

PENTECOST 22  
1/11/20  
CAVES BEACH

### **CALL TO WORSHIP**

May your Spirit fill our fellowship, Loving God,  
and give us minds ready to appreciate your word.  
May your Spirit fill our fellowship, Compassionate God,  
and give us hearts responsive to the distressed.  
May your Spirit fill our fellowship, Just God,  
and give us a willingness to stand with the powerless.  
May your Spirit fill our fellowship, Awe-inspiring God,  
and keep us open and receptive to your leading.

### **Opening Prayer**

Good News touches us as we worship this morning;  
the limits we place on ourselves are gone.  
Good News enlivens us as we worship this morning;  
the limits we have placed on our faith community  
are broken.  
Good News liberates us as we worship this morning;  
the limits we have placed on our troubled world, to  
know harmony, are shattered.  
Good News enfolds us as we worship this morning;  
for in Jesus Christ, you have spoken and acted, O God, and  
the limits are swept away. Amen.

**HYMN 457** The church's one foundation  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jotNbcFeIX4>

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

God of wonder, goodness and beauty,  
we praise you and give thanks for all you are.  
From the beginning of time  
you have filled the universe with grace.  
Your glory is revealed in the beauty of the cosmos  
as you hold all things together.  
Out of love you created humanity  
to share in the tending of the earth.  
For millennia, your people have been sustained  
by your Spirit's presence.  
We honour you. We praise you.  
We thank you and we worship you

Holy God,  
you have brought us into the realm of salvation,  
teaching us the ways of loving justice.  
You turn us upside down  
with your values that contradict  
the prevailing wisdom of our times.

You call us to be servants and to be meek of spirit.  
You call us to identify with those who have little power.  
You call us to serve and not to count the cost.  
Oh God, we find it hard to follow this way  
because so often we find ourselves put upon and put down.  
We find ourselves ridiculed for our beliefs and values.  
In our times of weakness, strengthen us, we pray.  
In the times of doubt, grant us wisdom.  
In the times of despair, guide us into your future,  
for we depend on your strength and wisdom. Amen.

### **WORDS OF ASSURANCE**

God is faithful and true,  
always present and full of love.  
With the confidence that has sustained the saints  
I declare: our sins are forgiven.  
Thanks be to God. Amen.

### **READINGS**

\* 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13

9 You remember our labour and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. 10 You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers. 11 As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, 12 urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

13 We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.

\* Matthew 23:1-12

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, 2 "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; 3 therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. 4 They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. 5 They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. 6 They love to have the place of honour at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, 7 and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. 8 But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. 9 And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father-the one in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

## **HYMN 215 You servants of God**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GH0aLQwhRY&t=6s>

### **SERMON**

Does anyone know what is happening in the US next Tuesday?

There is a massive 'bun fight' going on over there as they prepare to elect a president. A few years ago a political commentator in the USA made the observation that "any American who is prepared to run for President should automatically, by definition, be disqualified from ever doing so!"

If we take the time to reflect on the passage from Matthew's Gospel this morning we might sometimes think that Jesus would agree with that commentator's perception of power in the US. Jesus does not hold back in his attacks on power and how it is abused. I sometimes wonder if we really take the time to reflect on the damage that the abuse of power can cause.

In the political arena we so often hear one side attacking the other over their abuse of power. They suggest that power has gone to their opponent's head or that they are just using their power to further their own personal needs. In recent times there has been little said about how to use power for the right reasons.

I don't think that power in itself is necessarily a bad thing. It can be used for good. As Australians we all have a hefty dose of anti-authoritarian scepticism as part of our cultural psyche when it comes to power.

Talking with people who have lived in the USA it seems to me that as a nation they have a much greater reverence for power than we do in Australia. For them symbols of power like their flag and the trappings of the presidential office seem to carry an inordinate amount of reverence, regardless of which president is in power.

Here in Australia we still have debates from time to time about changing our flag. We have a tendency to cut down 'tall poppies', especially politicians. Politics here is considered to be a necessary but tiresome part of life. Reporters make a great deal of fuss about what happens almost daily in parliament but what happened last week soon seems to be forgotten.

In Biblical terms we can see that power is not intrinsically evil as it is one thing that God exercises. We readily associate the term 'power' with aspects of God, like the Holy Spirit. But how often have we heard that something occurred under the 'power of the Holy Spirit'?

As this description of an aspect of God has been abused so times we seem to be wary of the term. In the passage today Jesus points out that there was misuse and flaunting of power in front of him that day. This pattern has continued down through the ages.

