous occasions.
- It is the connection we have with someone who has been bullied and it brings back those times when we were bullied.
- How about the time when we are in the checkout que at the supermarket and the person a few in front of us is painfully slow counting out their meagre cash to see if they can afford all their groceries.
- It is the pain of watching a close friend go through the pain of bereavement from death or separation which brings back to us the pain of the loss of a loved one that we too have experienced.
- It is the pain of walking with a friend whose parent or partner is being overtaken with something like dementia, bringing back to us similar experiences with one of our parents or a spouse.
- In times like this we can have compassion for people caught up in the restrictions of a COVID 'lock-down' bringing back to us our own experiences just a few years ago.

When Jesus looked on those crowds who had followed him across the lake he felt their pain, their confusion and their deep desire to know of the God who their rabbis and teachers had not been able to share with them. He understood their need to know about God's love. He was suffering with them.

This means to me that when Jesus looks to each of us He feels our pain fully. He understands and connects with broken relationships, and the struggle to make ends meet as well as our deep desire to fully connect with God. In reality we can so often seem to be sheep running around without a shepherd to guide us.

This is where we can connect with the people in this passage. The local people hurried ahead to be able to meet with Jesus when He landed. This resonates with many of us today as Lake Galilee was not dissimilar from

our very own Lake Macquarie here next to us. It was not a massive body of water where you could disappear over the horizon. No matter where the disciples steered the boat they would have been easily seen from the shore by someone. Just by travelling along the shore the people could have easily been waiting for the disciples wherever they landed.

If we still have the idea that the destination that Jesus was heading for was going to be the point at which they could relax the pure size and shape of the lake would quickly show us that this was impossible. I sometimes wonder if that the relaxation took place as they floated on the water. I don't know how often people have commented how relaxing it is just being able to sit back on a boat and relax.

Jesus said: "*Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while (v. 31)*" I think that floating on the boat was the destination might have been what Jesus had in mind. Floating out on the water they had no outside distractions, no crowds and no diversions to their time-out. In the time it took to cross the lake they would have had plenty of time to talk among themselves and share and to eat and relax. It is only on the second journey that the disciples encountered the storm and we will address that another time.

Coming back to the crowd gathering like forlorn sheep on the shore we can see that Jesus and His disciples were the main reason for their journey following Jesus around the lake.

- How often have we tried to out guess what Jesus has in mind for us?
- Instead of simply following the boat around the shore, how often have we tried to second-guess the destination?

Most of the time if we guess we end up being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Yet even in these times of confusion Jesus connects with us showing His compassion.

Because of His compassion there is no token band-aid solution but a complete connection. He doesn't just acknowledge our misdirection He comes and helps us through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This is how we learn to be more effective disciples. This is how we take our simple and tentative steps to becoming better disciples. We are always

invited into healing and compassion arising out of grace. We are invited into a partnership like those first disciples. This is how His kingdom grows.

We are not all called to preach or to teach. We are simply invited to live out His message in our lives and our connection with others. We are invited to invest in the lives of those around us by our open invitation to share the grace and healing that we have experienced. As this happens the kingdom keeps growing. Miraculous things can keep happening.

We can't do this while we are trying to second guess where the boat with Jesus will land. We do this by following the shore and witnessing His coming ashore to join with us wherever we are meant to be. Sometimes it's what we assume we *should* be doing that keeps us from actually *being* what Jesus asks us to be – that is, the compassionate followers that He sends into the world to expand his ministry by being ourselves.

In the last few verses of today's reading, we see Jesus and his disciples back in the boat, heading out across the lake, this time to nearby Gennesaret. When the boat arrives at Gennesaret, there's one more little detail that deserves our attention. Verse 53 tells us that the disciples moored the boat. They anchored it, instead of dragging the boat up onto the rocky shore.

Of particular interest here is the word 'anchored.' This is the only time in the New Testament that this word is used. When we genuinely meet with the presence of Christ in rocky situations Jesus can create an anchor point for us. We no longer left to drift with the wind and the waves. When the disciples get off the boat, people are waiting for Jesus, eager to be healed.

Karen Yust writes that our job as the church is to be "the fringe of Christ's cloak" to the world. We may think that means scurrying around, trying to meet every single need that comes to our attention, but that kind of activity doesn't really offer compassion to anyone. It looks more like sheep without a shepherd, who race ahead of Jesus, instead of following him.

