

Rev Lou Piper  
PENTECOST 17  
15/9/24  
CAVES BEACH

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

We gather for worship:

**a sign that we are faithful to God.**

We gather with each other thankfully:

**we trust and support each other in the faith community.**

We listen for God's word to us:

**a sign that God, who has spoken in times past, still speaks to the people of God.**

We resolve to serve the living God:

**a sign that our faith has meaning and purpose for good, meaning and purpose for ourselves, and meaning and purpose for those in our community who have practical and spiritual needs.**

**OPENING PRAYER**

At the dawn of a new day, you are with us O God,

**filling us with hope, giving us a clear vision of the way to be taken.**

In the heat of the day, you are with us O God,

**strengthening us in the struggle and encouraging us when the way ahead is rough and testing.**

In the cool of the evening, you are with us O God,

**calling us to thanksgiving, enabling us to reflect on our experiences along the way.**

In this service, you are with us, O God,

**calling us to follow Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life.  
Amen.**

**HYMN** TiS 187 Let All Creation Dance

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1OF6liLcZqg>

**PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION**

We thank you, O God, our Creator, that you know and love each one of us.

We thank you for all the signs of new life as spring arrives again. We thank you for the colour of

flowers, of new leaves and blossoms on the trees. Thank you for our gardens that give us joy.

Thank you most especially for Christ Jesus and his gift to us of life abundant. Thank you for your

Holy Spirit filling our being, enabling your presence to be with us always.

Thank you for those who follow in Jesus' footsteps and are generous in the giving of themselves,

of their time, for the good of others.

Thank you for the ones who have chosen, often at cost to themselves, to work for justice in our world,

and to share the message of your love and grace.

We ourselves are sorry that we are often so slow to learn the truths that come to us from the

Scriptures, and to live in ways which reflect your love and give glory to you.

We come to you loving God, admitting our need for forgiveness. Forgive us for our failure to love.

We find it hard even to love the people closest to us, let alone those who are distant.

Forgive us Lord, for making negative judgements. We come repenting of wrong attitudes.

We ask for your forgiveness, and for your enabling, that we might love with that same love which

you have for each of us. Amen

## **WORDS OF ASSURANCE**

God's grace is freely available for all who come in faith, who acknowledge their need for forgiveness,

and willingly accept it as a gracious gift from Jesus Christ. In the Bible we read: "The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1: 15). In this way, God gives us a fresh start and welcomes us - hence in the name of Jesus, our sins are forgiven.

**Thanks be to God. Amen**

## **READINGS**

**\* Psalm 19 : 1-14**

The heavens are telling the glory of God,  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

<sup>2</sup> Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> There is no speech, nor are there words;  
their voice is not heard;

<sup>4</sup> yet their voice goes out through all the earth  
and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,

<sup>5</sup> which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,  
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

<sup>6</sup> Its rising is from the end of the heavens  
and its circuit to the end of them,  
and nothing is hid from its heat.

<sup>7</sup> The law of the Lord is perfect,  
reviving the soul;

the decrees of the Lord are sure,  
making wise the simple;

<sup>8</sup> the precepts of the Lord are right,  
rejoicing the heart;

the commandment of the Lord is clear,  
enlightening the eyes;

<sup>9</sup> the fear of the Lord is pure,  
enduring forever;

the ordinances of the Lord are true  
and righteous altogether.

<sup>10</sup> More to be desired are they than gold,  
even much fine gold;

sweeter also than honey  
and drippings of the honeycomb.

<sup>11</sup> Moreover, by them is your servant warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.

<sup>12</sup> But who can detect one's own errors?  
Clear me from hidden faults.

<sup>13</sup> Keep back your servant also from the insolent;  
do not let them have dominion over me.

Then I shall be blameless  
and innocent of great transgression.

<sup>14</sup> Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable to you,  
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

**\* Mark 8: 27-38**

<sup>27</sup> Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" <sup>28</sup> And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." <sup>29</sup> He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." <sup>30</sup> And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

<sup>31</sup> Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

<sup>34</sup> He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? <sup>37</sup> Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? <sup>38</sup> Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

**HYMN** TiS 526 Lord Jesus Christ, You have Come to Us

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uKsbd5UqKkc>

**SERMON**

As I read over today's gospel passage two personal memories came to mind. One was just the other evening. I was talking to a chap and patting his dog called Tuppence down at the Lake and after saying goodbye to him, I overheard him ask another fellow nearby if his dog was friendly and then say to him that he was just holding on to Tuppence as he didn't want his dog - to knock the old lady over. Right, I thought - that sure was a reality check! The other memory was the first statement that was made at

an interview when applying for an assistant minister's position just a few years ago in Sydney: "We know all about you," the gentleman said. My immediate (and silent) reply was, "I bet you don't!" So, first a reality check, and then the second - an assumption.

