

PENTECOST 4

20/6/21

CAVES BEACH

Call to Worship God: presence of

God never fails us;

in the testing times, God is there.

God gives us strength;

in our moments of weakness, God is there.

God is our companion;

when we feel alone, God is there.

God is to be trusted;

when we do not know where to turn, God is there.

Opening Prayer worship: throughout life God: presence of

In our strength and in our weakness, we worship you, O God.

You will use us when we are strong and support us when we are weak.

In our youth and in our mature years, we worship you, O God.

You are with us in laughter and in play when we are young; you give us wisdom as we grow old.

In our doubting and in our faith, we worship you, O God.

You will inform our doubts and confirm us in our Christian faith.

In our reflection and in our service, we worship you, O God.

You are present as we pray and you are the selfless spirit behind our care for others. In all the contrasts and changes of life, we worship you, loving God! Amen.

HYMN 589 Jesus calls us!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idAoS7at3nQ>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Based on Psalm 133

It is a wonderful and pleasing thing

when we, as God's people,

find our way into living in harmony and unity

- we should celebrate each time we find ourselves in such a place
for it is a precious thing.

It's like being showered with blessings, as the old song goes.

The goodness pours over us and runs through our hair,

onto our face,

and then washes over our bodies.

It's like the joy of rain that comes after a long dry spell

that washes the dust away

and makes everything look and feel fresh and renewed.

How fortunate are we that such blessing is ours

now and always.

God of all places, it's easy to trust you when the sun is shining

and things are going swimmingly, but life isn't like that.

We have experienced difficult circumstances,

found ourselves in situations where there is uncertainty,

where there is conflict, and this will happen to us in the future.

We will have times of loss, grief and distress and be struggling emotionally.

There will be times when we or someone we love is gravely ill.

People we love will die.

We will feel lonely, sad, misunderstood,
aggrieved – this is the nature of being alive.

The question will arise – are we fair weather Christians,
or is there enough substance to what we hold on to
that we can weather life's storms, disappointments, and troubles?

And what happens if we falter and fail?

God of all places, do you care when we are perishing?

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

The nature of God is not always easy to understand, it is as complex as the galaxies and as ordinary as bread. Yet we are always reassured that God is interested in us and our lives because God took flesh and bone and lived as one of us. Let the peace of God dwell in you.

READINGS

- **2 Corinthians 6:1-13**

As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. 2 For he says,

“At an acceptable time I have listened to you,

and on a day of salvation I have helped you.”

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! 3 We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, 4 but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, 5 beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger; 6 by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, 7 truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; 8 in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; 9 as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as

punished, and yet not killed; 10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

11 We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you. 12 There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours. 13 In return—I speak as to children—open wide your hearts also.

- **Mark 4:35-41**

³⁵ On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” ³⁶ And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. ³⁷ A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” ³⁹ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. ⁴⁰ He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” ⁴¹ And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

HYMN 607 Make me a channel of your peace

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

SERMON

After last week’s sermon it is nice for this week not to be so heavy!

How often have you wondered if some Christian teachings are contradictory? You seem to get one message then we feel that we are asked to do almost the opposite at the same time. For instance Jesus says “Love one another as you love yourself,” then at another time “If you love your own life then you will lose it.”

How do we find the balance in following these seemingly contradictory calls on our lives? Is there some way of achieving some sort of balance?

Today I have a picture of what is called a ‘Christ Pantocrater.’ A Pantocrater is one who rules over everything, in the case, Christ. However this is perhaps a bit of a simplistic description of the concept. The concept also incorporates ideas of the ‘one who rules,’ and ‘holds everything together.’ Even opposing ideas are held together by this being. This image does not create tensions, rather it hold opposing concepts in a creative tension. Traditionally the ‘Christ Pantocrater’ does not simply hold

everything in balance but rather draws us into that tension between two irreconcilable truths. In this situation we have the mystery which embraces both truths.

The readings this week have those paradoxes. On one side we have the Christian tradition that we need to care for ourselves and through this nourish our souls. On the other side we have we are encouraged to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of others in that we ignore our own needs and give ourselves fully for the life of the world. There is no simplistic way to reconcile these differing objectives.

In Mark's Gospel we have Jesus calming the storm with just a few words. In fact He was sound asleep while His disciples seemed to be in absolute terror. Many commentators on this passage draw the inference that it is about Christ keeping things calm in the church as the world around us rages like the storm threatening to sink the boat. In Mark's view we are all in the same little boat being thrown around by the world around us. As Christ is with us, Mark believes, that there is no furious storm that we cannot survive.

As an aside it is in this story I am attracted by the fact that Jesus seems quite placid and laid back throughout, even questioning as to why the disciples were worried enough to disturb his sleep seeing that He was with them. Compare this to Paul's attitude in the Epistle reading today which I will come to in a minute.

Coming back to the Gospel reading we have all the disciples frantically doing what they could to save the sinking ship and Jesus is quietly sleeping through all the drama. In Mark 1:35-37 we see Jesus again resting and meditating while all those around him are stirred up as people are looking for Him. This is not an uncommon image of Jesus where the crowds earnestly seek Him only to find that He has taken time out to rest and mediate. Even this story starts with Jesus marshaling to His disciples to get away from the pressing crowds onto this boat.

