

PENTECOST 3

13/6/21

CAVES BEACH

Call to Worship (from Psalm 20:7) Psalm 20:7 trust: misplaced trust: in God

Some people trust in influence and in who they know.

We trust in the power of a loving God.

Some people trust in money and in property.

We trust in the power of a loving God.

Some people trust in health that does not falter.

We trust in the power of a loving God.

Some people trust in a life without an ending.

We trust in the power of a loving God.

Opening Prayer differences/diversity unity: amid diversity

So many different sorts of people are gathered to worship you, O God:

different in age and in outlook, different in background and in occupation, together in giving thanks.

We have so many different feelings as we gather to worship you, O God:

downhearted and lacking confidence, worried and depressed, together in hope.

We have so many different ways of following Jesus, as we gather to worship you, O God:

practical and compassionate, spiritual and prayerful, together as disciples.

We have so many different visions for the faith community, as we gather to worship you, O God:

focusing on the local community, witnessing through music, serving the global church, together in Christ's love. Amen.

HYMN 217 Love divine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GenHMi5B7L4>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Our hearts are full. For we have been put right with God.

Christ, who loves the world, has reconciled us to our holy Creator,
and we are made new.

We need not carry the weight of our wrongdoing like a mill around our necks,

our trespasses and acts of injustice are no longer held against us,
we are forgiven people.

God calls us friends and make us ambassadors of grace,

entrusting us to tell the story of God's goodness

and appeal to the world to look into the loving heart of God.

This is our purpose and our feet are set and ready to take it on.

Fill our hearts with gladness and joy,

God, be with us we go.

God of life, the stories we tell ourselves and engage with

influence who we are and how we live in your world.

When our stories are those of seeking power

and influence by coercion and oppression,

we create oppressive and coercive systems that harm and damage your world.

Forgive us.

When our stories are those of seeking wealth
and financial influence above all else,
we create inequality and systems that promote poverty and scarcity.

Forgive us.

When our story is about pursuing the latest fashion
and fads and owning every new gadget and device,
we create habits of the mind that are never satisfied.

Forgive us.

When our story is about greed and taking advantage of those who are
dependent on the goodwill of others, we create hard hearts and rigid rules.

Forgive us.

When our story is about taking from the earth
without thought for the damage that might be done,
we create an ecosystem that cannot sustain and nurture life.

Forgive us.

Break into the story of our lives and talk to us of compassion,
kindness and your way of love.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

God's story is one of mercy and liberation. When God's story becomes our
story, we are set free from what has bound us and are restored into the
way of goodness. This is our hope and this is our joy.

READINGS

- **2 Corinthians 5:6-17**

6 So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at
home in the body we are away from the Lord— 7 for we walk by faith, not
by sight. 8 Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from

the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. 10 For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.

11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. 12 We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. 13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 14 For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. 15 And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. 17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

- **Mark 4:26-34**

26 He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, 27 and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. 28 The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. 29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

30 He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; 32 yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

33 With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; 34 he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

HYMN 609 May the mind of Christ my saviour

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gE5fOXSymBc>

SERMON

All too often we take this series of parables in Mark's Gospel as a group. Today I am just going to look at the first one.

Over the last week I have been struck by the constant barrage of stories on the news about people in trouble and distress. I don't even need to take extra time to watch the hyped up current affairs style programs, that seem to specialise in misery and drama, to feel burdened by all of the pain and sorrow in our world.

When we start to feel that things are coming in on us we need to find some balance in our lives. When there is nothing but drudgery then some balance in our lives in paramount. We need to know that God is there for us and there are promises to go with this. God is ultimately in control.

Let me be clear. The Kingdom of God is not a place, not some mythical land beyond the clouds. The Kingdom of God is a reality in our spiritual existence. It is a rule, an authority and completely sovereign. In Mark 1:15 we hear Jesus say: "The Kingdom of God is at hand". Jesus was the sign, the symbol, the embodiment of God being in control.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus gave us snippets to allow us to get a glimpse of the nature of heaven. It is not something that can not be described in physical terms. It can only be evidenced in our lives and by us being part of His world. Most of Jesus' snippets come in the form of parables.

