

PENTECOST 7

11/7/21

CAVES BEACH

Call to Worship

With song and dance,

we worship God.

With heart and mind,

we worship God.

With joy and enthusiasm,

we worship God.

With our works as well as our words,

we worship God.

In the heart of the faith community,

we worship God.

With the whole of our being,

let us worship God!

Opening Prayer God :presence of God: images for

In the peace of a winter evening,

we know that God, our wonderful creator, is with us.

In the joy of a mother with her baby,

we are sure that God, our loving Parent, smiles on us.

In times of peace within the struggle,

we are assured that God's encouragement secures us.

In clear moments of hope when sickness is upon us,

we rejoice that it is God in whom our security rests.

And in this act of worship,

**we respond with praise to our gracious, compassionate
God, and we give thanks for God's presence with us.
Amen.**

HYMN 147 To God be the glory

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-15v9iworAU&t=12s>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Ever present One,

We thank you for your calling,

sung to us on every breeze,

brought to us in every laugh,

shown to us in generous acts,

enlivened around us in new growth and life.

In praise, we offer ourselves humbly to you.

In awe, we offer our beings.

For you who loves with such generosity,

will bring us into Life everlasting.

Gentle Spirit,

Sit with me now, as I wish to hear to your wisdom.

A silence is kept

I have often not followed the Way of Jesus...

I do not always welcome or care for others with the breadth of your love...

I often bring prejudice and judgments into my thoughts and actions...

I sometimes hold on to hurt and self-doubt and let it fester...

In anger, I lash out instead of working towards peace...

In shame, I do not apologise for hurt I have brought to another or in creation...

Gentle Spirit,

Sit with me now, as I wish to hear to your wisdom.

A silence is kept

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Children of God, we are all welcomed to God's family.

It is one of justice, kindness, love and humble journeying together.

God opens all God's realm to us.

Jesus shows us new Ways of being.

Holy Spirit flows through God's realm in Kairos (God's) time.

From the beginning to evermore,

God's gracious love is with us.

READINGS

- **Ephesians 1:3-14**

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also,

when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

- **Mark 6:14-29**

14 King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." 15 But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." 16 But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

17 For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. 18 For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19 And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, 20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. 21 But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. 22 When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." 23 And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." 24 She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." 25 Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." 26 The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. 27 Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, 28 brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. 29 When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

HYMN 242 I danced in the morning

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mgvzwXTpM4>

SERMON

There is so much horror and disruption shown on TV today that we can almost become immune to other people's suffering. It is so far away that we

can think that we are immune. Then we have the collapse of a multi-story apartment block in the USA and the river of mud flowing down a Japanese street we can start to wonder how safe we really are here!

Just the other week we had a massive spike in the conflict in the middle east when Israel and the local Arab population yet again launched a series of attacks on one another. From a distance this conflict seems so pointless to me. We all know that with the imbalance of weapons one side is going to suffer more casualties than the other. Not only are homes destroyed but people's livelihood and hope for the future can so easily be shattered.

Most of the victims on both sides are ordinary people going about their normal daily activities. Outbreaks of violence like this are mostly random and tragic, to say the least. These people generally are not in any way starting the violence. It comes from people well away from the conflict.

The people who are sacrificed in this atmosphere of aggression and baying for blood can be any hapless person in the area. They are simply lost in the demands of a bottomless thirst for retribution.

So:

- Where is God in all of this?
- Why do these cycles of needless violence keep erupting without God seeming to act?
- Is there anything that we can do about this horror?

To even start to look at where God is when there are times of violence and people are needlessly suffering we must begin with the cross. For most of us this brings up the image of unfettered violence against an innocent victim.

We tend to think that the manner of Jesus' death was in some way unique. But this method of killing was not unknown in those days. The nature of the death that Jesus suffered was not unknown to Mark's audience. There would have seen the bodies hanging along a lot of roads.

