

LENT 5

21/3/21

CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

You will be our God, and we will be your people.

In times of weakness, in moments of temptation, the covenant holds.

You will be our God, and we will be your people.

When the journey is rough, when friends let us down, the covenant holds.

You will be our God, and we will be your people.

In our struggle to be a faithful community, in the uncertainty of faithful endeavors, the covenant holds.

You will be our God, and we will be your people.

In our work for justice, in our response of worship, the covenant is proved. You will be our God, and we will be your people.

Opening Prayer journey: Lenten journey: of faith, evil and the cross

You welcome us, O God, as travelers along the highway of faith.

We have set out in hope and we believe you are with us on the way.

The end of this Lenten season brings home the challenge of the journey.

But you, O God, have given us the person of Jesus Christ, to trust and to follow.

Jesus says "The hour is come," the cross stands menacingly at the end of the road.

We will not look back; we will confront the self-serving powers of darkness.

Love Crucified reveals a wonderful new prospect.

**Death is not the end; the Way goes on beyond the cross;
Love is eternal. Amen.**

HYMN 211 Jesus loves of my soul

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

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Thanks and praise, glory and honour,
are rightfully yours, O God.

In the fullness of time,
you have written the law of your love
on our hearts.

You have formed us for community
and transformed us into the likeness of Christ.

With each breath, we breathe in your Spirit
and are made one with you.

For the gift of life itself,
and for your indwelling in our hearts,
we give thanks.

Merciful God,

We have come this far.

We have brought ourselves into your presence,
yearned to see your face and be bathed in your light.

Our hearts are divided –

for we also know there is great cost

to following in your Way.

It takes nothing less than our whole lives.

Forgive us when we are afraid;

when we let other interests sway our minds;

when we look to lesser dreams and pretend that these will do.

(time of silence)

Give us strength to follow you;

to look beyond the easy way

and to join you in the paths of love;

which, in the end, offer us the fullness of life.

(time of silence)

We have come this far.

Journey with us to the end.

Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Now hear these words of assurance:

Our God is merciful and kind, abounding in steadfast love.

God does not cast us away, but restores us to joy.

We belong to God.

READINGS

- **Hebrews 5:5-10**

So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him,

“You are my Son,

today I have begotten you”;

6 as he says also in another place,

“You are a priest forever,

according to the order of Melchizedek.”

7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; 9 and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, 10 having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

- **John 12:20-33**

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. 21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” 22 Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. 23 Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

27 “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” 29 The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” 30 Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” 33 He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

HYMN 573 A charge to keep I have

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQUmBX17c0c>

SERMON

As we move closer to the Easter event we are continuing to follow John's Gospel. John's Gospel has many different levels woven into each passage. I have chosen today to concentrate on just the first part of the passage as there is too much in the reading for just one sermon.

In today's reading John has Jesus saying: "Those who love their own life will lose it; those who hate their own life in this world will keep it for life eternal." Listening to this, some people seem to want to emphasise the self-denial approach to life. Some people tend to shy away from Lent as they think that the message is very bleak and unattractive.

It can seem that there is even more emphasis than usual on getting rid of the sin in our lives and denying ourselves in order to seek some new perspective. It is all too easy to lose the perspective that Jesus offers us a life full of love and satisfaction and that the times of self-denial are designed to put this into perspective in the bigger picture.

In today's passage from John, Jesus tells us: "Very truly, I tell you, a grain of wheat remains no more than a single grain unless it is dropped into the ground and dies. If it does die, then it produces much fruit." Here Jesus is encouraging us to stop gripping onto some aspects of our lives so tightly that we are missing out on the new and better prospects. When we let go of those aspects of our life that stop our faith growing we are then free to become what God wants us to be.

Thinking back this brings to my mind how we developed as children. As a baby we soon learned that we couldn't hang on to every toy at once. One in each hand is generally the maximum. We had to let go of one toy before we could grab the another one. It is sometimes so cute to see a baby trying to overcome this problem, even getting frustrated that they don't have another hand to let them keep hold of everything. Sometimes we need to let go of something in order to gain something new.

In the same way we can see Jesus drawing us into this realisation in our lives. It is not possible for us to have everything and be everywhere at the same time. You can't be the peace maker and the aggressor at the same time. There is a choice to make.

We can't spend all day, every day, at work and still have a healthy relationship with our children. There is a choice to be made.

We can't grow up to be the person that we want without having to shed some abrasive aspects of our personality.

We all have dreams about how we want to be as a person regardless of how old we are. It is not like we hate ourselves but rather want to improve ourselves. There are always ways in which we want to improve ourselves. We want to be able to appreciate the little things in life. We want to feel as though we are able to enjoy the freedom which comes with age and our faith. We always have different things to learn and from this ... and grow.