Parables can sometimes sound like they are very easy to understand and they can look to be straight-forward and simple. However if we think that they are simplistic then we probably haven't been listening carefully enough. After all we have possibly heard each of them so many times that we like to think that we know everything that they are saying. However:

- How often have we been looking so closely at something that we miss the actual details?
- How often do we mix up the wood and the trees.
- I ask all the men connected with us today how often we have asked our partner for something in the kitchen, only to have it shown to us right under our noses?
- Don't laugh too loudly ladies, the same could apply to you finding something in the shed!

So we ask:

- What is really there in this parable?
- Can we actually see the full picture?
- What is it that we still haven't learned yet?

“And Jesus said, “The Kingdom of God is as if a man should cast seed on the ground then sleep and rise night and day. The seed sprouts and grows, but he does not know how. Without visible cause the earth produces a crop; first the blade, then the head, then the whole grain in the head. But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest is ready.”

So what is this parable about?

Is it just about the farmer? If so who is the farmer? We are not told any real details about him. In my view the farmer is not really central to the story. He spreads the seeds in what seems to be a careless way. All we are told after this is that he sleeps, gets out of bed daily and takes no apparent interest in the growth of the seeds he threw around. Jesus tells us: “The seed sprouts and grows, but he does not know how.” At the end of the story the farmer harvests the crop but that is as far as our knowledge of the farmer goes.

As it seems that the story isn't about the farmer then I don't think that the farmer represents God here. Consequently then we need to turn our attention to the seed. I think that there are perhaps four points here.

Firstly: The Kingdom of God is to be found in the ordinary and everyday things in life.

It is perhaps all too often overlooked that the Kingdom of God can be found in the simple normality of each day. If we take the time to reflect on the story we see the normal rhythm of an ordinary day. The farmer goes about his business, eats and sleeps before starting again on the same routine. There is no reference to the farmer preparing the fields or soil. There is no reference to the vagaries of the growth of the crop. No reference to the rain, the weeding or protecting the crop from storms or rodent attacks.

If we look back to the difficult times in our lives and we reflect on those suffering in the world around us the temptation can be to try and fix everything. We want things made right and we want the process to be completed as soon as possible. We want it all to be a happy ending.

However, if we are realistic, we can't fix everything. There are so many things beyond our control. It is not that everything is out of control, just that we can't control it ourselves. How often in our lives have we felt completely helpless and unable to make a difference? Sometimes it is better to have a good sleep and see how things work out.

How many of you changed the outcome of the State of Origin game this week by staying up and fretting about it? I know that I didn't!

God is still present and active in our world and not sidelined by things like a footy match. The seed is still sprouting, growing and being prepared for harvest!

God is in control!

Secondly: We don't need to dissect and understand God's processes.

As much as people like me like to have a fully prepared program before us it does not often work out like I planned. It is so satisfying to be work our way from point A to point B in a predictable manor. In my spiritual life I do earnestly seek to have a carefully planned and predictable idea where God is leading me. I am sure that many of you seek the same.

In the passage this morning Jesus does not acknowledge this approach. Jesus says: "The seed sprouts and grows, but he does not know how." The farmer does not know what is going on.

Farmers in Jesus' time generally would have had sleepless nights and suffered all types of anxiety if they tried to understand the process of grain growing. The farmer in the story is not like this. He doesn't seem to lose any sleep because he simply trusts the growth process. He can acknowledge that he is not in control. As I said before, we are not in control.

God is on control.

Thinking back about our struggles and anxiety over issues we can simply say to ourselves that we don't have to understand all the processes. We are not alone in taking this approach we are invited to take the same approach as that farmer. And of course, we are not alone in thinking that.

What was going through Jesus' mind on the cross when he said, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He didn't understand the process and, as a result, he felt forsaken.

But he wasn't forsaken.

God was in control.

We need to recognise that we are never in control, God is.