If that is the case then what does Jesus tell us about the upcoming events. In the Gospel accounts Jesus doesn't make any particular emphasis about his death being something special or unique. In fact he openly reflects back on the treatment of the prophets of the past. Their fate seems to have been looming largely on His horizon.

Basically he tells His followers that what was going to happen to Him was no different from what happened to so many before Him, including his cousin John. For instance we can see this in the parable of the mutinous vineyard tenants. The owner having sent a series of servants to collect the rent with each being successively more severely mis-treated by the tenants. This culminates with the brutal slaying of the respected son of the vineyard's owner. This clearly tells us that Jesus saw His death as not being unique, nor was it unexpected.

Now we come to John the Baptist. There are strong parallels here. John was seen as the last of the Hebrew prophets and we should note here that we have already heard of his death in the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark. So why is it now recounted in such gruesome detail?

In Mark's Gospel we are in the midst of a series of stories about the nature and cost of ministry and discipleship which was clearly being set out for those who followed Jesus. Following Jesus was not designed to allow for a long and untroubled life. We still live in a world of hostility and violence where just for being a follower of Jesus we might attract even more trouble than we already have.

Mark's Gospel was written in turbulent times shortly after the sacking of Jerusalem when many people thought that the world was about to end. Therefore there was a great need to spread the good news of Christ quickly before the end-times started. This passage sits squarely in the middle of where we learn of Jesus' teachings about the consequences of being a follower.

While not exactly the same there are strong parallels between Jesus' suffering and John's death. Both were arrested because they had exposed transgressions of power by those in charge. John has called out the adulterous betrayal of Herod's brother. Jesus openly exposed the failures of the religious elite in the Temple in Jerusalem's establishment. Both victims shone a piercing light on hypocrisy and the lack of grace by those in power.

Then both Jesus and John end up with their fate in the shaky hands of those in power even though both leaders have a fascination with their teachings. Herod hates John for calling him out yet at the same time he is drawn to the message that John is preaching condemning the evils being perpetrated. Perhaps there is an interesting psychological study here for some eager theology/psychology student to explore one day.

At the same time Pilate thinks that Jesus is naïve and could be described as a ridiculous dreamer. Pilate tries to engage Jesus but gets nowhere.

Both leaders find themselves caught up and pushed into making the fateful decision by blood thirsty onlookers.

Herod and his banquet guests have been drawn in because of the evocative dancing by Salome who is then easily able to manipulate the despot into disposing of the man her mother hated so much. A severed head on a platter is all that will quench this mob and her vengeance.

Then again it was a similar crowd who shouted Hosannah as Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey and then transformed their focus to become a blood thirsty mob seeking the crucifixion of Jesus. In both cases the decision makers were inclined to stop the murder but were unwilling to go against the mob's bold blood lust.

Like we have reflected over the last few weeks it is in the differing parallel stories that we can see a deeper truth come through. Jesus death is just the latest in a long line of murdered prophets, including the most recent one of John the Baptist.

We find that Jesus' and John's deaths were not unique. Violence then, as now, is endemic. It reflects in the deaths of so many innocent people down through the ages, including in the middle east today. On each occasion there are enraged mobs baying for retribution over real and perceived 'wrongs.' Going along with this are the leaders who do not have the courage to stand up to the mob's outrageous demands for victims to be sacrificed in the name of 'the mob's wounded honour.'

Now we can start to see the connections of honour stoked retribution we can see connections all over the place where there is mob violence.

For example there are traumatised and dispossessed people seeking asylum in a country like ours shining a light on the excesses of our lifestyles. It is so easy for a frenzied mob to start calling for these innocent victims to be the object of mob violence as people seek to re-establish their life of ignorance ignoring the real needs of our world. The casting out of Jesus comes alongside the persecution of asylum seekers.