If we reflect on what people wish for at New Year then we can see that they want a simpler life and to feel more at peace and to be more connected with the love in the world. Where the 'rubber hits the road' is when we are forced to evaluate what we are prepared to change and give up in order to achieve that position. Are we really willing to make the changes necessary to create a new environment for ourselves?

Or are we like that little toddler wanting it all?

Reflecting on today's Gospel reading we can see that God has a vision for us. God understands who we are and can help us become a more honest version of what He created in us. While there is no coercion, God is willing to help us become His creation. Our strong will and stubbornness is what holds us back.

God's Spirit is willing to work with us if we are prepared to allow those difficulties to fall like seeds into the ground to allow the difficulties to die and bring out new shoots in order to create new life and potential.

God comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ to show us what the vision looks like - to show us what it looks like when we have love and freedom and grace and peace and we reach the fullness of our potential as a human being. And, through Jesus Christ, God also shows us what it can cost to become that and live that way. And in the end the choice is ours.

No matter who we are there is always a lot that God can do with us. However we need to be aware that God does not expect us to do it alone. The Holy Spirit is always there to support and guide us. It is in the transfiguring experience that we become better able to connect with and serve God. However we have to be the willing partner in the experience.

Any areas of our life where we are unwilling to relinquish our grip on will remain no-go areas for God's Spirit. The more parts of your life you declare off-limits, consciously or unconsciously, the less God will have to work with to bring that vision to fulfilment and the more meagre the results will be.

If just one grain of wheat falls to the ground and germinates it produces many, many, times more grains of wheat. If the grain of wheat doesn't allow

itself to die and germinate then it simply becomes just another grain of wheat on the ground.

If we are willing to let go of the limits we impose on our lives then God has a free hand to develop our potential. God, through the actions of the Holy Spirit, enables us to grow and move towards our potential. If we refuse to make changes to our lives and stubbornly hold onto our difficulties then we remain locked into the same old cycles.

God offers us everything, but forces us to do nothing. What price are you willing to pay to become the person you want to be and the person God makes it possible for you to be? It is not just a question of how much do you want to change.

Some people will express that they really want to change and grow but remain unwilling to let go of the old ways. They have learned to live with their foibles and failings — they have even learned to make them work for them in their own twisted sorts of ways — and the possibility of real change is actually a terrifying step into the unknown. We so often continue to want it all — the security of our broken but familiar present and the wholeness we crave.

Some things exclude other things - our foibles can take up the only available space. You cannot commit your life to acquiring things and possessing things and controlling things and simultaneously expect to be growing in love and grace and in your capacity to appreciate the simple things in life.

I will take up my cross and follow you.

If your hands are full, if your life is full, you're going to have to put some things down before you can receive the new depth of life God promises to give you.

God will give you everything if you'll create the space. But as we know only too well, creating the space is a tough call, a hard road, and an unpopular choice. In a "you can have it all" world, it is not surprising that the message of Jesus Christ is easily caricatured as life-denying, as stifling, as simply denying yourself all the good things that the world can offer.

But when we re-read those easily ridiculed sayings of Jesus against the bigger picture of his call to life in all its fullness, perhaps we'll see why so many of those who do the ridiculing are still making the same new year's

resolutions year after year after year. In Jesus of Nazareth we see that there's a high price to be paid, but in the risen Christ we also see that it turns out to be a bargain!

HYMN 588 In heavenly love abiding

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXc04P8d654>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

Generous God,

we give thanks for the fullness of our lives.

Receive these gifts, we pray

and bless their use

that they may be a blessing to others.

In Christ's name, Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Loving God,

into your care

we commit the prayers of our hearts

assured of your presence.

We pray for the environment

for creatures of the air and sea,

for trees and plants

for high mountains and for desert plains.

Where greed has brought destruction,

may we be moved to offer healing.

We pray for the human family

for refugees and asylum seekers

for new parents and for the dying

for the rich and for the poor.

May we be ever mindful that we are one,
that we belong to one another and that the fullness of life
depends on each of us living in wholeness.

We pray for ourselves

for times of great joy and deep sadness

(time of silence)

May we discover anew our home in you
that we might be shaped in our living.

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 373 Hail, our once despised Jesus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WtmTetC7uak>

BENEDICTION

Friends, go from here
knowing that God goes with you
into every part of life.

Our calling and charge
is to live fully for God.

Go in peace.

Amen.

779 May the feet of God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhiG-Vj8CGU>