Thirdly. God's Kingdom keeps growing regardless.

Have you ever wondered if your actions have made any difference to God's Kingdom?

Perhaps you might have blocked the growth of God's Kingdom by doing the wrong thing by someone?

If only I was more loving?

Can I be more compassionate?

Could I be a better parent, or perhaps a better friend? Would any of that make a difference?

If only I could help God's Kingdom to grow!

I need to recognise my many weaknesses and faults. After all I am fallible. This could cause me to feel guilt and a growing sense of worthlessness as I cannot produce the perfect conditions for God. However the actual truth is that God's Kingdom is far greater than my failings and faults. That Kingdom can and does grow without my actions or inaction making any real difference.

God is in control.

Let me amplify this. The parable that we heard this morning makes no mention of watering the crops or rain falling on the crops. There is no reference the wind assisting in the cross pollination of the crop. I can see no reference to the amount of sun needed to warm the seed and helping the crop to grow. As we read in verse 28: "Without visible cause, the earth produces a crop".

Put simply, God is in control.

We are all frail in our own ways. We can all admit to being less than perfect at times. These shortcomings are no barrier to linking with the Kingdom. We have nothing to fear and we have nothing to cause us to be anxious because God is in control.

Fourthly. There is an identifiable outcome.

When we are in the midst of suffering we often wonder where our pain is taking us. When we feel that we are in the midst of a foggy cloud of confusion we can wonder where we are heading. What is the point of all this?

God is in control.

And in this parable, we learn that there is an end game, verse 29: "But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest is ready." Not when the farmer gives the go ahead, not when the farmer understands the process - but when the crop permits... Then, and only then, the farmer takes his sickle and harvests the crop.

This is where we start to see the outcomes that we have been seeking. The harvest is after all the outcome that the farmer is seeking. If we are honest with ourselves then we can recognise that the Kingdom is implanted within us.

In Romans 8:28, Paul writes, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God." That doesn't mean that all things are good. It doesn't even mean that God is in all things or that we need to find God in all things. Sometimes life is just cruel and dishes up a raw deal for us. God is not in the raw deal.

But what God promises through Paul in Romans is that all the cruel experiences, all the pain, all the hurt, all the joys, all the celebrations, all the unknowns and unknown, will one day be gathered up together and will be brought together for our good. That is the end game: that is the harvest of the Kingdom.

It is God who takes the darkness and makes it into light.

So where are we? It is this Kingdom of God which Jesus is speaking about in the parable. It is not a geographic point it is an event in our life. It is an experience. This comes through in the ordinary things in life, right in the midst of our fears and anxiety. We don't need to fully comprehend the processes, just acknowledge God's presence. We experience God as the response to our faithfulness and trust in Jesus' message of love and grace and forgiveness. It is not through our labour, our intelligence or our complacency.

We experience God through our love of God and God's love of us. That is heaven!

HYMN 154 Great is your faithfulness

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

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

God of all, may the story of the gifts we give, tell of your goodness and our longing for a better world. May they work to enrich and renew the lives of those they reach. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

When we respond to your word,

we are planted in the family of God,

We pray for those who live and grow in community with us.

We bring to mind those that care and nurture us

so that the fruit we produce is healthy and strong,

We bring to mind those who observe when we are at risk

and those who with a heart of care and affection,

step in to protect and defend us.

We bring to mind those who work for a more just and kind world

in which all can flourish.

We bring to mind those who never give up

the belief that all life is precious and that we all have value and purpose.

God, your loving Spirit plants seeds of justice and peace in our hearts and minds,

we pray that we will be people of good faith,

true caretakers and custodians of your story,

those who speak of goodness

and act with compassion and so become agents of your love.

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 106 Now thank we all our God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s99dNPKYtHk>

BENEDICTION

The story God has implanted in our hearts will dwell and grow in us as we nurture and act on the words of light and love. We go into our world and daily lives uplifted and ready to do God's work of reconciliation and restoration. Let it be so.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhiG-Vj8CGU>