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**PENTECOST 11**

**16 AUGUST 2020**

**CAVES BEACH**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

How wonderful it is for God's people to live together in harmony:

**to gather for worship, to rejoice in thanksgiving.**

How wonderful it is for God's people to live together in harmony:

**to encourage each other to be good friends.**

How wonderful it is for God's people to live together in harmony:

**to work together to support the troubled, near and far away.**

How wonderful it is for God's people to live together in harmony:

**to have the promised blessing, life that never ends.**

**Opening Prayer**

Rejoice! We come to give thanks for the abundant gifts God has provided.

**God is gracious; God's wonders can be seen and experienced.**

Rejoice! We come to praise God as God's people together.

**God will receive our offering, and challenge us to work faithfully within this fellowship, and build up our fellow members.**

Rejoice! We come to proclaim ourselves as followers of Jesus Christ.

**Christ's example is clear for us; Christ's death challenges us; Christ's risen presence is eternal hope for us.**

Rejoice! We come to envision Christ in the most unlikely places and people.

**Our commitment is proved as we meet Christ in the unloved and suffering, and befriend them.**

Rejoice!

**Our hearts overflow with thanksgiving to you, our ever-present God. Amen.**

**HYMN 106** Now thank we all our God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42ZqYk1YwRA>

### **PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION**

God of imminent hope,

we wonder at the capacity you have

to bring your people together.

We are thankful for all the many ways

you create community amongst us.

We praise you for every situation

where community happens in the spirit of kinship.

Your love is a beautiful thing.

It's like rain on hot dry land,

or dew on an spring morning.

Your grace is like water trickling along a creek bed –

good and pleasant,

soulful and nourishing to the heart.

Within it we feel your blessing

and begin to see a taste of

what your reign on earth can be.

We are grateful.

Forgiving God,

we come before you confessing

that we are often stubborn and hard-hearted.

There are people we just don't listen to,

that we refuse to believe we will hear any truth from,

not because of their words necessarily,

but because of who it is that's speaking.

Sometimes we resist through prejudice –

because of the colour of their skin,

or the make of their clothes,

or because they speak with the accent of an outsider.

It might be that we find their manner annoying,

that they don't use the niceties we expect,

or it might be that they keep pushing and pushing their point

and become tiresome and irritating.

We wish we could brush them away like crumbs off a table.

Too often we refuse to see a human face with a human need,

any injustice that has been perpetrated,

or any wrong that needs to be put right.

Forgive us.

Renew our minds to listen for truth and justice.

Renew our hearts to be open to stranger and friend.

Amen.

## **WORDS OF ASSURANCE**

God's table is open to all of us.

There are no exceptions.

No one is too young or too old,  
too bold, too shy or too foreign.

We are all beloved and a forgiven people.

**Let us live in grace.**

**Amen.**

## **READINGS**

### **· Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32**

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.<sup>2</sup> God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel?

... for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.<sup>30</sup> Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience,<sup>31</sup> so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy.<sup>32</sup> For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

### **· Matthew 15:10-28**

Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, "Listen and understand:<sup>11</sup> it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles."<sup>12</sup> Then the disciples approached and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?"<sup>13</sup> He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted.<sup>14</sup> Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit."<sup>15</sup> But Peter said to him, "Explain this parable to us."<sup>16</sup> Then he said, "Are you also still without understanding?<sup>17</sup> Do you not see that whatever goes

into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?<sup>18</sup> But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles.<sup>19</sup> For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.<sup>20</sup> These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."

<sup>21</sup> Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." <sup>23</sup> But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." <sup>24</sup> He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." <sup>25</sup> But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." <sup>26</sup> He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." <sup>27</sup> She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." <sup>28</sup> Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

**HYMN 601** O master let me walk with thee

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3tHDkRRvKo>

## **SERMON**

I was reflecting the other day on the announcement of the person to be the proposed vice president to Joe Biden. No sooner than the name was announced than social media lit up attacking her gender, her racial background, her political career and so on. Her name, Karmala Harris, is not so much the issue as the attack on a person.

We live in a world where people can say almost anything to degrade another person and seem to be able to self justify their approach.

In the media the other day an 'anti-vaxer' tour bus set up in a prominent place in a regional Queensland caravan park and wanted to base their campaign in the local area from there without first seeking permission from the owner of the park. When the owner objected to political style events on his property and asked them to leave, they came out with vindictive comments on social media attacking him.

We can all recall that just prior to the crisis we call COVID 19 our politicians were in a daily battle to denigrate their opponents. It is still going on in many ways but the disaster news is pushing these comments into the background.

In our world today we seem to be primed to attack and divide even when there seems to be very little difference between the arguments. In reality the difference between the overall policies of the main political parties here in Australia are minimal.

What happens is that some 'spin doctor' comes out with an approach to make their opponents seem wrong and they harp on it until it becomes an accepted fact.

Within the Christian community we also seem bent on doing the same all too often with statements like:

She is evangelical!

He is too liberal!

They come from a catholic background so they wouldn't understand!

He comes from Vietnam.

They eat dogs in South Korea.

We are the only true Christians!

Today's reading from Matthew comes towards the end of Jesus' ministry. The Pharisees and others are constantly seeking to latch onto some of Jesus' teachings and cause division by making Jesus out to be a false prophet. This polarisation was causing a lot of confusion. As we know Jesus teaching made complete sense but those opposing him claimed otherwise, frightened that they were being put out of their lucrative priestly business.

