

PENTECOST 17

19/9/21

CAVES BEACH

NOTICES

Good morning, everyone. Another week of lockdown, I hope you are all still surviving and looking forward to what might happen when we reach 70% double vaccinations rates. Our people who have had surgery are all home and in various stages of recovery. Mark had his second round of surgery last week to have a stimulator fitted to help ease his back pain, it needed a little tweaking but he is believes it is helping manage the pain. Chris is back home after his surgery this week and is resting as he recovers, he wishes to thank everybody for their thoughts, prayers and phone calls during this. Beryl is home after surgery on her leg and is doing okay and Marie continues to rest at home. George is still waiting on a date for his surgery. So, we ask for your continued prayers for all of these people.

CALL TO WORSHIP

The casual, thoughtful word of a good friend

can open up a way for us to encourage or to forgive.

The simple, generous act of a caring neighbour

can bring home to us the esteem in which we are held.

The carefully phrased note from a family member

can be a symbol of a love deep and profound.

And this time of worship - familiar, routine, imperfect -

can be a faithful reminder of God's wonderful love for us.

OPENING PRAYER

The smile of a family member when we are joyfully reunited

makes clear your wholehearted love for us, O God.

The singer bursting forth into glorious song

encourages us to praise and thank you without limit, O God.

The reader caught up in the pages of a great novel

inspires us to watch for your word in scripture and to find the message for us.

The researcher carefully exploring new territory

prompts us to look for fresh spiritual truth, unafraid of what might be revealed.

Jesus Christ, full of compassion; with clear intuition; honouring God's word; fearless and forgiving:

Jesus is our pattern as we worship. Amen

HYMN - Praise my Soul the King of Heaven

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BUmeaA7wYXI>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Thank you Lord for the many gifts of grace we see in the lives of those about us, and throughout our world. In the quiet of our own hearts and minds, we think of those whom we particularly appreciate.....

We rejoice that there are people who quietly and uncomplainingly work for peace between individuals, groups and nations. Thank you for each of these peace-makers, and the fruits we enjoy from their ministry of love.

Thank you too for the many gentle, gracious people who make this world a better place for all of us. Thanks for those whose friendly manner and supportive phone call have meant much to us in the past week. And thank you also, for the ones we have had the privilege and joy of supporting and caring for. Fill our hearts, Lord, with gratitude for all the special people about us.

God who serves, you have challenged us to be servants like you. But we like to feel important. Forgive us our selfish ambition, and our failure to embody servant hood.

God of truth, you have challenged us to live honestly and with integrity of heart. But we are often hypocritical. Forgive us our duplicity, and our failure to embody truth.

God who accepts us as we are, you challenge us to live humbly, using the gifts and abilities you've entrusted to us. But we find it hard to own our limitations. Forgive us our arrogance, and our failure to "be" the people you have created us to be.

Forgiving God, you know us, love us and reach out for relationship with us. We come to you as you draw us closer, repenting of our wrong choices, asking your forgiveness. Deepen our desire to live out our discipleship in every part of our lives. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

God is gracious and quick to forgive us. As you receive his gift of forgiveness, let God's mercy and grace fill your hearts with joy and give you peace.

Thanks be to God. Amen

READINGS

*** James 3:13 - 4:3, 7- 8a**

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. ¹⁵ Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. ¹⁶ For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

4 Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? ² You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

7 - 8a

⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

*** Mark 9: 30-37**

³⁰ They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; ³¹ for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and

three days after being killed, he will rise again.”³² But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.³³ Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?”³⁴ But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another “who was the greatest”.³⁵ He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”³⁶ Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them,³⁷ “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

HYMN – Be Still and Know that I am God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oN5PW5WsdTY>

SERMON

This time of lock-down certainly makes us realise just what social animals we are, doesn't it! How are you going learning to smile with your eyes? How are you going even seeing out of your eyes, now that your hair is covering them? It almost seems that I will be on the wrong tack this morning exploring the passage from James' letter, because it is all about living in community - and we aren't doing much of that at present. But hopefully we will again, although the road ahead with COVID, if countries overseas give us any idea, may be very bumpy for a good while yet.

Those of you who listened to or read the service from last Sunday, might recall that we were considering how do we find God's wisdom. We thought about the fact that we have many choices continually confronting us - how do we know which path to take, and so have some clarity establishing priorities. Is there a way to understand the wisdom of God as we make our choices along life's journey?

So it is opportune then, that James' passage this morning begins with this question: “Who is wise and understanding among you?” James puts the question, and Mark in the gospel passage gives us a contrast - the disciples seem to be as far away from being wise in their thinking as you can get. That should give us some food for thought. And then we have our Lord putting the finishing touches with a poignant illustration of his own. So after much pondering on my part, which took a few walks down to the Lake between showers over the past week, that's where I'd like to take you now - not to the Lake! - but to James' letter, to Mark's gospel where the disciples have a meeting, and then to finish, to a simple illustration that Jesus offers us. An entree, a main course, and a desert to finish off! Sound good?