Yes, well it was those personal anecdotes that came to mind as I read the first verses today from the passage in Mark. There are two questions that Jesus puts to his disciples. The first: "Who do people say that I am?" There's plenty of room there to move, because it's just about opinion really: "John the Baptist, others say Elijah, some others say one of the prophets." So we hear that when it comes to Jesus, popular opinion was all over the place. It'd be the same today - not those same answers, but I bet your bottom dollar, if we stood outside Coles or Woolies at Swansea we'd get a lot of different and probably some pretty odd answers too. I read that a church group tried it recently in New York, and answers ranged from a good moral teacher, to a prophet, and even a space angel.

The second question, "But who do you say that I am?" is in a different category. It's short, it's sharp, and he's limiting the responses open to them. Here Jesus is forcing them to give a response which will state their allegiance. Peter gets it right, "You are the Messiah." But there is a problem nevertheless: the trouble being that Peter understood that term in a different way to Jesus.

I am reminded of another interview I had. This time it was for teaching in the Northern Territory. The gentleman asked me if I wanted it wet or dry. "Goodness, I thought, these guys can even control the weather!" I guess I must have come across somewhat confused, so they explained it, they set me straight, that they were meaning: did I want a place where alcohol was permitted or not. You see, I had one understanding, while they had another.

Jesus had to set Peter straight on the meaning of Messiah. Peter had one understanding, Jesus had another. For Peter, the word Messiah meant king, someone with position and power and who would knock over the Roman power-base. But what we have here in the following verses is the first of three Passion predictions that Mark records in his gospel, and so we find that Peter, given his understanding of the term Messiah, will have the rug pulled out from under his feet because Jesus proceeds to outline the way he will be treated at the hands of the Jewish leaders of his time. It's

obvious, that the prospect of suffering at the hands of these officials for Peter, had absolutely no appeal.

What do we make of this in today's day and age. You will find that one of the biggest issues that come up about people's attitude to God and religion has always been about this matter of suffering. Why doesn't God stop it if he is God? Maybe we need to take on board the fact that God is limited in what he can do by laws of nature, and by the evolution of human nature and human freedom. Of course our God we worship neither promotes nor encourages suffering, nor approves of the suffering human beings inflict on one another. God is not responsible for illnesses, accidents, and natural disasters. God is not cruel, he does not cause our misfortunes - indeed, we are the losers when or if we blame God for those things. Rather, we can turn to him for help in overcoming our difficulties and our griefs, precisely because it is through Christ, through his suffering unto death, that we are assured of God's re-creation of our lives. That is resurrection hope!

If we are to own for ourselves, and offer the abundant life that God through Christ Jesus offers us to others, then we need to know and understand this, and how to draw on God's power for our own lives. This is in fact what Peter needed to understand, though of course we can't blame him for not wanting his friend to steer clear of getting hurt. And what did Mark want his early Christian community to understand? We need to realise that he wrote his gospel decades after Jesus' message had been rejected by the Jewish authorities, and after Jesus had been brutally tortured, crucified and raised from the grave. So Mark was writing this material to point out that anyone, who was committed to following in the footsteps of Jesus, could expect harsh treatment, rejection and persecution from those who persisted in opposing the establishment of the kingdom of God.

We should take on board that the Good News does not skirt the topic, the issue, of suffering - it tackles it head on. But realise at the same time, that the type of suffering that is addressed here is that which occurs when you take on the values of Christ - the one who came to promote the kingdom of God, to proclaim the value of justice for all, who came to teach the value of the poor, the widows, the orphans, the stranger - to make sure they were cared for and not overlooked. It was a commitment to integrity, and Jesus knew that he would be made to suffer for being true to those

values. We see Peter taking Jesus aside telling him that he did not want him to suffer - but in actual fact Peter was effectively presenting himself as a hindrance to the mission that Jesus was undertaking. And hence Jesus' strong rebuke to him: "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." Peter had not yet come to understand that suffering would inevitably come to Jesus as it had come to all the prophets before him. Our Lord knew the scriptures well. An alternative Old Testament reading in the lectionary that is often used for today is a passage from what is known as the Suffering Servant section in Isaiah: "I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting." Jesus would have known it well - he knew what was ahead of him. He didn't shirk. He knew that his personal integrity would bring on him the same kind of rejection and suffering that had been meted out to the prophets who had preceded him.

And what happened to Peter? Well, we could assume that he kept on hoping that the rejection and suffering that Jesus had forecast for himself might somehow be averted; and we also know that on the eve of our Lord's crucifixion his denial to the servant-girl of knowing Jesus was to cause him great shame. Indeed, it was not until after Jesus' resurrection that he fully realised that suffering was inseparable from the life of the Jesus whom he had committed himself to follow. And we do know that all on whose behalf Peter had answered our Lord's question as to who they said he was - with the exception of only one, Judas Iscariot - none of them swayed from their commitment.

