

PENTECOST

31 MAY 2020

CAVES BEACH UCA

CALL TO WORSHIP

The God of all calls us together. We gather in this place, at this time, and set it apart for worship not because God needs us to worship but because we come to respond to God's life amongst us. We gather to give glory to God and to celebrate God's presence in all the earth. Let us worship!

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Spirit of wonder, you move in our hearts as we gather today.
Where we are closed, open us. Where we are in need, heal us.
Where we are anxious, give us peace. Lead us in our worship, we pray. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

O Lord, from generation to generation we have praised your name.

For you have given us life in abundance and the joy of all things great and small. You have opened your hand and filled our lives with good things.
You have sent forth your spirit and renewed the face of the earth. Above all, you have come here and dwelt among us,
becoming one of us that we might know you better. May your glory endure forever as we sing praises to your name.

Gracious God,

we confess that we have been like the disciples, locked in a room, filled with fear.
Our fears have grown from ignorance, but also, from our wilful disbelief of your promises.
Too often we are willing to be swayed by the ways of this world and to follow the distorted thinking of protection by division, sustenance through stockpiling and peace that comes from violence.
Turn our hearts and minds away from these falsities. Instead, turn us to
your ways of unity, abundance and love.

We confess we have been locked in a room, filled with fear:
fear of not being relevant or enough, fear of not being popular or relevant.
Help us to see that when we follow in your ways, that these fears are irrelevant and they distract us from the call to love.
Turn our eyes that we might see your wounds and know the paths of discipleship.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Jesus breaks through the barriers of our making and those that the world puts up as well.
He stands among us and offers peace. The peace of forgiveness be yours today. May this peace give you new life.

Amen.

READINGS

Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." 12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" 13 But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. 16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

17 'In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.
18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.
19 And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.
20 The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.
21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

Great Southland <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3h6vnHXRbeM>

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

O Lord, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
25 Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,

living things both small and great.

26 There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

27 These all look to you

to give them their food in due season;

28 when you give to them, they gather it up;

when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

29 When you hide your face, they are dismayed;

when you take away their breath, they die

and return to their dust.

30 When you send forth your spirit, they are created;

and you renew the face of the ground.

31 May the glory of the Lord endure forever;

may the Lord rejoice in his works-

32 who looks on the earth and it trembles,

who touches the mountains and they smoke.

33 I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;

I will sing praise to my God while I have being.

34 May my meditation be pleasing to him,

for I rejoice in the Lord.

35B Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Praise the Lord!

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

3b no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body-Jews or Greeks, slaves or free-and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

John 20:19-23

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

SERMON

I was looking at the passage from Acts where it refers to all the different languages spoken by the people at that first Pentecost event. The miracle of Pentecost for me rests with the message that God is able to meet with everyone regardless of language, race or culture. We all too often see divisions.

I thought of the different languages spoken by many of the parents of some people who attend here now at Caves Beach. It must be a very frightening thing to be somewhere when you don't know the local language or understand the culture.

For many years our nation has obliged people to learn at least some basic English to encourage people to mix into our society. At the same time the mixing of cultures, which have joined Australian society in the last 100 years, has certainly brought a lot of colour and depth to our nation. Why would I look at this at a time like Pentecost?

* Let us see where this journey takes us.

The language or dialect spoken by different groups of people is very often closely linked with people's identity. At the same time people can use a person speaking a different language as the basis of attacking them both verbally and physically. It is the trigger for many racist attacks. It is ironic that this week we have riots in the USA after the death of a negro at the hands of a white police officer.

Quite often I have heard that some dispute was started when someone spoke in another language and one of the people there has taken offence. Here in Australia people sometimes demand that other people speak English only. Especially where there are existing tensions in the community this approach can soon boil over into a brawl, more so among young people.

Over time in Australia many attempts have been made to force people to drop their native languages and customs. This was not just done with migrants. It is interesting that we reflect on this issue during the National Reconciliation Week where bonds are being built with our First Nation people.

Destruction of traditional languages was part of the White Australian policy which has now been discredited.