Another example might be the so called reality shows of a few years ago when we targeted and humiliated people based only on their weight and body shape. These shows only served to highlight our cultural obsession with food, thinness and impossible images of the correct body shape. I doubt that many people could live up to those impossible, and probably dangerous, body image objectives. Once again we are being bombarded with unreal ideas of what is acceptable and beautiful through the eyes of

some very unqualified people who have been given cult status by the media only seeking ratings.

Closer to home there is the tendency to look for a victim to be a scapegoat when we feel threatened and under pressure to conform. We can consider attacking someone who is perhaps more vulnerable than us. Or we want to bring down people who we consider to be more capable and a threat to us.

Then we come back to the situation where the bombs start to fly across the Israel/Lebanon border with no sign that it will ever stop completely. Both sides are constantly looking to the other as the scapegoat.

Is there a way out of the cycles of objectification and ostracism and violence?

Yes, it comes about when we recognise the way of freedom that Jesus opens up for us. Recognising the solidarity of Jesus with the victims of these various acts of violence and humiliation does seem to be confronting to us. There are plenty of times when we find ourselves as the victims. There are times when we find ourselves isolated and misunderstood and unfairly accused and abused.

In those times of pain we find the suffering messiah standing in solidarity with us. And the call to us, in those experiences, is to seek to always position ourselves with the victims, and to look at all these situations through the eyes of the victim. But, and this is the next step, not just any victim. In Jesus we have encountered the victim without resentment, the victim who knows his own murderers as victims, as those caught in the web of hostility and violence and unable to break themselves free.

In Jesus we encounter the victim who is able to pray for the forgiveness of his own killers, and who comes back to us, raised to life by God, as the sacrificed victim whose death exposes the sickness of all our violence. Those whose wounded hands are open in welcome and mercy and the absolute absence of resentment or vengefulness for the benefit of everyone.

It is only in that experience of grace, in surrendering ourselves to that gratuitous forgiveness, that we can find a way to be free of our own hostility, so that the world can begin to be healed of its grievous wounds.

It is only as we find ourselves anew in that overwhelming mercy that we can begin to become part of the solution instead of continuing to be part of the problem.

It is only as we begin to reciprocate that love and spread it around that we can find the courage to stop perpetuating the cycle of declarations of "they will pay a very very heavy price", and instead say "they will face a very very awesome outpouring of resilient forgiveness, just as we have been saved by a very very awesome and resilient outpouring of grace."

In His suffering death, Jesus calls us to solidarity with all who suffer, and in His complete lack of vengefulness, the risen Christ offers the hope of healing from our violence.

HYMN 561 Who would true valour see

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

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERINGB

Today, we offer our gifts of living and being, as we offer ourselves again to you, O God. Teach us again what it means to be your children. Help us again to love with open hearts. Fill us with a desire to be your loving people, as we delight in the realm of God.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of all,

We pray for those who are imprisoned –

through tyranny, injustice, prejudice, violence, selfishness and illness.

As your family, we pray for all your children.

Show us where we can bring your justice.

We pray for those who hunger –

for democracy, justice, acceptance, respect, self-awareness and wellbeing.

As your family, we pray for all your children.

Show us where we can bring your grace.

We pray for those who are unseeing and unbelieving -

to abuse of power, valuing the other, a fair go, understanding the breadth of your creation, to faith in you and to knowing your realm.

We pray for your realm, O God, to be known in this time.

As your family, we pray for all your children.

Show us where we can bring your peace and Light.

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 228 Crown Him with many crowns

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7OCs0d_4vM

BENEDICTION

Let us celebrate the wonders of being in God's family -

the belonging, the community, the wisdom and wealth of creativity.

God covers us with gracious grace -

every day, in every place, in every moment.

So, let us leave with

the knowledge of God's presence

and the skills that Jesus brings us

and the strength of the flowing Spirit drawing us forward.

God calls to us to open our souls to everything in heaven and on earth.

God loves us, enriches us and we belong to God's family!

We go out in joy and hope, to a new awakening to God's realm.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJ6RaKX4_I4&t=28s