

## EASTER 3

1/5/22

## CAVES BEACH

### CALL TO WORSHIP

Risen in joy,

**We come before you, God, and rejoice.**

Risen in hope,

**We come before you, God, in anticipation.**

Risen in love,

**We come before you, God, with thankful hearts.**

Risen for the world,

**We come before you, God, in solidarity with all your suffering people. Amen.**

### Opening Prayer

You call us from family life, from school, and from work, O God,

**To the joy and inspiration of worship.**

You call us from concern about our world, and concern about ourselves, O God,

**To the joy and inspiration of Jesus Christ, the peace-bringer.**

You call us from dwelling on our yesterdays, from dreading the future, from counting our losses,

**To the joy and inspiration of this supportive faith community.**

Bless our praise, bless our prayers, bless our reflections on your Word, O God,

**That we may know new life in Jesus Christ, and bring new life to others. Amen.**

**HYMN 351** Lift high the cross

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ephp3TVkPVY>

**PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION**

We will never forget you, God of Light,

for you bring us new days and fresh beginnings.

Weighed down with sadness, you stay with us as we weep.

Hurting from cruel actions and unkindness, your gentle love warms us.

Angry over injustice and stupidity, your compassion releases us to forgiveness.

You create in us ways of being better people,

to serve when we thought we had nothing more to offer,

to love when we cannot do it on our own,

to forgive when we had little strength left.

How wonderful, how precious it is that you care so deeply.

You fill us with joy at the least joyful moments.

With deep thanks, our grateful hearts adore you, Gracious God.

We open ourselves to you, O loving God.

When you call to us, it is a delight.

Yet, when we need to act, we are filled with uncertainty.

Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to us.

To share our faith with others is often difficult

and we cannot find the words.

Jesus, write on our hearts the message to share.

Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to us.

To love those who are mean, unkind, or cruel is so very hard  
and we often turn away in hurt and fear.

Jesus, fill us with love that flows easily to all.

Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to us.

You gift us each with certain skills.

Yet, we are often selective and hesitant to use them.

Jesus, fill us with your inner strength  
so that we love and serve all God's people.

Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to us.

## **WORDS OF ASSURANCE**

Friends, God is nearer than we ever understand.

Your prayers are heard.

Offer your fears and uncertainties, for you are much loved.

God tends to us.

Let us attend to God without fear.

Gracious One, you are with us.

We are your people and long to share your love with the world.

## **READINGS**

- **Acts 9:1–20**

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice

saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” 5 He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6 But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” 7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. 8 Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

10 Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” He answered, “Here I am, Lord.” 11 The Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision[a] a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” 13 But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; 14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.” 15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; 16 I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” 17 So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, 20 and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”

- **John 21:1–19**

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. 2 Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. 3 Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

4 Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” 6 He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now

they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. 7 That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. 8 But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

9 When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” 11 So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. 12 Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. 13 Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14 This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” 16 A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” 17 He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. 18 Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” 19 (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

#### **HYMN 224 All hail the power of Jesus' name**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_hmtxrFgrEA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_hmtxrFgrEA)

#### **SERMON**

In my mind I see that perhaps both Peter and Paul are the most important of the founding figures of the early Christian Church. They both died in Rome and if we went there today we apparently would see that the two most important churches would be St Peter's Basilica (over Peter's Tomb) and the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls (built over Paul's tomb.)

One thing that we often overlook is their profound interaction with the risen Christ.

In the passages we heard this morning we have two stories of conversion experiences. Peter's might be better described as a re-conversion experience. Saul's story perhaps better fits our expected idea of conversion.

Saul, as he was known at that time, was one of the main persecutors of the fledgeling Christian movement until a blinding flash of light knocked him to the ground. This is perhaps the best known of the New Testament conversion stories. In many ways people have tried to make it some sort of template that people having a conversion experience need to fit into, even today.

I think that Jesus meets each of us at the most relevant point in our faith journey and the reality is that no two conversion stories are the same. Although looking at the stories of the conversion we heard today they might seem very different there are some similarities and looking more closely at these stories might clarify our own faith experiences.

Central to their accounts is their experience of forgiveness at the hands of the risen Christ. Perhaps this comes out more clearly in the passage about Peter. However we don't need to search too far into the passage from Paul's story either.

The voice said: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Saul, as we are told, had been a fervent disrupter of the fledgling Christian community trying to stamp out these deviates from Judaism. The high priests seemed to like his aggressive approach to stamping out these people. Then came that day when Saul was blinded and knocked to the ground by his confrontation with the risen Christ.

Saul would have been expecting retribution, much like he had been handing out to those he had persecuted. He would have expected humiliation and punishment, even death for his opposition to Jesus. However there were no violent reprisals.

