

**PENTECOST 3
9/6/24
CAVES BEACH**

CALL TO WORSHIP

We are ready, O God; we wait for your blessing.

From the experiences of another week, we come to you.

We wait for your blessing.

From the twists and turns of friendship, we come to you.

We wait for your blessing.

From our encounters with temptation, we come to you.

We wait for your blessing.

From our efforts to follow Christ, we come to you.

We wait for your blessing.

And you will bless us, O God, in this our morning worship.

Opening Prayer

We are strong, as disciples of Christ!

We gain strength as we learn and apply the teachings of Jesus.

We are compassionate, as disciples of Christ!

We look to those who confess the Way of Jesus, and who heal, and comfort, and listen.

We confront the powerful, as disciples of Christ!

We are not intimidated by position, influence, money, or threats.

We are faithful, as disciples of Christ!

We have a life of prayer; we seek to build up a faith community following the example of Jesus. Amen.

HYMN 459 In Christ there is no east or west

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TpITJOShix0>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

God of infinite grace,

we come today with our heads full of the noise of our lives.

Often, we don't even have enough time

to sort truth from falsehood,

enough brain space to know what we should retain

and what we should ignore,

enough energy to pay attention to what is important.

This is who we are, God of patience.
Today, as we gather with each other and with you,
help us to be at peace in our minds
so that we may experience your love.

Perhaps we are never really ready for you, gracious God,
never really able to understand how you shook up the world
and upside-downed everyday expectations and ideas.
We confuse promises of an easy life
with those of an abundant and blessed life.
We allow the loudest voices to instruct us
on ethics and integrity and ignore those who
speak words of compassion and peace.
We buy the lie that money and status
is all we need to fix what we believe has gone wrong
and forget that kindness and goodness is your balm to what ails the world.
Forgive us for not looking your way
and seeking your wisdom above all else.
Forgive us for trusting in false promises, rather than having faith in your
love.
Fill us with the Spirit of faith and hope and love.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

It is God who forgives.
It is God who renews,
It is God who brings life.
You are the children of God.
You are forgiven.
Live in peace.

READINGS

- **2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1**

13 But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—"I believed, and so I spoke"—we also believe, and therefore we also speak, 14 because we know that the one who raised Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and will present us with you in his presence. 15 Indeed, everything is for your sake, so that grace, when it has extended to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. 16 So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. 17 For our slight, momentary

affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, 18 because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen, for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

5:1 For we know that, if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

- **Mark 3:20–35**

20 Then he went home, and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. 21 When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” 22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” 23 And he called them to him and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26 And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. 27 But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

28 “Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter, 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin”— 30 for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

31 Then his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside asking for you.” 33 And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” 34 And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

HYMN 210 O for a thousand tongues to sing

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

SERMON

I am not surprised that the passage that we just heard from Mark’s Gospel causes a lot of confusion. It contains at two very confronting statements which can unsettle people. There is also the issue of Jesus portraying himself as a burglar and as we get caught up in this we find ourselves in an interesting dynamic.

We have the image of Jesus who would normally be seen as having no limits to his forgiveness. After all he forgave a thief and murderer as he was dying on the cross. Now He tells us that there is in fact something for which there is no forgiveness.

There is the image of Jesus as a massive supporter of family values publicly rebuking his own family and putting them in a place in the world below that of his followers. This would possibly not be quite such a shock today as it used to be when people lived in close knit family groups in the first century.

Today we have so many competing demands on our time and energy that we seem to be far removed from the massive constraints which used to bind us together in close knit family based groups. The kin based social systems of first century society in the middle east were almost never broken or ignored. Now we often wonder whether there is any family loyalty any more.

Over the next few months we will be mainly concentrating on Mark's Gospel and it is the shortest of the Gospels. Mark's message is short, sharp and straight to the point. That also applies to today's reading.

We now need to flesh out these statements by putting them in context. This passage is at the start of today's reading and already Jesus is challenging societal norms. He has just called His twelve disciples and commenced His preaching and healed quite a few people as well as casting out the odd demon. This has already attracted the attention of the local authorities because He has not asked their permission and was not doing things according to their rules.

In this passage Jesus' family is concerned about Him as they thought that He may be under the influence of some demon Himself.

Had his work led Him astray?