So often power is treated as an end in itself rather than a means to support and encourage people. This is equally a problem in both democratic and

totalitarian systems. Just recently here in NSW we have had a very public airing of the machinations of a discredited politician who apparently abused his power to gain wealth for himself regardless of who he deceived. I am sure that we can all add to this list from both here and around the world. Politicians also try to manipulate power in order to stay in office for as long as possible, often well past their use by date!

Human based power structures seem to need to maintain their image and appearance in order to survive. In Jesus' words from Matthew's Gospel today we hear: "They love to have the place of honour at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people address them with impressive titles." Jesus is clearly confronting the abuse of power which seeks to just perpetuate itself.

Come our election days we are challenged with displays of power by opposing teams. We tend to go with the team which appears the strongest. They all say that only they have the correct answers to every the problem that they can think of. We get this in cycles of 3 to 4 years.

Power equally has to be confronted when there is abuse. Just think back over the last few years as we found out more and more about the abuse of sexual power in both government and church institutions as it was publicly laid bare in a Royal Commission. All parts of society can be corrupted by the abuse of power.

The point that Jesus is making is that there can be good power.

- \* Power that is not just exercised for its own sake.
- \* Power which does not need to be projected as image and window dressing.

None of us doubt that Jesus was a powerful person. Even the rulers of his day were wary of him. At the time of his birth we have the Bible story that King Herod sought to have Jesus eliminated. The threat which led Him to the cross was that the rulers and those in power were unable to control Him for their own desires so as to keep their power.

Jesus concept of power is orientated towards empowering and helping to support those who are currently powerless. He does not need to do anything to maintain his power as He is the source of power. The sorts of people that God seeks to empower are generally referred to in the Bible as: 'The widows, orphans, the refugees and the poor.' These sorts of people are very so often exploited by greedy and ruthless power-hungry people.

Good power, as described by Jesus, has virtually the opposite outcome to the power-hungry abusers. It is in this light that we can come to talk about a God of both power and might. So often in our world power is symbolised by violence, the power to hold people in prison, the power to dismiss people from their job, the power to withhold love and support. These are all aspects of that violence.

The only violence in the power that Jesus demonstrates is His power to

suffer with those who are suffering. Jesus is not one to counter violence with more violence. Jesus is the Prince of Peace who demonstrates that genuine peace is not achieved by superior violence. Instead He stands in the way of violence and absorbs the abuse. Therefore He refuses to perpetuate violence through fighting back physically. His response is love and forgiveness which breaks that horrific cycle of abuse and violence

This is where Jesus' message is so powerful, the power of God. The idea that God is some ultimate violent threat promising eternal torture does God a great disservice. In the life and death of Jesus we come to learn of God's true nature. It is the power to give without limit, to lift up those who have been oppressed, the strength to absorb the worst that power hungry forces can deliver and then to still give new life. The power to still share graceful love with forgiveness and new life even when death seems to reign.

In the revelation given to us by Christ through his life and ministry we are shown the correct way power should be exercised. Jesus said that we should follow his teachings, not the actions of the rulers of his day as they did not practice what God taught.

No matter how much we feel that we have learned in life we need to constantly reflect and keep learning how to exercise the pure power of love and grace as shown to us by Jesus.

In a time where there are so many different interpretations of power and authority being displayed throughout the world we need to come back to Jesus' simple message.

"The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted."

HYMN 601 O Master let me walk with thee  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoWzpJpyPaQ>

### **PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING**

Loving God,  
receive the gifts we bring and the dedication of our lives.  
Whatever it takes, may we be faithful in our service  
and may your mission of reconciliation in the world  
be realised in our discipleship. Amen.

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE (Roz)**

PATIENCE and FAITH.

Years ago a friend gave us the book of Devotions called "IN TOUCH" - It gives God's perspective about life and the role He wants Christians to play in it.

Using only verses of scripture from the Living Bible.

This section on patience and faith stood out for me to share with you this morning.

"We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials for we know that

they are good for us - they help us learn to be patient.

And patience develops strength of character in us and helps us trust God more each time we use it until finally.... our hope and faith are strong and steady.

Then , when that happens, we are able to hold our heads high no matter what happens and know all is well, for we know how dearly God loves us.....

Afterwards we can see the result - a quiet growth in grace and character.

When your patience is finally in full bloom - then you will be ready for anything, strong in character, full and complete\_\_\_\_\_

When I am weak, then I am strong,-- the less I have, the more I depend on Him".

Let us pray for the people ---- the people of this Church .... the people of all Churches ... the people of Australia .... the people of the world.