Now let's turn to Peter. He had been a fisherman, not a rabi with a theological background. Peter knew how to fish and not a lot about theology. Then on that fateful night he had ended up in the middle of the mob filled with bloodlust and he was completely overwhelmed. So the faithful disciple who had been so strident in his loyalty to Jesus lost his nerve and pretended that he didn't know Jesus. This was just as Jesus needed a friend at the height of his beatings.

Peter didn't just deny Jesus once, but three times! There is a saying that all it takes for evil to prosper is for good people to turn away and say nothing. This is exactly what Peter had done that fateful evening. Remember Jesus saying once: "What you did to the least of these, you did to me."

When you balance these two thoughts then we see a whole new approach. Even in our own country there are horrible abuses being perpetrated. Most of the time I do nothing more than reflect on them over my morning coffee. I don't need the cock crowing three times to make me realise that in some ways I am no better than Peter in denying our Lord. Peter did nothing more that night apart from fleeing into the darkness as a broken man.

How could he ever hope to face Jesus again? But that was not going to happen as Jesus was dead and buried in a tomb. It is sometimes seems easier to try to forget our mistakes than face up to the consequences. It is so much easier to move on when no-one else knows.

Then we move to that morning on the beach. Jesus is casually cooking some fish for breakfast on a charcoal fire and calls on Peter to join him. This is where the insights of John's writing come out.

Where was Peter when he denied Jesus? Beside a charcoal fire in the Chief Priest's courtyard! Now a few days later where is Jesus when He calls to Peter? Standing by a charcoal fire!

If we look through John's Gospel we find that these are the only two references to charcoal fires in that Gospel. Also we recall that Peter denies Jesus three times. In this passage Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves Him! It is just like Peter is being taken back to that fateful night in the High Priest's yard.

Jesus is in no way trying to rub Peter's nose in that failure, Jesus is clearly forgiving him for his human frailty. Jesus is about more than just 'forgive and forget,' which is not a Biblical phrase anyway. There can be a lot of misunderstanding about forgiveness which can cause a lot of confusion. Forgiveness does not mean that the issue is forgotten. It is not a matter of trying to ignore some issue. In fact by trying to ignore some problem from the past we often build up more problems in our lives.

Jesus message is not about sweeping issues under the proverbial carpet. His message is centred on mercy and forgiveness. Real forgiveness is about bringing the issues into the light of day and then choosing not to seek bloody revenge on the perpetrator. Instead there is room to offer love and allowing everyone involved to restart their lives wiser and stronger. Jesus

did not hide His wounded hands and try to pretend that nothing had happened.

Jesus reaches out with His wounded hands and embraces us fully as we are. It is in accepting that embrace from His woundedness that we receive forgiveness just as Peter did that morning on the shore.

As Peter stood beside the charcoal fire with Jesus on that momentous morning there is no superficial forgiveness. Jesus is not only seeking to heal the pain but also to set Peter free. This cannot happen unless there is a direct correlation with the agony of the denial that fateful night. If the incident was glossed over then it would have forever been festering in the background.

For true healing to occur Peter and Jesus needed to connect and accept the pain of that night and then move to healing into the presence of the charcoal fire by the shore. “Simon Peter, here by the charcoal fire reminding us of that other event, do you love me?”

“Yes Lord, You know that I love you.”

This is an excruciatingly painful encounter. By the third time Jesus asks the question John tells us that Peter was in anguish. It was in the painful realisation of the charge that he was now given that Peter not only experienced forgiveness but he also took up that charge to head up the early church.

Every Sunday as I lead worship I include a period of confession in our prayers. I think that some people wonder if it applies to them. Haven’t we been forgiven already in the Resurrection? The answer here is yes, but Jesus also wants to help us heal as we face up to our shortcomings.

A few years ago after the Apartheid Regime was toppled in South Africa there was a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This concept came from Jesus’ helping us to face our wrongdoing. The forgiveness that comes from facing up to wrongs is the point where new life can begin. This proved to be the case in South Africa. Just ask those who have been part of 12 step Programs like AA and NA. Denial has no foundation on which a new life can begin. New life begins from facing up to our failures and honestly seeking forgiveness.

In the truth seeking words of Jesus: “Do you love me?” we can all stand beside Peter as he addressed his failing face to face with the risen Jesus. Forgiveness is more than a few words. Just like Saul as he was knocked

down on his persecuting journey the real forgiveness comes from our actions.

Real forgiveness is not in words, but in actions, and what more radical expression of forgiveness could there be than Jesus saying, “I want you to be my representative. Tend my sheep. Proclaim my message. I entrust my flock and my mission and my reputation to you.