In those times mental illness and demonic possession were seen as the same thing. This had caused his family to feel the need to come and whisk Him away so He could be taken home and 'kept out of harms way.'

Mark has the habit of breaking away from one story to jump into another and then he hops back again. This is often confusing to the casual reader. However as we look at the Gospel closer it becomes clear that he sees one story clarifying the other. In this passage we hear from the religious hierarchy before we have Jesus respond to His family's attempt to control Him.

Jesus clearly rejects the inference that His actions are under the influence of demons. He argues that He is under the influence of a force far more powerful than the most powerful demon called Beelzebub, who was considered to be the prince of demons.

How often do we hear public references to demon possession in everyday conversations on the street? This sort of demeaning treatment of people who don't fit with some supposed societal norm does still go on today.

For many years in the AFL there has been an indigenous round where the contribution of First Nation people to the AFL is recognised and celebrated. There is a similar practice in the NRL as well.

During one such game a few years ago Adam Goodes from the Sydney Swans briefly celebrated a fantastic goal by doing part of an Aboriginal War Dance. His actions seemed to set off the crowd and there was a lot of booing and also derogatory remarks from the commentators. It did not take long for all of the critics to come out and roundly condemn his actions.

This then began to be a common practice to try to unsettle him. Being proud of his heritage, Adam refused to be shamed out of this cultural celebration and in fact he continued to do it. This was brought out in a later documentary about him and how the ongoing racial vilification of him lead him to eventually walk away from that sport.

It seems that people were happy to acknowledge the contribution that First Nation players made to sport here in Australia but there was some sort of expectation that these people should feel grateful for their opportunities and not make any display celebrating that culture.

How often have we seen a soccer player or a cricket player make the sign of the cross or New Zealanders doing a Hakka without any adverse comments from those watching?

As was the case of Adam Goodes, and with Jesus in His ministry, there seems to be some sort of over-riding community expectation that such an 'upstart' should just buckle under and do only what the rest of society expected. Some people feel that their culture should be dominant and there is no room for other sorts of cultural expression. Therefore we denigrate and demean those people, trying to make them conform to our traditional way of doing things. For too long time we have tended to demonise those who we see as different.

On the other hand we all know the angst which occurred when the government first started to remove the citizenship of people who chose to link with terrorist organisations and then deport them. The approach here being different in that these people had chosen to reject completely our culture and values wanting to completely destroy our society for some violent quasi religious ideals. In this situation we are removing from them the idea that they are part of 'us' and their mantras that they alone have all the 'answers.'

The deciding factor here is whether we treat others with respect. With someone like Adam Goodes we have to be able to reflect and learn that we are seeking to only remove those who would damage our society rather than those who simply seek to expand the breadth of society to include things like First Nation culture.

In this passage we come across Jesus being labelled as demonic so he simply responds with the statement: "How can Satan cast out Satan?" Drawing on the ancient hierarchy model Jesus asks how any kingdom can survive when it is in conflict with itself.

We could equally cast our minds back to the number of nations in recent times which have descended into turmoil when they are deeply divided. It is only when a nation acknowledges the differences within and builds on that diversity that it can grow and survive. Satan could not survive if he was in conflict with himself.

It is all too easy here to get diverted from the central issue. Jesus is not talking in ignorance about satan being divided. Let's hear the whole verse again:

“If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come.”

Jesus is simply saying that as we remove our focus from Satan to God we remove the crushing power of Satan.

We can often get caught up in debates about satanic powers and labelling others who might be a bit different accordingly. The word Satan actually means the ‘accuser.’ The tendency of labelling others with such a word is in itself demonic. We become the ‘accuser!’

Society all too often tries to ‘protect’ itself from those who are different, but not really a threat, by labelling them in a derogatory way. When we label them as evil ones and demand that they be rejected and forced to conform we are in fact taking part in a demonic process. What is actually coming out is the evil within our own hearts and that needs to be brought out into the open so that God’s light can shine upon it so that there can be healing and forgiveness.

The demonic actions leave us with a bitterly divided society which can so easily spiral into violence and chaos. We would then be living in a society which is bitterly divided into the ‘good’ and the ‘bad,’ the ‘clean’ and the ‘unclean,’ the ‘sinner’ and the ‘saint.’

As those divisions trickle down into our society the response of those rejected or alienated can become more intractable. Like Jesus said; “If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come.”