Jesus clearly models the need to pace ourselves like He did for Himself. If we don't look after ourselves both spiritually and physically then we soon burn out and become ill. When this happens we are of no use to anyone. However I think that Jesus takes us one step further as He adds the concept of nurturing ourselves and this is an important aspect of saving our world. The world is best serviced by allowing people to experience fullness in their lives as opposed to being burned out and consumed by the world.

As our world is able to adapt to be more loving, peaceful and prayerful there is hope. It has to start somewhere, why not with each of us? If we

panic with every strong gust of wind and big waves we are not able to cope with the real storms in life. How can we model Christ's calmness when we enter into distress so easily. Looking back, Jesus' calm manner in the midst of the storm is a good model for us to copy.

Now let's turn our attention to Paul and his advice to the faithful in Corinth. He sets out his style of ministry for those people to follow. While referring to the large list of hurdles that he has overcome Paul says that all of this has helped him to seek salvation. He and his friends seem to have suffered tremendously and at times they seem to be almost seeking to take on more suffering. While going without enough sleep and not eating enough they have worked themselves to exhaustion so that they could spread the Gospel to everyone they could possibly reach.

This brings to mind the concept of 'asceticism' which was associated with monks and nuns who prayed and fasted at great physical cost in the deserts of the middle east in the early days of Christianity. The word comes from the Greek word for 'discipline' and is associated with a life which incorporates strenuous self-denial. Being prepared to sacrifice creature comforts for a higher cause has been highly valued throughout Christian history.

Here we start to see the tensions with the two passages. Trying to meld the two together is not going to help. The tension between the two approaches is where the message lies. Even reflecting on the way that Jesus lived can give us a clearer perspective but even that is not the full picture. Jesus gave us the prime example of self-sacrifice for the sake of others on the cross and at the same time he was heavily criticised for eating and drinking with outcasts and taking time to nurture his own spiritual life.

There is no simplistic answer to the paradox but there are lessons to be learned. Over time the ascetical approach has been valued for what it is but not widely accepted. Hardship simply for its own sake is not necessarily the way forward. There needs to be a clear goal that the monk like person is seeking. Often they seek joy in the simplicity and freedom from social demands.

Let me take this one step further. When we reflect carefully we can see that marriage is a form of ascetic discipline. This might seem a misnomer. Quite often celibacy features strongly in the discussions of asceticism. Just like a celibate monk or nun the married person takes some life-long vows. They commit to live within certain boundaries and this comes from their desire to live a life in which they can build a deeper and trusting relationship with their partner. This would not be possible if there were no boundaries. While some might see it as self-denial it is in fact a discipline with great rewards

and it allows life-long mutual support from some-one who knows all about you.

We equally take ascetic ideals into the times when we make our covenant vows each year. These vows draw us into a situation where we undertake a discipline of living out God's purposes in our daily lives. That is not always an easy undertaking. We can fail, we can mess up and we can learn more as we go. These commitments are not designed to make life more difficult than it already is. This commitment does allow us as individuals and as a community to experience a faithful Christian life more fully. We draw closer to God as we follow Jesus' example of loving one another and we can savour the taste and flavour of the life that God created for us.

When we sit back and consider it, there are many different ways some aspects of ascetism can enrich our lives and at the same time allow us to actively live out our calling as fully committed and active members of the Christian community. In this way we draw on the abundance of God's Holy Spirit to fulfil Christ's charge to us as His followers.

This is where we come back to the phrase we started with. We live our lives within context of Christ the Pantocrater. In that paradox we see new life, new beginnings and are able to constantly unlock the deepest mysteries of our lives.

Self-sacrifice and ascetism are not mutually incompatible with the call to care for yourself and your community. They are just two sides of the same coin.

HYMN 126 God moves in a mysterious way

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MgbVoyPWTo>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

God of all people, we pray that what we give today becomes a blessing to those who receive it and a sign that they too are included in your loving realm.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Spirit, bringer of goodness and joy, we pray for our world.

For the people who we see every day - our family, friends, work colleagues

Be with them so they may know your blessing.

For those who influence how we live our daily lives – politicians, town planners, medical researchers, engineers, farmers and all those who produce our food.

Be with them so they know your blessing.

For those who are curious about our nature and the nature of the world – scientists, artists, poets, psychologists, theologians, children

Be with them so they know your blessing.

For those who call us to respect the past and the lessons we have learned - historians, community elders, our first nations people

Be with them so they know your blessing.

For those who urge us to adopt new things that will enhance our wellbeing and benefit the way we live, and who encourage us to change – inventors, researchers, prophets, environmentalists and young climate activists

Be with them so they know your blessing.

For those who stand by us in the storms of life – counsellors, pastors, community workers, our church family

Be with them so they know your blessing.

For the earth that is the source of our life and the source of all we need for living.

Be with her so she will know your blessing.

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 224 All hail the power of Jesus' name

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyPT3IVSpmo>

BENEDICTION

We leave this time of worship and travel to both known and unknown places, into familiar and unfamiliar circumstances, yet we go confident that God goes with us. Go in peace to love and serve God in all the places and all the circumstances that you encounter.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rw1sjc3JVrw>