Not because I’m pretending you didn’t deny me or persecute me, but because we have revisited that and in the face of that, you have given me your love, and I have no desire to see you humiliated or punished. Come, be free, and look after my people, be my representative, feed my sheep.”

So as we sit here today looking at a charcoal fire we are invited to share a meal with the Risen Christ. Christ reaches out to us in the broken bread shared from wounded hands. Like both Peter and Paul we are invited to honestly face up to our failures as we approach the sacrament of communion knowing that in that honesty we are granted graceful forgiveness and membership of that wonderful group that Christ has invited us to be part of.

### **HYMN 526 Lord Jesus Christ**

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

### **PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING**

Grow in our church the ability to serve all your people with the wealth of your love. May these offerings be a new beginning, which builds on the past and allows a flourishing of new horizons. Call to us, and we will serve.

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Let us bring prayers for those we have met and for concerns in the wider community and world.

God of the disrespected, the broken-hearted, the lonely and lost,  
we bring to you the people who have come before us this week.

The people we see in our local area...

The family and friends grieving lives ill and lives lost...

For families broken through gambling, alcoholism, drugs, and violence...

For businesses and workers who serve us...

For leaders in our churches, who guide our ministries and teachings...

For government and leaders shaping our society ...

For global leaders as they draw together for the benefit of all...

Your love, God of Light, shines across our community. Open us to be your people who tend, care, love, respect, serve, and support all we meet and all Creation.

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.

## **COMMUNION**

The Lord be with you.

***And also with you.***

Lift up your hearts.

***We lift them to the Lord.***

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

***It is right to give our thanks and praise.***

Thanks and praise, glory and honour are rightly yours,  
our Lord and our God,  
for you alone are worthy.

In time beyond our dreaming  
you brought forth light out of darkness,  
and in the love of Christ your Son  
you set man and women at the heart of your creation.

By the gift of the Spirit  
you bring to completion the work of your  
Son.

You lead us in truth  
and give us power to proclaim the gospel  
to the whole world.

And so we praise you  
with the faithful of every time and place,  
joining with choirs of angels and the whole creation  
in the eternal hymn:

***Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.***

***Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.***

We thank you that you called a covenant people  
to be a light to the nations.

Through Moses you taught us to love your law,

and in the prophets you cried out for justice.

In the fullness of your mercy

you became one with us in Jesus Christ,

who gave himself up for us on the cross.

You make us alive together with him,

that we may rejoice in his presence

and share his peace.

By water and the Spirit

you open the kingdom to all who believe,

and welcome us to your table:

for by grace we are saved, through faith.

We bless you, Lord God, king of the universe,

through our Lord Jesus Christ,

who on the night of his betrayal

took bread,

gave thanks,

broke it

and gave it to his disciples, saying:

Take this and eat it.

This is my body given for you.

Do this for the remembrance of me.

In the same way, after supper,

he took the cup,

gave thanks,

and gave it to them, saying:

Drink from this, all of you.

This is my blood of the new covenant  
poured out for you and for everyone  
for the forgiveness of sins.

Do this, whenever you drink it,  
for the remembrance of me.

With this bread and this cup  
we do as our Saviour commands:  
we celebrate the redemption he has won for us.

Pour out the Holy Spirit on us  
and on these gifts of bread and wine,  
that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ.

Make us one with him,  
one with each other,  
and one in ministry in the world,  
until at last we feast with him in the kingdom.

Through your Son, Jesus Christ,  
in your holy church,  
all honour and glory is yours, Father almighty,  
now and forever.

**Amen.**

The bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.

The cup we take is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Receive this holy sacrament  
of the body and blood of Christ,  
and feed on him in your hearts  
by faith with thanksgiving.

## **DISTRIBUTION**

## **PRAYERS AFTER COMMUNION**

Creator of all,  
We give you thanks and praise  
That when we were still far off  
You met us in your Son and brought us home.  
Dying and living, he declared your love,  
Gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory.  
May we who share Christ's body live his risen life;  
We who drink his cup bring life to others;  
We whom the Spirit lights give life to the world.  
Anchor in us the hope that we have grasped;  
So we and all your children may be free,  
And the whole earth live to praise your name;  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## **AMEN**

**HYMN 531** Sent forth by God's blessing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LB-wqYryV1w>

## **BENEDICTION**

Stand strong in your faith, for God is with you.

Go in confidence because Jesus is alongside you.

Be at peace in all that you do, for the Spirit dwells in you.

For we are called to feed and tend,

serve and love all God's people.

AMEN