For so long the way that people addressed differences was to build a wall of distrust and hatred. There was the tendency to separate ourselves from those we suspected of being different. The rationale being that the division was the only way to survive.

In Mark’s Gospel they rejected Jesus and accused Him of being demonic precisely because He was challenging that old divide and conquer concept.

Jesus saw a different way ahead for us. We are all part of humanity and parts of the same group. Instead of looking at ourselves in opposition to others He opens up the doorway to love and forgiveness which can accommodate everyone. In God’s Kingdom there are no outsiders and no

insiders. We are all on the welcome guest list. We are all welcomed with generous love and mercy.

Of course this does tend to offend those who set themselves up as to sole experts on what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. It was no wonder that those Pharisees saw Jesus as a threat and tried to brand Him as demonic.

We can see the evidence here as to why rejection of God's Kingdom is unforgivable. By rejecting the forgiveness of the Kingdom they are in fact rejecting the very act of 'forgiveness' itself.

Now we are getting there. When we hear Jesus refer to rejection by God we tend to jump to the conclusion that these people can never have forgiveness when in fact what is being revealed by Jesus is that He is simply rejecting the act of not forgiving. Those who reject the act of forgiveness cannot simultaneously be forgiven. For example, if I reject food when it is offered I will eventually starve to death.

So now we turn back to the other part of this passage, Jesus' family. When they arrived outside the house where He was teaching we can now see where the Gospel writer is taking us. We hear:

"Who are my mother and my brothers? Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

While this might be a shock to first century people hearing from Jesus it is in fact bringing home a very important point.

Jesus is refusing to become any part of the old way of dividing and conquering. It is not a matter of an arbitrary view of the 'good' and the 'bad.' His ties to those around Him are more than just family bonds.

There is no inner group and no place to put 'outsiders.' His approach is unprecedented in that His anti-family approach is seen as demonic. However we are learning that when we blindly give our loyalty to one group at the expense of others we are simply fanning the coals of the fires of hatred and fear.

Jesus' message was simply that everyone was His sister and brother and mother. In this process there is healing for the deepest of wounds and

mercy reigns. The only things which Jesus calls on us to reject is the act of rejection and exclusion.

He has shone the light of truth on our deeply entrenched culture of Satan casting out Satan and called us all into one new worldwide family in which all of us, as forgiven and healed sinners, are gathered as one another's brothers and sisters and mothers for the glory of God and the life of the world.

HYMN 650 Brother, sister, let me serve you

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQaOErUUjm8>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

God is the giver of all that is. Let us live and give in God's generosity!

God of all goodness and care,
today, we want to be givers like you are.

We want to give of ourselves
for the love of each other
and the world you make.

May what we give here,
and what we give in other ways and other places,
be for the joy of the world.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Kurri - Weston Church meets each Sunday at Weston followed by Morning Tea and Fellowship. About 8 to 10 people then move on to lunch together at the local Club. We are a Multi Congregation with Mulbring Church who meet fortnightly at 10.30am and often provide a light lunch for their visiting Preachers. We conduct a combined Coffee and Chat monthly on a Saturday afternoon. **Prayer:** We pray for Kurri Weston Multi Congregation at Weston and Mulbring as they endeavour to be places of welcome to all comers. As members age, we pray that we can continue to worship and share with our communities. Amen.

God of love,
Jesus said: 'If a kingdom is divided against itself,
that kingdom cannot stand.'

What is true of kingdoms is true of individuals.
Many in our community are at war within themselves.
Some of us have mental illnesses
where we hear voices that tell us untrue tales of horror.
For those of us who struggle with these voices
it is very often hard to tell what is true and what is a lie.
Many more of us do not hear voices
but do conduct an inner monologue
where we tell ourselves how we are wrong,
how we are less than others,
how we are failing to be who we think we should be.
Many of us think that we are alone in our situation,
that no one else could have an inner life that is so debilitating.
Therefore, we must keep ourselves secret from each other.
We are individuals divided within ourselves
and from each other,
God of love.
We pray today for a world free of the voices,
free of the accusations;
a world full of your love and welcome.

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 690 Beauty for brokenness

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5_TVy2gHRg

BENEDICTION

We have heard words of forgiveness.
We have heard words of hope.
We have heard words of welcome.
Go into this day filled with the goodness of God.
You are loved.
You are loved.
You are loved.
Amen.

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