Today I think these scripture passages are asking us to re-consider our own commitment. We all realise, that because of our human frailty, we have wavered at times. We will all have our individual responses. The words of commitment that we articulate will be confirmed by our actions. And our actions sometimes falter. We can give thanks that God forgives us, and we need to forgive ourselves and others in the same way. Then with God's help we can pick ourselves up, and with forgiveness and recommitment, we can live true to the Lord Jesus who never gives up on us. We will put our trust in God who is merciful, and even if hope seems to be failing at times, we can take up the cross of Jesus again and follow him.

Let me go back to my walk to the Lake the other evening. When walking I find that my mind clears - and I think and sometimes I find myself

praying. On that walk I left home truly feeling very tired. But not far along the road I had a conversation with one elderly gentleman who explained to me why he believed that his living was a miracle, then I met the young man who introduced me to Tuppence and believed I was old, and then I met a dear friend who told me how the Serenity Prayer had been so helpful to her and others she knew. And I resolved to share it with the group next Wednesday morning. And I came home renewed, refreshed, and reinvigorated. All God's gift to me during an evening walk.

Maybe it is when we have exhausted our own reserves, then it is when God comes along and enables us like Peter, to stay close to him even though sometimes we might be wanting to give it all up. Maybe we will become more mature in our faith as surely happened to Peter over the years. And we will find that we are better able to answer for ourselves, just who Jesus is. Don't you think?

The Lord be with you.

**HYMN** TiS 562 I'm Not Ashamed to Own My Lord

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-sYKDMtE3VQ&t=19s>

### **PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING**

Giver of all good gifts, the offering we make is already yours.

Through your providential care, we are enabled to be sharers of life for the common good.

Receive the gifts we bring as an expression of the lives we would offer to the glory of your name. Amen.

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE** (Prepared by Lieza Steele)

Good morning my brothers and sisters in Christ!

The other day as I was going through one of my journals

I found this short poem which I would like to share with you.

It's called: God will make a way.

Where there seems to be no way.

He works in ways we cannot see.

He will make a way for you and me.

He will be our guide.

Hold us closely to his side with love and strength.



For each new day He will make a way for you and me. Amen.

The following prayer I transcribed from the song: What a friend with have in Jesus.

Let us pray, Heavenly Father, thank you for the friend with have in Jesus.  
Who bears all our sins and griefs to bear.  
Lord, It's a privilege to carry everything in prayer.

Lord, all that peace we so often forfeit.  
All that needless pain we bear.  
All because we do not carry  
everything to you God, in prayer.

We all experience trials and temptations.  
And Lord, we know there is trouble everywhere.  
Lord help us not get discouraged  
and take it to You, all in prayer.

Nowhere, can we find one, so faithful  
Who will share all our sorrows.  
Jesus knows all of our weaknesses.  
So we all need to take everything  
To You in prayer. Amen.

Lord God, source of all goodness and love.  
Accept the fervent prayers of your people,  
for all those caught up in tragedy and disaster,  
For whom are experiencing injustice, famine, hunger, thirst,  
disease, slavery, domestic violence, living amid war, those who are fleeing  
their home  
countries and are now refugees.  
Lord we pray for peace and safe places for them where they will be well  
provided for.  
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers.

Lord we pray for peace among all nations, all homes, all dwellings  
And peace in all our hearts.  
Lord we pray for healing for everyone in this world who are experiencing  
sickness, pain and who are burdened and are grieving for lost loved ones.

Lord we pray that you will give them your strength, hope and courage to face the future.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers.

This week's congregation and church from the Hunter Presbytery Prayer Diary is the Tarro Uniting Church. They have a congregation of about 12. They have monthly meetings of fellowship with many activities which include the community. A men's coffee and a games morning which has avenues of witness and outreach. They are all a friendly and welcoming community with an average age of late 70's. Let us pray, Lord, we pray for the members of the Tarro Uniting Church as they witness and reach out to the local community and that those who attend their events and programs will begin to join them in worship. Lord, in your mercy, hear their prayers.

We say all this with grateful hearts and minds. In the name of your beloved son Our Lord and Saviour, Christ Jesus. Amen  
Please join me in singing the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed by 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 forever. Amen.

**HYMN** TIS 666 We are Marching in the Light of God

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gl24\\_27wW1E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gl24_27wW1E)

## **COMMISSIONING & BENEDICTION**

Let us go to be bearers of truth.

Let us be bold in speaking the gospel.

Let us be willing to be used by Christ

as we attend to God's word and obey the call to discipleship.

May the love of God dwell in our hearts,  
May the teaching of Christ be upon our lips,  
May the guidance of the Spirit direct our paths,  
and the blessing of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be  
among you  
and remain with you always. Amen

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_wy4wVtPS6k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_wy4wVtPS6k)