The entree first: James' letter, with some verses both from chapters three and four. We need to realise as background information that James was the head or leader of the Church in Jerusalem, and this letter is understood to have been written

later than most others in the New Testament - probably somewhere between 65 and 85 AD. It is difficult to date. In earlier years the church had been very poor, but by the time this was written it would seem that a spirit of worldliness amongst its members was becoming a threat to the faith. The letter, which maybe the content of sermons already preached, seems to have been addressed to a well organised Christian community.

So back to that question; “Who is wise and understanding among you?” Is the writer expecting that the wisest and most understanding person in the community, will be the one who thinks they are right? In that he says they should be gentle, does that mean that a leader’s assertiveness might not be adequate, in which case, they might end up abdicating responsibility? Would a person willing to yield, as he puts it, be a Christian who is ineffective - becoming as we might say, a door-mat?

So is the writer’s description of a person who is wise and understanding, realistic? They may have been back in those days - but now, in today’s world? Can we take these verses from James, and live them out today and survive out there?

We need to be very careful how we articulate and practise our faith. The word submission, for instance, is very problematic - it is close to what James is saying here, “be willing to yield”. If church teaching is *misunderstanding* what James is implying here for instance (which is all good), then Christian families can get it wrong too. We know about domestic violence. Another significant passage that comes to mind is, “Wives, *submit* to your husbands” - a Pauline passage that has been distorted and used for evil. Intimate partner violence or IPV as it is called, is an area now being addressed by both government and church psychologists - it is an almost hidden area of social concern and that’s why it is so dangerous. Issues like this are a scourge on our society. And of course we don’t want to be understood as bending in that direction.

In his letter, and within this passage we are considering today, James makes it clear that he is aware of problems within the community which he is addressing. He asks, and I quote (4:1): “Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from?” We might ask along the same lines, “What is it that drives people to be divisive and to write others off? What drives the need of people to put other people down?” Maybe it is to get our own back. We can always dress it up with some kind of justification.

James seems to be guiding this community’s leaders to think deeply about what is happening amongst themselves. He gets them to realise that this sort of divisive engagement like verbal fighting or abuse, can be put down to their unfulfilled human cravings. “You want something and you do not have it,” he says. And in today’s terms, that just ends up “widening the gap,” doesn’t it, between the have’s and the have-not’s? Because those things we want can depend on someone else either missing out or having less. That brings us as right into the area of ethics. Think about today’s international competition where we have first world and third world countries. And into the ethics of even how the COVID vaccines are being distributed, not only

nationally across states within Australia, but internationally. For instance, just to the north of us, the vaccine distribution in PNG is very precarious - how fair is it that some countries now are already, or about to, give a booster shot, a third jab, when many haven't even had sufficient supply for their first?

Where does James say wisdom comes from? He says (v.17) that wisdom is "from above." It is helpful to know that here he is speaking in the traditional Jewish way of how God comes to his people. In making clear the values of a well functioning community, he places the true value as being in right relationship with God and with oneself - and that outcome impacts all others.

To understand the formation of a community from a motley lot of people we need look no further than (no, not Caves Beach Uniting Church!!) - no further than Jesus' own group of disciples. Here we have a group of men who are just ready and waiting for us!

So let's make a little trip to that gathering of Jesus' disciples. What is it that is the problem there? They have now passed on from Caesarea Philippi in the north where they were, and travelled south through the area of Galilee and onto Capernaum. Our Lord is still endeavouring to teach his disciples the hard truth of what lies ahead. What he says is similar to what we heard him say last week, but now the fact of his *betrayal* is added (verse 31): "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." Should we be too hard on the disciples for failing to understand? Well, we know ourselves, that there are always things we do not wish to hear because they are too threatening and too painful. And also, it is not only the disciples but we too, need to be asking ourselves what these words of Jesus mean for our lives and for the world.

What happens next is a bit like when we meet someone in the street we know who is really struggling - maybe with a serious medical issue, or maybe a bereavement - and instead of speaking about the "elephant in the room," we start chatting on about the weather. We can't fathom what would be best to say, so we side-step the real issue altogether. Now it wasn't the weather that the disciples were going on about, but rather, they were discussing the issue of leadership - who was the greatest among them? We can assume it was just them, because Mark specifically says that Jesus called the twelve to be with him when he sat down to talk to them. Just prior to this, Jesus had been teaching them about his coming betrayal and death - and yet, here they are talking about "climbing the ladder". The men had been going off about their own power trip! No wonder they felt ashamed and were silent when Jesus asked them what they were arguing about! Surely Jesus must have felt a good deal of frustration with these men!

