

**EASTER 6**  
**5/5/24**  
**CAVES BEACH**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

The whole of planet Earth is singing as we come to worship God.

**Birds are dawn-chorusing, bees are humming, and elephants are trumpeting. Seas are roaring, rivers are applauding, hills are singing a chorus of joy.**

God's steadfast love and faithfulness is for us and for all people.

**And so the orchestras are performing, the jazz bands are jamming, the choirs are harmonizing, and the groups are "out of sight."**

God has done marvellous things!

**And the singing will never be done; never ever be done.**

**Opening Prayer**

Friends of God, you are called to praise and prayer.

**It is our joyful and thankful response to God's goodness.**

Friends of God, you are called to hear the Word:

**the Word that instructs, the Word that challenges, the Word that reveals the teachings of Jesus Christ.**

Friends of God, you are called into faith community:

**a community that encourages, a community that brings out talent, a community that works in harmony.**

Friends of God, you are called to a far reaching vision:

**a vision beyond the local church, even beyond the boundaries of the nation.**

**Our giving and our service will honour the name of Jesus.**

**Amen.**

**HYMN 590** What a friend we have in Jesus

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

**PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION**

God of goodness,

at the dawn of creation,

you brought light into the world,

light that brought warmth and energy to every living thing.

Since that moment, that light has never stopped shining,  
it has never stopped making the earth a home for all its creatures.  
This is how you love the world you made –  
you filled it with light,  
you filled it with warmth,  
you filled it with yourself.  
For this and all your blessings,  
seen and unseen,  
acknowledged and unacknowledged,  
we pray in thankfulness.

**God** of infinite love and compassion,  
we acknowledge today  
how often we read in our scriptures about your love for us  
and yet how little we let ourselves experience that love.  
So often, we think we know ourselves better than you know us.  
So often, we have decided that we are not worthy of love.  
We know the list of our failings all too well.  
And we so often decide that we will be the ones  
who will determine how you will love us,  
when you will love us,  
and how much.  
We take your love in drips and drops  
even though you give it to us in torrents and floods,  
even though we are thirsty for love.  
Forgive us, God of love,  
for not letting love fill every part of our being.  
Amen.

### **WORDS OF ASSURANCE**

Love pours down like rain, free and abundant.  
Stand in it, friends of God,  
Know that you are forgiven.  
Know that you are loved,  
you are loved,  
you are loved.  
Amen.

### **READINGS**

- **1 John 5:1–6**

5 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ[a] has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. 3 For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, 4 for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. 5 Who is it who conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

6 This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

- **John 15:9–17**

9 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11 I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. 17 I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

**HYMN 699** A new commandment

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2X8m9tVR0\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2X8m9tVR0_Y)

## **SERMON**

In our Gospel reading today from John we hear a lot about love. While it is not spelt out for us in the reading love can be a very difficult thing to accept. Jesus tells us that His love must be accepted in a commandment.

This commandment is intertwined with how we live as a community. We keep expecting love to be handed out in small doses according to how we

perform in life. It is as if we get apportioned love according to how good and loving we act in our daily lives. We feel that if the receiving of love is to work we should have to earn it. This approach also means that we can control the way that people love us and accordingly keep displays of love measured and not allow it to get into our comfort zone.

Our evangelical and protestant backgrounds means that we tend to be suspicious of anything which goes against the idea that salvation is by grace through faith. We know that we can't earn salvation or forgiveness. However we do tend to stick with the idea that love still has to be striven for.

If we simply substitute the word *love* for *grace* then we are confronted with the need to review our previous ideas that we need to strive to receive love. In reality they are the same thing. Grace is not some sort of magic entry token to help us get into heaven. Grace means that we are loved by God freely, passionately and unreservedly. Nothing that we can do will ever make God love us more or less.

Jesus told us that God chose us, not that we chose Him. We are not in control of the love offered to us. God already loves each of us. All that we can have an influence on is whether we welcome God's love and choose to make it part of our lives.

