

## EPIPHANY 3

24/1/21

### Caves Beach Uniting Church

**NOTICES** Some people have asked about what lies behind the Covenant Service that I have been referring to.

A few centuries ago, the English Puritans had a tradition of making a personal covenant with God. When new congregations were formed there would be a covenant between the members to build and to sustain the community.

Scottish Presbyterians also made differing covenants aimed at affirming and deepening their faith. The form which we now use comes from the ministry of John Wesley in 1755 which he adapted from Congregationalist writers, Joseph and Richard Alleine. It is likely that John Wesley could also have experienced similar ideas among the Morvians in Germany.

As a community we can so easily drift from one year into another and another, after all they move so quickly when we get older. I believe that at least once a year we need to focus on refining our life.

- What is important?
- What can I no longer sustain?
- What refinements are needed?
- Are there new challenges before me?
- Am I allowing my life to be sustained by God?

When we celebrate a Covenant Service is a time for us to at least address these things. We have so much to celebrate. Our loving community comes together to surround us throughout the year.

### CALL TO WORSHIP

Spirit of God moving over the waters, bringing light where there was only darkness;

**Holy Spirit, move among us, change us, enlighten us.**

Spirit of God, there at the baptism of Jesus, claiming, anointing, speaking loving words;

Holy Spirit, touch us, enthuse us, claim us.

Spirit of God, calling disciples in days of old and today to follow Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life;

**Holy Spirit, meet us, convince us, inspire us.**

### **Opening Prayer trust discipleship**

Trust in God!

**God will give us the challenging task, and also the strength to get it done.**

Trust in God!

**God will call us to discipleship, and give us the insight to work out our following of Jesus.**

Trust in God!

**God will show us our role within the faith community and sensitivity to the needs of those beside us.**

Trust in God!

**God will love us “through all the changing scenes of life,” and will be there at life’s end, to welcome us home. Amen.**

**HYMN 215** You servants of God

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZ9j3e8\\_yQc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZ9j3e8_yQc)

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

God of joy,  
we give you thanks that you gift us this extraordinary journey of life.  
With amazement, we see the places your call takes us.  
We are grateful to be part of your people and to follow you in the journey.  
We are thankful for the fellow travellers who have gifted us wisdom, shared laughter and tears.  
We are thankful that ordinary moments are made extraordinary by your presence and by the company of others.  
For the gift of Christian community,  
for the challenge of Christian discipleship,  
and for the joy of journeying with you, we offer our thanks.

God who calls us,  
we come to our time of confession, knowing just how often we fall short.  
We come knowing that so often our eyes are fixed upon things that do not bring life and love.

Turn us towards your paths, God of compassion.

Jonah came to the Ninevites, revealing to them their evil ways.

They turned to you and changed their ways.

We come knowing that we don't want to hear the words of prophets that call us to new ways as a society and community.

Turn us towards your paths, God of compassion.

Jesus came to Simon and Andrew, James and John, and called them to leave the security of their daily living.

We come knowing our resistance to hearing your call when it is challenging, risky, or demands us to change.

Turn us towards your paths, God of compassion.

## **WORDS OF ASSURANCE**

Hear the good news:

God is steadfast in the ways of love and persistent in calling us to follow.

God's call, even when it is challenging, is also filled with joy and surprises.

God's compassion is greater than we can comprehend.

Thanks be to God.

## **READING**

### **Mark 1:14-20**

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." 18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him. 19 As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. 20 Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

**HYMN 595** O Jesus I have promised

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UU\\_cev2ri90&t=7s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UU_cev2ri90&t=7s)

## **SERMON**

Last week we spoke about the first disciples being called as described in John's Gospel. This week we have a similar passage from Mark about calling the first disciples which raises some different questions for us to consider.

For me these questions are:

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?

What are Jesus expectations of his followers?

What sort of church should we be as followers of Christ?

In Matthew 28 we have the great commission Jesus left with his followers: "Go and make disciples..." These were his final words on the to his disciples and they apply to us.

In the light of Jesus last words to his disciples we are now looking at how he approaches his disciples at the start of his ministry. This passage in Mark's Gospel comes after John has baptised his cousin and Jesus has spent 40 days in the wilderness preparing for his public ministry. We read in verse 14: "After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee."

John made the main emphasis of his ministry to prepare the way for Jesus but it was cut short and therefore Jesus takes the lead in the Gospel account. In verse 15 Jesus starts out as he means to continue. He says: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news."

Straight away we come across a phrase which has been debated ever since. When Jesus said that the Kingdom of God has 'come near' what was he getting at?

Was it going to be in the next few days or was it just over the horizon?

If we look honestly at the passage from our perspective 2,000 years later can we honestly say that that Kingdom is not complete, it is still unfolding. At the same time there are some aspects of the kingdom which we can identify as being present with us today.

When look at the words... "The time is fulfilled." We need to understand that there are at least two different words in Greek which we tend to translate as 'time.' There is 'chronos' which tends to indicate a point or moment in historical time, a date on your calendar or an hour in the day. Mark uses the word 'kairos' which refers to time in the eternal sense. Now we can see that Jesus is not referring to an historical moment. Rather he is indicating that the Kingdom of Heaven can be encountered at any time when we believe.

The relevant moment in time is dependent on our response. For some of us it initially comes as a one-off spectacular event, for others it is a realisation that our faith has always been there. This realisation can also be an ongoing revisiting of our growing faith life. Each step taking us further into that infinite connection with the eternal truth of God.

In verse 16 Jesus starts his recruitment program as he approaches both Simon and Andrew, followed by James and John in verse 19. Given the succinct nature of

Mark's Gospel it is not surprising that we are given no background on these disciples who are plucked from obscurity into Jesus' band of followers.

Picking up on his surrounding Jesus simply says to these new followers "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

Those first disciples may have already heard of this Rabbi called Jesus. He had been wandering around the fishing villages of Lake Galilee proclaiming God's kingdom was coming to fruition. They would also probably have heard about John the Baptist and that eventful day when God affirmed his Son, Jesus, on the banks of the Jordan River.

So what might have been going through the minds of these four people as they chose to leave their old lives behind to join with this radical preacher who had just come from many days out in the wilderness?

It is likely that they saw this as a way out of the grinding hard work of trying to make enough to eat and at the same time pay those constant Roman taxes. Their initial perception might have been that they could share in the hoped for power and authority and have others serve them. At this stage they had not had time to fully appreciate the message that Jesus was teaching the people.

This constant misinterpretation keeps popping up among Jesus' disciples throughout Mark's Gospel.

- They debated who would sit on the right or left of Jesus when he was on his throne.
- They wanted others to serve them, not be the servants of the world.
- Then there was the concept that they had to die to live.
- This was just as difficult as when they went to shoo away the children when Jesus turned around and openly welcomed them setting them as examples of God's family.

Later after the triumphant entry into Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday Jesus upset everyone by roughly overturning the tables of the traders in the forecourts of the Temple.

This disillusionment culminated at the crucifixion!

After all of those climactic events these men went back to their fishing boats. Had they really done the right thing following this person who was said to be a mighty ruler only to have him crucified as a common criminal?

It is clear that when Jesus called on Peter, Andrew, James & John they didn't fully appreciate the dynamics of the call. It took them some time to fully understand what Jesus was about. This call still resonates today as we need to constantly re-evaluate

and update our understanding of our relationship with Jesus. We can all be a bit naive.

Jesus call to each of us is not inviting us into some simple cultural nicety. The call goes against the grain at times. It takes us well out of our comfort zone so often. Even today Jesus call on us turns the whole world on its head for us.

There is a level of discomfort and constant challenge in the ways that Jesus constantly grows our spirituality. In the baptism of Jesus heaven and the world came together with Him. The whole experience of power and authority was not what his disciples expected and is still a challenge for us today.

We still want to be treated with extra care and respect and be able to exercise power and authority today. However the 'way of the cross' still calls us to lose our lives in order to live. We are not being offered a free ride. We are invited to experience a full life including surprises and challenges. We are brought into servant leadership. In Mark's Gospel we are constantly being called into a new way of living.

If we are seeking honour and glory and authority and respect we are challenged to walk the way leading to the cross. The message from this story in Mark's Gospel is that Jesus does not always take us the way we expected to go but that's OK, because we are safe in the loving arms of God.

So to come back to where we started:

- What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?
- What are Jesus expectations of his followers?
- What sort of church should we be as followers of Christ?

To be a disciple of Jesus we are called to constantly adapt and change to bring to life the message that Jesus shares with us.

Jesus has the expectation of his followers that while they are human with human failings we are also prepared to grow and allow God to be our guide.

As a community who follow Christ's teaching we need to be seeking out those people who deserve the presence of God in their life. We need to be a beacon in a world which has so much conflict and confusion.

**HYMN 597** Master, speak, thy servant heareth

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

## **PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING**

Jesus Christ,  
receive our offering, that our lives may be focussed upon you and upon serving

others. Shape our living through our giving that we may follow you all our days.  
Amen.

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Holy God,  
for you alone our souls wait in silence,  
for our hope is found in you.  
You are our rock and our salvation. (*silence*)

We pour out our hearts before you – our deepest fears and our greatest hopes for  
creation, the nations, our communities and our families and friends, we pray.  
(*silence*)

We pour out our hearts before you – our sense of powerlessness and our desire to  
contribute to the wellbeing of creation, the nations, our communities and our families  
and friends, we pray. (*silence*)

We pour out our hearts before you – our situations of sadness and our experiences  
of love for the earth, the nations, our communities and our families and friends, we  
pray. (*silence*)

Gently hold our prayers and listen to longings of your people, loving God, for our  
hope is found in you.

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 611** God of grace and God of glory

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

## **BENEDICTION**

Go into the week ahead,  
encouraged in faith and upheld in prayer.  
May God give you strength and courage,  
patience and resilience,  
hope and trust,  
for the journey ahead.

In the name of God who loves us, Christ who calls us, and the Spirit who sustains us. Amen.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH\\_HdkWs74](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH_HdkWs74)