Lord, You know each one of us bowed before you now -- You know our innermost thoughts, our weaknesses our..... frailties.

You know those who are ill --- suffering pain --- difficulty in walking --- difficulty in thinking clearly, -- those suffering loss and loneliness --- those suffering rejection.

Lord, there are some of our number who are weary and tired of making the effort to do the most basic of things.

Some of us have made a huge effort to come to Church today because they love You and wish to worship You with their friends.

Thank you for the tireless effort put into our Church meetings and we pray for those responsible for performing all the large and small tasks.

We pray for the following people.. that you will guide and direct them ---

Reverend Mark Watt, Jan, Iris, Bob and Val, Lieza, Les , George, Nola and the Church Council --- the list goes on ..... You know and love them all.

We pray for the entire human race as they face the pandemic of Coved 19.

We pray for those who are suffering the illness of Covid 19 --- those who are mourning the death of loved ones and those facing restrictions placed on funerals and gathering of families.

We remember those with small businesses who are unable to work yet ... or are just restarting after a long compulsory break.

We bring before you those who are isolated in their houses or hotel rooms ---

Those who are lonely and those who are stressed by being confined and suffering boredom.

We ask that You bless all research into a successful vaccine.

We remember people suffering from bushfires ... floods .... droughts ...

loss of livestock and crops .... loss of homes ... fences and equipment.

Lord be with the professionals and volunteers who are working with families in distress.....& please look in on those who need help but do not ask.

We pray for our Australian Government --- both Commonwealth and State --- we ask that our leaders be given help in managing all the social problems existing today.

Give us patience to deal with rules relating to Covid 19 so there will be less spreading of the Virus throughout Australia and the World.

We thank You for our Church as it is ---- a place where we feel comfortable with one another and with our God.

We thank you that our church has been able to adapt to changes since Covid19 and is functioning well with all tasks being performed.

We pray Our Church projects an image of being friendly, caring and welcoming.

We thank you for our homes which are situated in a safe neighbourhood and the comfort we all enjoy.

Please join me in saying our Lord's Prayer.

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 537** Let us talents and tongues employ  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otsvD\\_kujpw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otsvD_kujpw)

## **COMMUNION**

Hear the words of institution of this sacrament as recorded by the apostle Paul:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said: "This is my body which is for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, for the remembrance of me.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

With this bread and this cup we do as our Saviour commands: we set them apart for the holy supper to which he calls us, and we come to God with our

prayers of thanksgiving.

The Lord be with you.  
And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.  
We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.  
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right that we should always offer thanks, O God,  
because you have created and sustained us  
and all things.

And so we praise you  
with the faithful of every time and place,  
joining with choirs of angels and the whole creation  
in the eternal hymn.

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.

We praise you, O God,  
that in your mercy you gave your only Son, Jesus Christ,  
that whoever believes in him  
should not perish but have eternal life.

We give thanks for his humble birth,  
for his life of ministry and love,  
for his sufferings and death on the cross,  
for his glorious resurrection and ascension,  
and for the promise that he will come again.

O God, by your word and Spirit  
bless and sanctify this bread and this wine,  
that they may be for us  
the communion of the body and blood of Christ,  
and that he may ever live in us  
and we in him.

God, accept us,  
as we offer and present ourselves, our souls and our bodies,  
to be a holy and a living sacrifice;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,



to whom with you and the Holy Spirit  
be all honour and glory, now and forever.  
AMEN

The bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.  
The cup we take is a sharing in the blood of Christ.  
The gifts of God for the people of God.

Receive this holy sacrament  
of the body and blood of Christ,  
and feed on him in your hearts  
by faith with thanksgiving.

### **DISTRIBUTION**

### **AFTER COMMUNION**

Let us pray:  
We thank you, God our Father,  
that through word and sacrament  
you have given us your Son  
who is the true bread of heaven  
and food of eternal life.

So strengthen us in your service  
that our daily living may show our thanks;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**HYMN** 658 I the lord of sea and sky

### **BENEDICTION**

People of God,  
let us go to serve in the ways of Christ.  
Let us join the saints of every age  
to advance God's realm of righteousness and peace.  
Let us take up the mantle of mercy  
as we strive to make a better world,  
one where every person is truly valued  
and every life equally blessed.

May the God of all mercy fill our hearts with compassion.  
May the servant Christ teach us the path of righteous humility.  
May the Holy Spirit empower us in our discipleship.  
Amen.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IiH\\_HdkWs74](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IiH_HdkWs74)