We need to remember that we were chosen so that we could bear the fruit of that love and we could not influence that free offer given to us. God is free to love and has chosen to love each one of us no matter what we have done.

This does not mean that God has no interest in how we respond to that freely offered love. Just as love cares, God cares. Our response makes a big difference in how we live our lives. God cares passionately about how we respond. Jesus invited us to 'abide' in His love that is to make ourselves at home in this love. In doing this His joy is complete and our joy is also complete. God wants us to enjoy that love, to enjoy being loved and to joyously bear the fruits of love. God wishes us to take pleasure in living in love.

So why do we so often miss out on feeling the love in our lives?  
Is love and joy a strong theme in our lives?

Most of us can recognise ourselves in the mirror but what are we really looking at?

Do we see things in others that we don't want to look at in ourselves?

We have all come from a culture which makes a big issue about personal choice. We want to be free and have complete control over our own destiny. We see it as a right to set boundaries on our relationships and choose who we will love and manage who we will accept love from.

We try to keep our distance from those people whose perceptions of us are such that we are powerless to influence them. This is because either they see right through us or because their response to us is so gratuitously free that nothing we do seems to make any difference. These people can threaten our sense of autonomy.

When Jesus tells us that He chose us we can feel a bit threatened if we think that our self-control might be disturbed. Our upbringing seems to support our wanting to control our all aspects of our lives, even being loved by God unconditionally.

If we were to ask a member of the Knights Football Team whether they would prefer to earn their place on the team or just find themselves being selected because of all the other people for that position were injured, I am sure that they would prefer to be there on performance alone.

Being part of God's team does not mean that we have to compete for our position like a footballer as there is no limit on the numbers invited by God. God resists any attempt to control or regulate those selected. Those selected are not restricted by regulations or any other control measure we might like to impose.

Sometimes people will refuse to accept God's generous offer of love in the mistaken belief that if they hold out a bit longer they will be a better offer. This is not usually as crude as thinking that there might be some love that is bigger and deeper than God's love. Instead it is a kind of bargaining with God for better conditions.

We cannot put conditions on God's gift of love. Holding out for a better offer will not mean that God offers us better conditions and in the meantime we

are the losers with our contact lost with the Holy Spirit. The love God offers us through the Holy Spirit is extravagant and free and overwhelming. There is nothing held back. Jesus says, "I love you in the same way that I am loved by the Father. Make yourselves at home in my love."

We are invited to share in the full depths of love that exist in the relationships within God; the relationships of pure love between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. A little further on in the passage he tells us that he no longer refers to us as his servants, but as his friends, because we are no longer kept in the dark about what is going on between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We are now invited into the inner life of God, to experience and enjoy and participate. And, if any doubt remained, Jesus points out that there is no greater expression of love than to lay down your life for your friends, and then he does just that.

He laid down his life for us, for us who he now calls friends. He laid down his life rather than surrender us up to the violent systems that would regulate love and measure it out in miserly handfuls to those deemed worthy by the dominant people who control our culture. He laid down his life rather than surrender to the ideology that says that the fullness of love is only for the beautiful or successful or deserving or privileged.

**HYMN 641** This is my will

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JuyBdW2rHUU>

## **PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING**

We live in God's love. Let us be receivers and givers of love in all the ways we are able.

God of generous love,  
may we always live in the generosity of your love  
and give in good heart  
and great hope.

In the name of the one  
who gave his whole life for you and us.  
Amen.

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Charlestown Garden Suburb Congregation is an older congregation with attendance hovering around 40 each Sunday morning. Like many we are grappling with issues regarding finance and property. However, we have a strong desire to leave a legacy, and so have committed to forming relationships and participating in ventures outside of our own walls in a mission we are calling "Neos". As a beginning, we have "Coffee in the Community" at two shopping centres each week and participate in the Hunter Community Alliance.