That kind of activity keeps us from having real compassion for those who Christ calls us to reach. And it keeps us from staying connected to Jesus himself. To be the fringe of Christ's cloak, we have to be touching Jesus

ourselves. To offer healing to others, we have to allow them to touch us as we keep connected with Christ.

This is what gut-wrenching compassion means. It isn't pity that says, "Gee, that's too bad, wish I could help but I can't be bothered right now." It isn't even empathy that says, "Here's a handout that I know won't solve your problem, but it will help me feel better about myself."

Gut-wrenching compassion means letting ourselves be touched, so that we can be Christ's healing touch in the world. May it be so.

HYMN 152 Joyful, joyful, we adore you

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMY3ivdNzwE>

PRAYERS OFR THE OFFERING

As God reaches out to us,

so we would reach out to others in his name.

The offering we make is a sign of our discipleship and commitment.

The work of our hands is a sharing in the mission of Christ.

Receive these gifts, O God.

Let them be used to ease the burdens of others.

May they be a sign of our love for you and one another. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Good morning my brothers and sisters in Christ!

Neville and I went a funeral recently and this verse called the Gift of Giving was on the memorial which was so true for the lady who had passed.

So I thought I would share it with you. Enjoy!

Give out of love, not obligation.

Give when it's least expected.

Give without strings attached.

Give from the heart.

Give of yourself.

Give to show that you care.

Give help without causing helplessness.

Give something that takes personal sacrifice.

Give to make a difference.

Give without keeping score.

Give for no reason at all.

*Give a little if you can't give a lot.
Give without attracting attention to yourself.
Give without being asked.
Give of your experience.
Give to those who need it most.
Because it's better to give than to receive.*

This week's Hunter Presbytery Prayer Diary is Mayfield - Stockton Uniting Church.

The Port Hunter Parish consists of two churches - Mayfield Uniting Church and Stockton Uniting Church.

Mayfield Uniting Church meets each Sunday followed by a cuppa and a catch up.

Our women meet weekly on Wednesdays at 10am to discuss the bible or a relevant book and our men meet on Thursdays at 8am.

Our congregation consists of about 20 - 25 regulars between the ages of 70 - 95.

Stockton Church meets each Sunday with an average congregation of 10. The Stockton ladies meet for coffee fortnightly and bimonthly for lunch and the church is open on Wednesdays from 11am - noon for anyone who wishes to pray.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, We pray for our church family and in particular the Church Council and ask you to direct them in the promotion of the Christian faith, the care of your house and the pastoral care of our parishioners.

Please Lord, we are a hospitable congregation and would welcome new parishioners into our church family to further spread the Good News of your word.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers. Amen.

Dear Lord, all people are made in your image. You love them and you know each one by name.

Lord, please bring your boundless resources to help women and children around the world who are experiencing violence of any kind. We pray for governments around the world to rule wisely and to make and enforce laws to protect women and children from violence. Please provide support agencies with the resources they need to provide for the rights of victims.

And please change the culture that permits, ignores, downplays or excuses violence against women and children throughout the world. Please give your grace, comfort and healing to all those who suffer.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Father in Heaven, We lift and pray for the people of Ukraine, the Middle Eastern and African countries, the South American countries and also for all the North American people who are living in the conflict of war, political turmoil, economic decline, severe food shortages and medicine. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers.

We pray that your amazing light of unfailing love, grace and mercy will surround and cover the whole world so that everyone will hear and be touched by your, beloved Son, Jesus. So all will know the freedom of forgiveness, peace and the joy of having you live and dwell within us.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Gracious Lord, Thank you for the gift of our salvation through the extreme sacrifice of your beloved Son, Jesus.

We say this with grateful hearts and thanksgiving In the precious name of your beloved son,
our Lord and Saviour, Christ Jesus. Amen.

Please join me in singing 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 588 In heavenly love abiding

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sT0r9DaGbmQ>

BENEDICTION

Let us go with the compassion of Christ,
sharing the providential grace of God
to serve and to heal,
witnessing to the endless love of God.
May all we do honour God's holy name.
And may the truth of Christ be on our lips,
the love of God be in our hearts and hands,
and the peace of the Holy Spirit fill our souls
with compassion, this day and forevermore. Amen.

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