Here is an extract from Stan Grant's book "Talking to my Country." (p107-8)

By the middle of the twentieth century my father's language was dying. It had largely vanished, wiped out by missionaries and government officers who forbade it. My father caught the last utterings of Wiradjuri. His grandfather was among the final keepers of the traditions and ceremonies and he would speak in the bush to my father, educating him in the way he and his father before him had been educated. But once he made the mistake of calling out to his grandson in front of the whites. Downtown Griffith was no place for this. The police arrested him and he was jailed. When he came out he refused to speak his language again.

All over Australia the local dialects were systematically squashed along with the culture and bush knowledge.

- * Why is language such an inflammatory issue?
- * Why does it stir open violence and hostility?
- * What does all this have to do with the Gospel reading today?

A lot of it comes out of fear. Fear can be a multi-layered reaction to the unknown or misunderstood. I can remember walking the streets of towns in the Solomon Islands not really knowing if anyone would understand me. I was very prominent in my military uniform and felt like I was an easy target for any person resenting our military presence there.

- * Have you ever walked down the street in a strange place not knowing the culture, even here in Australia?
- * Have you felt vulnerable like this?

In our own society with speaking our common language we can feel fairly confident in most situations. Our common heritage would allow us to negotiate most situations.

But, how about ordering a simple sandwich in another language and culture?

If something goes wrong how do you ask for help if no one understands you?

Understanding the fearfulness of being so vulnerable can give us some understanding and compassion for people who are feeling threatened and exposed as they come into contact with an entirely new culture.

Take away any sense of security as you don't fully understand what is happening around you and you can understand part of why people might shy away and react inappropriately sometimes. People speaking another language when you are not sure what they are saying about you can be very confronting. Especially if there is a history of violence and confrontation between people in that community.

In a lot of the world, and even in some parts of Australia, people live in fear of an unprovoked attack. This fear makes you feel always on the defensive and needing to protect yourself. In these dynamics people tend to want to make another person the object of attention so as they can personally feel safe and not be noticed by the aggressive people in that society. In order to protect themselves they try to direct attention onto another, more vulnerable, person.

This may be an unconscious approach but it is more successful if we direct hostility away from us. The difference might be racial, language or just cultural and this approach is more effective if the victim is relatively powerless. Aggression is most often directed towards minorities or disadvantaged members of the community as they are less likely to retaliate. As someone said, there are no neo-Nazi skin heads attacking Jews in Jerusalem, as no-one picks on the majority.

Most of us, when we feel under attack, are likely to try and point the finger at someone else saying: "What about them?" This sort of attention diversion is common in most faith systems. While it does not always result in violence it is common to shun and persecute the 'outsider'.

Over the centuries our Christian western society has persecuted Jews, Muslims, people of different skin colours, women, divorcees, homosexuals, liberals and fundamentalists. This is often done under the cover of a religious crusade against some sin or other wickedness. In this process we excuse ourselves by suggesting that we are siding with God who hates those evil people. In fact most of these sorts of attacks are basically driven by the same motive I mentioned before, fear!

When we want to purge the world of sinners we need to make sure that we are not the ones purged. We want to feel safe as one of the people identifying other's failures. After all if they are the 'evil' ones then we must all be the 'good ones.' Of course this means that we are exempt from 'judgement.'

As we are all somewhat fearful of being judged and being made the outsider we will tend to side with those who initiate the attacks. In this respect I believe that neither the 'right' or 'left' of the Christian traditions can be absolved from such movements.

There is the hostility directed at Margaret Court in the last few years because of her vilification of sexual and racial minorities. If we simply reciprocate her hostility we are further developing a divisive world.

The more that we point our fingers at others and identify them as the 'problem' the more we descend into separation and conflict. We should not see ourselves as separated factions. We don't need to maintain our personal identity based only on the emotions that dictate that our survival is at someone else's expense.

Coming back to Jesus message ... we now see why it was so remarkable. In an extraordinary way Jesus moves us together rather than apart. He came among us and willingly stood out as being different and unusual. This invited people to turn on him as the 'odd one out' or the 'vulnerable minority' who we could all join with in persecuting with the mob mentality. This then deflects the responsibility away from us when things go wrong.

By being willing to be the object of derision and scorn Jesus achieved an astonishing transformation.

He unmasked the great lies within social systems. The lie which says that crusades were authorised by God and therefore they should be conducted on God's behalf. It is the lie which says it is only us 'good' people who can attack the 'evil' ones, as only we can identify what is really 'good' or 'evil' based solely on 'us' and how we see the world.