Those following Jesus were seeking to live a holy and religious life. They were involved in the controversies about what could be eaten, what was banned and what was the right way to prepare food. In Jewish traditions there were masses of rules and a lot of folk law around having to eat certain foods in certain ways and even how to wash before a meal. These rules had little to do with health or nutrition. In fact, at times, the rules were contrary to what should have been the approach.

Jesus clearly addresses this in the first part of today's reading. Basically He says that it is more important to concentrate on what comes out when you speak than to get all upset about what you eat and how you eat it. Let me quote:

"For out of the heart comes evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.<sup>20</sup> These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile."

How many of you have seen the Tele-evangelists of a Sunday morning on TV? So often it keeps coming out that they can't even live by the high moral standards that they keep preaching. It was no different in Jesus day. There were religious scholars setting themselves up on high moral grounds as they fleeced people of their meagre income to support lavish lifestyles.

Even today there are gurus who have established massive followings and live in lavish situations while fleecing poor and vulnerable people. These people are not restricted to any one religion.

Especially in the media, people seek to put very strict and arbitrary rules around how we should judge Christians. I know of a Pentecostal group in Sydney which grants special privileges to people in their congregation as they increase their offerings. This privilege is based on dollar amounts, not people's ability to pay.

I often contemplate how people from another country, like Papua, or Russia, or China would view us if they were here today. We do things un-announced in our services which could quickly unsettle someone with no church background. You only have to look at me standing out the front here with a long gown. That is not a common sight in the streets around here! At the end of the service we used to form a circle and hold hands to sing the benediction. That doesn't happen at the local café or bowling club!

I am not suggesting that we should change anything, rather we need to be aware of what is confronting to visitors. We need to be sensitive so we can share gracious Christian hospitality. It does mean that we treat those with whom we disagree with respect, not denigration. We don't have to accept aggression but we should seek peace.

As we bear this in mind we now move to the second part of this passage. After his attack on the Pharisees, Jesus moved on to another place but his reputation precedes him and he is called out to in the middle of the street by a desperate woman whose daughter is dying. This leads to some banter with the woman.

What is a pointed issue here is that the woman represents everything that the Pharisees have been rallying opposition to:

It was a woman, not her husband,... woman should be at home.

She was not even a good practising Jew.

She did not approach Jesus quietly and seek his assistance humbly.

She called out to him in the middle of the street.

Rather than dismissing the woman out of hand Jesus starts a bit of banter with her. It gives her time to settle down from what was probably an incredibly stressed state. Jesus enters into a friendly banter about dogs and bread from the table.

We don't know much about this woman other than she was from a different ethnic group to the Jews. The two groups were not always friends. Jesus initially ignored her. His disciples urged him to walk away.

Eventually Jesus calls back to the woman dismissing her with the response that her problems were not his because she was from a different community. He says: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Like any loving parent this woman was not to be easily put off when it comes to her child. There is now the simple statement: "Lord help me!" She is not getting involved in racial and religious debates. Her needs are far greater.

Still Jesus holds off. He playfully comes back to put her off. It was common practice for wealthier people to leave some of their food on the table for their poor servants and even their dogs to finish up after a feast. There was a specific pecking order on who went first and so on. The dogs were the bottom of the pecking order.

Once again the woman was up to the banter. "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." She was not going to be ignored or deflected.

Now, after three requests and deflections Jesus responds and says: "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." The child was then healed.

Here I see that the words at the start of this passage are being lived out. Jesus is not being diverted by ancient religious rivalry. This passage follows the Old Testament response from God.

So often petitioners in the Old Testament only receive their request after pleading with God three times. This is reflected here. Matthew's readers, being Jews would have immediately resonated not just with the repetition but also with the repartee. Dry humor like this was not uncommon.

So where does all this take us?

Jesus starts out saying that rules and regulations do not give us a true picture of how our faith should be lived out.

He points out that the words of our mouths are more important than the food that we eat and how we eat it.

Then we move quickly on to the meeting with the distressed Canaanite woman ending with her daughter being healed.



If we consider these words carefully we are being challenged by God's grace. It does not come from some man-made set of rules. It comes out in how we treat one another.

Grace is not restricted to a select few people chosen by a set of rules but comes freely from God's love of us. In the interaction with the woman I see God as the loving parent looking beyond human limitations to free the whole of creation and to heal our loss and pain.

**HYMN 607** Make me a channel of your peace.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2svZhZT6Pro>

### **PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING**

Gracious God,

take this, ours offering, and let it become

food for the hungry, relief for the captive,

healing for the sick and shelter for the refugee. Amen.

### **PRAYER OF THE PEOPLE** (Val Willoughby)

God of hope, love and healing,

you call us to be a community of welcome.

You call us to be servants of others,

to make a difference wherever we are

and to care for your creation.

May we be bird rescuers;

builders of homes for native bees;

restorers of bushland;

rubbish recyclers;

careful users of energy

and guardians of the earth.

Help us to look beyond what we now know,

to not be afraid of wisdom from outsiders.

Let us be overcome by joy at new revelations,

to be curious about innovative justice

and to look for the good that we can do.

Create in us a will to be kind, to offer a supportive arm

or work for all creation to reach its full potential.

Let all your people serve your mission of reconciliation. Amen.

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 210** O for a thousand tongues to sing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4O9kw3cILpg>

**BENEDICTION**

Go into the world

wearing the love of God on your sleeve,

the hope of God in your hearts

seeking the wisdom of God

from whichever direction it comes.

May God's love hold us firm,

Christ's surprising revelation guide our path,

and the blessing of the Spirit make us whole. Amen.