It is in the way that Jesus handles this that we see the link between this gospel passage and the passage from the Letter of James. What attributes in its members are valuable for a community? What attributes build a community up? How does one measure greatness? What is the link between greatness and power? And is there one? These are perennial questions. They are at the forefront when politicians are

scrutinised. Anybody who has a public leadership role ditto; a school principal; a leader of a church, of a community of faith.

We are told that these men had argued with one another about who was the greatest and we can assume they were meaning amongst themselves. Maybe there was someone in the group who was particularly wanting to make clear to the others their own value and so wanted the others subordinate. We know that Peter had already become a spokesperson for the group, though individual names are not mentioned here - in any case, Jesus speaks to them as a group about this matter.

Verse 35: “He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all”. This message is directly subversive of the norms of Jesus’ day and the norms of ours. It calls into question our values. Jesus himself embodies where true value comes from - it comes from doing the will of God, which in Jesus’ case includes exactly what he is doing as we journey with him through Mark’s gospel on the path to the cross. This is why people are out to get him - he is subverting the standard values of the day. Yes, he has authority, yes we call him King, but his crown will be a crown of thorns, and he becomes a broken man on a cross. So he himself is turning what human society understands as greatness on its head - completely upside down. Think of price tags on goods in a shop window if you like - you walk past one day and then someone changes them all around over-night - those items that were most valuable are now the cheapest, those that cost the least are now the most expensive. Jesus’ way of being was, and is, a bag of opposite values to the world.

Obviously the disciples can’t grasp what is ahead of Jesus as he makes this journey. They don’t get it -that he *himself* is the illustration of his teaching. So what does Jesus do? He gives them another real-life illustration. He is making an appeal for them to understand that his vision of the kingdom of God is not about power and domination and control, by holding a vulnerable little child in front of them. This is not about adults having to become child-like - no! Rather, Jesus is identifying himself with that child - the child represents Jesus himself. A child had no status, no authority, no power as society then knew it. This is the illustration for the upside down kingdom of God which Jesus is ushering in. Verse 37: Welcome the child, you welcome me, and you welcome the one who sent me - God.

Today we are challenged to think differently to how the world does. To live responsibly as worthy disciples of Jesus. To find meaning and purpose in caring and loving because that is what creates community and thereby mutual support. To be a community where Christ is held central. And that is the life Christ offers us together.

HYMN – A New Commandment

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptjXcWEIb8I>

PRAYER FOR THE OFFERING

Gracious God, may our offering be just part of what we bring to you. May it be used to encourage and refresh our living and being as church, so that might we serve this community in which we live, in ways that please you. Amen

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

(Prepared by Roz Denniss)

Quotations for thought.

“Worship - Immersed in splendour - like a plunge into a sapphire mountain lake on a hot day.”

“We need to behold God’s splendour - He is the Lord of the Cosmos - we need to respond with adoration and service and sacrifice”

“God desires honesty of soul, and a transparency in our hearts”

“There will be lots of joy in knowing the saving presence of the Lord in our lives”

Let us pray

Lord God we are thrilled to be able to come into your presence today!

What an honour!

We worship You as the Almighty, all knowing, loving God!

we realise that You are the Creator of all things in the heavens, the earth and all forms of life,

We pray that You will help us to grow in knowledge of Yourself and that we will live fruitful and worthwhile lives,

We pray that we will be true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ,

We will pray the prayer of Christian Discipleship by St Francis of Assisi:

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon!

Where there is doubt, faith!

Where there is despair, hope!

Where there is darkness, light!

And where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console!

To be understood as to understand!

To be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive!

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned!

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

Lord, We have much to thank you about:

We thank you for answered prayer concerning the production and availability of vaccines to fight against COVID - we thank you for the gradual improvement in the attitude of the Australian community towards vaccination.

We continue to pray for those involved in the production of vaccines and the injection process.

We thank you for those who have been able to escape from Afghanistan and for those who risked their own lives to help them .

We pray that the Taliban will be guided by Your wisdom.

We pray for those suffering war, accidents, violence, homelessness , floods, famines, droughts and earthquakes.

We bring before you our own church people as we are unable to worship in our normal way;

we thank you for the effort being made by Jan ,Lu,Thorin and Les to prepare for Facebook and the printed copy of the Service today

We pray for a speedy recovery for our Minister Mark Watt.

We have members who need help with their health and everyday chores - we have members who are alone and are lonely - members whose families are needing Your help and guidance - members who are sick and those recovering from or soon to have medical procedures - O Lord please comfort them all.

Here we will pause so that you may name those you know who need God's help.

The world leaders, our own Australian Prime Minister and premiers together with Church leaders need Your wisdom, guidance and endurance at this time.

Let us pray the Lords Prayer.

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 – Shine Jesus, Shine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3iB30gCqAc>

COMMISSIONING & BENEDICTION

Even under these present lock-down restrictions, live each day as a servant of Jesus Christ, and be thankful knowing that joy is found in Christ. Count it as privilege to serve God by sharing his love and grace with others.

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 - Shalom

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