**Prayer:** We pray for the leaders and congregation of Charlestown Garden Suburb Uniting Church as they seek to engage with the community in new ways so that they might give life to something new that will contribute to an ongoing expression of the love of God and the ethos of the Uniting Church in their area. Amen.

God, who is love to the world,  
today, we pray for those among us  
who know the word love  
but very often do not know the experience.  
We know that we love selectively and jealously.  
We know that we can be frugal with love,  
that we can withhold love.  
And yet, we know that we hunger for love;  
we long for respect and acknowledgment.  
We know that for our lives to be full,  
we need to matter to others –  
to live in their minds and imaginations.  
And we need for others to be alive in our minds also.  
God of love,  
we know you do not love like we do.  
You love with abandon,  
with an open, warm-hearted welcome  
and complete acceptance.  
You love in the way all people long to experience love.  
Today, we pray that each of us,  
all of those who live with us and around us,  
all the people in our nation  
and all the nations of the world  
will know your undying,  
forever unconditional love.  
This is our fervent 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 398** Come down O love divine  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edK3Vv7Qwo4>

## **COMMUNION**

The peace of the Lord be always with you.  
**And also with you**

Christ our Lord invites to his table  
all who love him,  
who earnestly repent of their sin  
and seek to live in peace with one another.  
Be present, risen Lord Jesus,  
as you were with your disciples,  
and make yourself known to us  
in the breaking of the bread;  
for you live and reign with the Father  
and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
**Amen.**

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.

And so according to our Saviour's command,  
we set this bread and this cup 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.**

Thanks and praise, glory and honour are rightly yours,  
our Lord and God,

for you alone are worthy.

In time beyond our dreaming

you brought forth life out of darkness,

and in the love of Christ your Son

you set man and woman at the heart of your creation.

When the right time had come,

you sent your Son Jesus.

He was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,  
and became truly human.

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 thank you that you called a covenant people to be a light to the nations.  
Through Moses you taught us to love your law,  
and in the prophets you cried out for justice.

In the fullness of your mercy  
you became one with us in Jesus Christ,  
who gave himself up for us on the cross.  
You make us alive together with him,  
that we may rejoice in his presence  
and share his peace.

By water and the Spirit  
you open the kingdom to all who believe,  
and welcome us to your table:  
for by grace we are saved, through faith.

With this bread and this cup  
we do as our Saviour commands:  
we celebrate the redemption he has won for us.

Pour out the Holy Spirit on us  
and on these gifts of bread and wine,  
that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ.

Make us one with him,  
one with each other,  
and one in ministry in the world,  
until at last we feast with him in the kingdom.

Through your Son, Jesus Christ,  
in your holy Church,  
all honour and glory are yours, Father almighty,  
now and for ever.

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.

Jesus, Lamb of God Lamb of God,  
**have mercy on us.**

Jesus, bearer of our sins,  
**have mercy on us.**

Jesus, redeemer of the world,  
**grant us peace.**

Jesus, liberator of creation,  
**Grant us peace.**

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

### **DISTRIBUTION**

Let us pray:

Bountiful God,  
at this table you graciously feed us  
with the bread of life and cup of eternal salvation.  
May we who have reached out our hands  
to receive this sacrament  
be strengthened in your service;  
we who have sung your praises  
tell of your glory in our lives;  
we who have seen the greatness of your love  
see you face to face in your kingdom,  
and come to worship you with all your saints for ever.  
**Amen.**

**HYMN 411** Filled with the Spirit's power

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_QG-8ycM2yc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_QG-8ycM2yc)

### **BENEDICTION**

People of God –

people loved by God,  
know this: you are alive on God's good earth.  
God always welcomes you with open arms;  
you are always called into the heart of love.  
Be of good cheer!  
Go into your day in joy – God goes with you!  
Go into your day in hope – God is the hope of the world!  
Go into your day in love, for love is all.  
Amen.

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