The next revelation is that he simply unmasked community lies. Becoming one of the persecuted is not necessarily a bad thing. Even though he was crucified he rose again to be more alive than before. We can safely follow Jesus' example knowing that the life and love of God is with us. In doing this we don't need to be part of the 'finger pointing' and 'crucifying' of people who differ from us. It is in this way we become part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

The Spirit which flowed out onto those gathered at the first Pentecost event was Jesus' Spirit. It was the same Spirit which shaped Jesus' ministry and teaching and inspired him and empowered him. It allowed him to stand with victims throughout the world to the point that he was the ultimate victim of human hostility and violence.

When Jesus pours his love on us it is a Spirit which has absolutely nothing to do with the divisions we make between ourselves and rival groups. It has no ethnic, linguistic or theological or sexual separation. Rather it is a Spirit of love which breaks down barriers and builds bridges and heals divisions while reconciling us with our former enemies.

It was this wild and crazy Spirit which drove those first, previously fearful, disciples out onto the streets and empowered them to preach the good news in everyone's language. It was a sign of a new culture revealed by Jesus in which we are all welcome and our diversity is a cause of celebration and liberation, not a message of suspicion and division.

Celebrating the diversity among us might be a small thing initially but it is a sign of a massive transformation that we need in our world. We can then be moved about by the Holy Spirit to be present beyond our little enclaves marked by frightening conformity and repression of any diversity.

It gives us pathways where we celebrate the wonderful diversity and colour of our world. It allows us to be all-inclusive in our love that brings healing for those who are hurting through being pushed aside. We can be part of creating a community of belonging and security which we have all longed for.

Even today the Holy Spirit first revealed in that Pentecost event helps us the communicate in any language, culture or on any continent. God is the God of the whole world and beyond.

O breath of life come sweeping through us https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QHZB_v0ZaY

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE (Roz Denniss)

We stand before You in our raw state.
We have nothing to give you worthy of your GREAT GLORY.
Continually we decide to follow in Your footsteps. But we get side tracked leaving us to feel lost and alone.
Alone with our mistakes and failures, Please forgive us.
Please forgive us for being so easily distracted.
We hold out our hand,
Asking that You clasp our hand to lead us.....
So that we will not be distracted or make mistakes.
So that we will not fail you, the ones that we love, nor ourselves.

We thank You for all the positive things we have learned from the Corona Virus pandemic.
We thank You that we have learnt to appreciate leadership and its consequences.
We have learnt to be lovingly concerned for our friends, neighbours and families as they face a variety of

personal problems.

We thank You for those who have bravely worked in areas infected with Covid 19 - Doctors, nurses, checkout operators at essential stores, chemists and school teachers,

For the scientists who are striving to find a vaccine for Covid 19,

For drivers of all sorts of transport.

For manufacturers of hand sanitisers, masks, gowns and other protective equipment.

For farmers, we thank You for the rain that has produced crops for food once again.

We thank You for the challenges that have come along to all of us and the solutions we have been able to make in our lives and in our Church life.

We thank You that we have learnt to appreciate and value the "ordinary" things of life - our contacts, our food, medication, exercise, worship, music and technology.

Some of us are glad to meet with friends for coffee at last, others are glad to be in physical contact with loved ones once again.

We are thankful for the work of Rev. Mark Watt - encouraging communication amongst our Church friends and for the involvement of our Church community in our Church "Magazine".

We pray for all world leaders as they each try to guide their countries into a degree of normality once again.

We pray for all those who are grieving the death of loved ones in a world of isolation and restrictions.

We pray for all those who are frightened - for those who are lonely – for those who are forgotten.

We bring before You all our Church friends who are not feeling well, who are feeling worn out and discouraged, who have serious illnesses and therefore weak and a bit sad. We thank you for those who are strong in body ,mind and spirit

We pray Your loving arms will close around them all and that they will experience Your presence and peace always.

We now pray the prayer Jesus taught.....

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.

In Christ there is no east or west <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zfNlBxvXbus>

BENEDICTION

God breaks in and offers peace even when we are afraid or unsure about life.

God sends us out to offer peace and forgiveness, instruments of grace and love.

May we go and let this be our life's calling and our life's way.

Go in the peace of Christ, the love of God, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen.