

PENTECOST 21
13/10/24
CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

You will prosper our worship, O God.

Every hymn, every prayer, every word of the Word will count, if you are with us.

You will prosper our witness, O God.

Every friend cared for, every family member listened to, every faithful contact made will count, if you are with us.

You will prosper our service, O God.

Every powerless one encouraged, every downhearted person given hope, every dark deed exposed will count, if you are with us.

Opening Prayer

Your love, O God, will not let us go!

As we stand in awe of creation, your love is “wonder-full.”

Your love, O God, will not let us go!

As we struggle to let go the past, your love is forgiving.

Your love, O God, will not let us go!

As we strengthen this faith community, your love binds us together.

Your love, O God, will not let us go!

As we serve as disciples, your love comes clear in the life of Jesus. Amen.

HYMN 599 Take my life and let it be

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Of4I5bTdZ8M>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Holy God, there are times when we identify with the feelings of rejection and fear experienced by the Psalmist and even by Jesus himself. Our belief that you hear and respond to our cries slips away and we begin to believe that we have to cope with life on our own. We need to know that you identify with our pain, and in Jesus we have that affirmation - for he was surely tested in every respect as we are - and more, much more.

Through his suffering, death and resurrection we have been gifted with his

Spirit, enabling us to rise above our fears and to know ourselves embraced by your love. Jesus has shown us that our lives are forever blessed by your love and care, O God. May our worship, witness and service reveal the depth of our thanks and praise.

Living God, you have blessed our lives with so many gifts, so why do we find it difficult to share what we have with others? We forget about those who do not have the choices we have. Those whose economic landscape is shaped by circumstances beyond their control - no job, no skills, chronic illness, no hope, war and civil conflict and domestic violence.

Forgive us for believing that we are the body of Christ in this place but fail to love as he loved, fail to care as he cared; fail to empty ourselves of self so that we can be filled with the desire to meet the needs of others. We want to be faithful followers of Jesus - help us to discern what hinders our commitment - whether it be our possessions, our career, our family or friends...

Invite everyone to picture what might be hindering them personally...and then to imagine what might be hindering them as this community of faith...

Merciful God, our hope lies in our belief that what seems impossible for us is possible with you. In this hope we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

The mercy and grace and love of God far outweighs what we think possible, for, as we confess our sins, God forgives us and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. *(based on 1 John 1:9)*

Thanks be to God!

READINGS

- **Hebrews 4:12–16**

12 Indeed, the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

14 Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we

are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

- **Mark 10:17–31**

17 As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 18 Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 19 You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. You shall not defraud. Honor your father and mother.’ ” 20 He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” 21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” 22 When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

23 Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” 24 And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” 26 They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” 27 Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

28 Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” 29 Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the good news 30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

HYMN 590 What a friend we have in Jesus

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

SERMON

Just about any church today almost falls over itself to attract any new member that they can find. How often do you hear people boasting about the famous people who attend their church? I think back to the time a few

years ago when Hillsong almost burst its boiler boasting about how Justin Bieber, the pop singer with a wild history, joined their services in Sydney.

In the light of this we now turn to today's Gospel story from Mark. A wealthy young man simply walks up to Jesus, then kneels at His feet asking: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus proceeds to talk the young man. In the process Jesus sees straight through that young man. Gently He leads the prospective disciple through a series of questions, asking things like....

Do you know the commandments? ...

You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, etc, etc.

Then Jesus comes up with the defining point which this young man could not get past. "Go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor; then come and follow me."

At this point the young man seems to be floored by Jesus' demands. In one stroke Jesus had seen through the young man's misguided vision for a religious life.

Now let's go to the reading from Hebrews. "The word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It cuts all the way through, to where soul and spirit meet, to where joints and marrow come together. It judges the desires and thoughts of the heart."

This does not mean that I will be delivering a sermon on whether or not to be a wealthy Christian. The story of the rich young man does not demand that we have to give everything away just to be accepted as a disciple. After all Jesus did not write a new batch of laws. In fact, if anything, he was about abolishing human laws.

The point of the story becomes clearer in the passage from Hebrews. Let me repeat: "The word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It cuts all the way through, to where soul and spirit meet, to where joints and marrow come together. It judges the desires and thoughts of the heart."

Rather than making us a whole lot of new laws Jesus was in fact calling on each of us to commit our lives to following Him. We are invited into a life-long journey seeking wholeness, holiness and developing our lives to better reflect His teaching.

We all have things that, despite our faith, we are attached to. Those things can keep holding us back so that we keep repeating the same self-destructive actions. If we reflect on the Gospels there are numerous stories of people being called to follow Jesus, often they just walked away from their work and friends. I am sure that each of us has things in our lives that we have had to change or leave behind so that we can continue on our Christian journey.

Facing up to the need to change can be a very powerful and painful experience. We can be very attached to those things which can hold us back.

At times I can feel a little jealous of people who come to the Lord with lives that are completely out of control and desperately in need of help. In these situations the simple act of leaving their old life behind them is so much easier. When our lives are more conventional it can sometimes be harder to make the necessary changes.

Then we reflect deeply on the words: "The word of God is alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It cuts all the way through, to where soul and spirit meet, to where joints and marrow come together. It judges the desires and thoughts of the heart."

This is when we realise that we have to make those hard decisions about our life. When we truly invite the God into our life we are soon faced with what is of real value and what we have to discard to allow ourselves to grow into a fuller faith.

How many of you have heard the old story about how they caught monkeys in some parts of Africa? They would tie an old kerosene tin to a tree and put a few peanuts in the bottom of the tin. The monkey could easily reach into the tin to grab the peanuts but the opening was so small that the monkey could not get their hand out while still holding onto the

nuts. As the monkey was so fixated on the nuts it was easy to walk up to the animal and capture it.

- How often is there something in our life that prevents our freedom?
- How hard is it to actually let go of that problem?
- Is there a treasure in our life which traps us?
- What is it that stops us from getting on the road to complete freedom?

In the passage we heard from Mark, Jesus refers to wealth and possessions because it is the key issue for this young man. It can be a common problem for some Christians. Throughout the Bible we hear that wealth can be a problem which can block out faith. Jesus says that it is harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven than for a camel to pass through a narrow gate in a city wall called the 'Eye of the Needle.'

It might be possible to outswim some Olympic champion like Emma McKeon or Kate Campbell, with shoes and socks on but that extra drag certainly holds you back from our true potential. If we are honest about following Jesus then why put roadblocks on the path ahead?

I would suggest that for most of us money is not the primary issue. As we learned from the Hebrew's passage there is a sharp, two-edged sword, or scalpel, ready to cut us free from that thing that goes to the very heart of our problems. It might be tightly locked away in some hidden and untouchable place that we studiously avoid. We might be living in fear of it being exposed to God and therefore we become stuck in some ongoing rut.

- How can we keep avoiding this issue?
- How can we avoid confronting that call and being given freedom?
- How can we avoid the Holy Spirit laying bare that sacred cow?

It is actually quite easy!

- Don't ever read the Bible.
- Completely avoid any type of silence, meditation or reflection on our life.
- Every time that still small voice starts to address the issue, keep talking over it and divert your focus to something else.

However if you are really serious about the journey to freedom and fullness in your life then it's time to read bits of the Bible regularly. Take the time to let it filter through all your barriers. Let it cut right to the bone where healing is required. Ask God to open your eyes and your heart to the new potential. Forget those few peanuts clasped in your fist which are trapping you, as in reality they will not sustain you for very long.

Not only will the Holy Spirit journey with you on this road to self-discovery but it will also give you the strength to reach your goal. The Hebrews reading goes on to say that when we feel vulnerable and exposed to God we can be comforted that we have Jesus as the High Priest who understands our situation.

If you are able to allow God's word to seep into your very being then you will not only find the pain which holds you back but also the healing which is the way to freedom. You will know mercy and grace which is why Jesus was sent to us.

HYMN 573 A charge to keep I have

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8w-m4JKjy4>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

God, bless what we give here
and what we are able to give in other ways and places,
that we, and what we give, may be a blessing to others.
Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of love,
all through our lives, we ask, what must I do to inherit eternal life?
We ask, what must I do to live a life of meaning and purpose?
Our culture so often answers us with visions of wealth
and of bubbly, happy families – things many of us may never have.
You put a different vision before us,
one where relationships are central –
relationships with you, with each other, and with all of creation.
Today, we pray for all who are caught up in the impossible false visions
that the good life consists of money, fame, or appearance.

Today, we pray that all of us will be free of the shame
of not being thin enough or rich enough,
or attractive enough, or smart enough.
We pray for the insight and wisdom
to leave it all behind and to follow you.
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 268 Joy to the world

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_N40D2pk-w0

BENEDICTION

You do not need to leave here fully restored
to the knowledge of God's presence in all times and places.
You need only leave here with a still, small hope in your heart
that along the way, you will indeed meet God,
fully enough to share love with others.
Go then, surrounded by God's love,
known and unknown.
Go, and seek the narrow way of love,
as shown by Christ.
Go, empowered by the Holy Spirit,
to be the visible sign of God's love for the world.
Go, in peace. Amen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH_HdkWs74