

PENTECOST 2
2/6/24
CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

As the breeze blows, as the water runs clear and free,

we respond to God the Creator, “Here I am, for you called me.”

In the midst of family, for a situation where suffering is confided,

we respond to the Compassionate God, “Here I am, for you called me.”

Within our faith community, as we offer our worship, as we pledge our service,

we respond to our God of the Church, “Here I am, for you called me.”

Meeting the anxiety of a good friend with words of hope,

we respond to the Ever-Present God, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

Opening Prayer

Glorious God of the seventh day, we worship you!

This is the day for praise in God’s house; this is the day when we come together as God’s people.

Glorious Sunday God, we worship you!

This is the day to put stress and daily anxieties behind us as we focus on your Word for us.

Glorious Sabbath God, we worship you!

This is the day for us to listen and to get ready for the tasks of mission and service that lie ahead for us.

God of the seventh day, God of *all the days*, we worship you!

**Each day we will learn about the Way of Jesus; each day we will respond to the downhearted as committed disciples of Christ.
Amen.**

HYMN 547 Be thou my vision

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

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

God of all-knowing,

The Psalms tell us that you have searched us and known us.

You know when we sit down and when we rise up;
you discern our thoughts from far away.
You search out our paths and our lying down,
and are acquainted with all our ways.
Even before a word is on our tongues, O Lord,
you know it completely.
That you know us so well and so intimately is a great joy to us,
God of love,
we do not need to hide ourselves from you.
We can rest in your love and care.
Thank you.

God, all through the past week you have said to us,
over and over again,
“peace be with you.”
But we do not always hear you,
We do not always trust you,
and we don’t always have peace.

Our minds are too often in turmoil.
Our interactions with those we love are too often hard and sharp.
Our communities are too often frightening and mistrustful.
Our world is too often filled with violence and war.

God, forgive us for not hearing your words of peace,
for not trusting your way of peace,
and for not living in true peace with ourselves and with each other.
Help us remember that you are the Prince of Peace
and that your call to us is always a call to peace.
Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

People of God,
the God of peace is present with you now
whispering peace to you in rhythm with your every breath.
You are forgiven;
you are the people of God and God’s emissaries of peace to the world.
Be at peace.

READINGS

- **2 Corinthians 4:5–12**

5 For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus's sake. 6 For it is the God who said, "Light will shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

7 But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. 8 We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, 9 persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, 10 always carrying around in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. 11 For we who are living are always being handed over to death for Jesus's sake, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our mortal flesh. 12 So death is at work in us but life in you.

- **Mark 2:23–3:6**

23 One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. 24 The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" 25 And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food, 26 how he entered the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions?" 27 Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath, 28 so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

3 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. 2 They were watching him to see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3 And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." 4 Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. 5 He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6 The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

HYMN 154 Great is your faithfulness

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

SERMON

This week's readings is the final in a series of interactions between Jesus and the Pharisees about religious boundaries and rules. In the first passage today the disciples randomly eat a few ears of wheat as they walk along the road. The Pharisees had obviously been carefully watching their activities. While work is prohibited on the Sabbath there was nothing to stop people from having something simple to eat which does not require any preparation. In fact Jesus points out that David had even eaten bread from the high alter when his band was hungry.

The Sabbath Law about working on that day was aimed at making sure that there was at least one day in the week where people concentrated on God and had a recuperating break from work. There is no way that grabbing a few heads of wheat could constitute work as they were not harvesting a crop. Neither were they supposed to be fasting. Jesus responds to this attack with the simple statement that the Sabbath was made for humankind and that humankind was not made for the Sabbath.

Some people tended to go to extremes and they sought to make adherence to the guidelines a matter of strict and onerous expectations. Jesus asks us to relax and celebrate the fullness of life that God has granted us.

Then we come to the incident in the synagogue where Jesus meets up with a man with a withered hand. Jesus simply acts to stop that man's suffering. Here Jesus again brings to a head the issue of what constitutes working on the Sabbath. Jesus then calls out those who would attack Him saying: "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath, or to do harm? Is it lawful to save life on the Sabbath or to bring death?"

Here this series of stories comes to a head.

What is religion about?

Should our beliefs bring life or are the rules more important?

Is our faith a source of healing and hope or is it about judgement and enslavement?

Jesus' actions on that day brings out the issue as to whether our actions honour God or do they seek to put God into some legalistic box and impose onerous conditions on people.

Disputes like that between Jesus and the Pharisees over the way that the Sabbath was observed can be taken to a ridiculous extent. Healing a man's withered hand is really an act of kindness, not work. Likewise grabbing some grain as they walked down the road was a common and accepted practice in New Testament times.

One of the things that has been overly portrayed in the media for some time is that of Christians failing to show any signs of mercy for people in need. We have been portrayed as people who like to be some sort of thought police trying to take the fun out of life. Some people see us as ascetics who are into flogging and fasting, avoiding parties, movies, the beach and everything else that everyone else enjoys.

This has been built on by an image of us being heavily into guilt, legalism and building division in the community. Speaking to some people I often hear that they are reluctant to engage with us as they already carry enough guilt and don't need any of ours. Some people might be concerned that adopting a Christian lifestyle might alienate them from their friends in the mistaken belief that Christians only associate with other Christians.

For these people becoming a practicing Christian and living a fulfilled life are mutually exclusive ideas. So many people think that religious practice has not kept up with our society. Even if we were those Palestinian peasants from the First Century, we would still be having some difficulty with society's expectation of behaviour being warped by adherence to irrelevant rules and practices.

Followers of John the Baptist and the Pharisees were fasting at this time and this was a common practice in the Jewish community. Fasting and observing feast days was a part of their religious tradition, a sign of devotion. This had been passed on from generation to generation for a long time. This was seen as a way of honouring God. It was a practice which they believed honoured and respected God.

These traditions didn't hurt anyone and they promoted spiritual awareness. Jesus was challenged as to why His followers were not also fasting. Jesus

simply responded: “The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is still with them, can they? As long as the bridegroom is with them, they will celebrate. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken from them, and then they will fast.” Put simply we can only quote the prophetic words of the singer, Bob Dylan: “The times they are a-changing.”

This was not to condemn religious traditions as a whole, only those which held little or no real significance. The distortion becomes an issue once the practice has lost its relevance. What may have once been fresh and invigorating at one time can lose its significance to the point where it becomes stale, lifeless and even oppressive as time moves on.

The question always needs to be asked as to whether a religious practice is still relevant and life giving. Trying to legislate that practice can be seen as trying to sow old patches onto new clothes, or like putting new wine into old wineskins.

When religious practices are oppressive and meaningless Jesus’ message and actions support moves for freedom and liberation. Does our faith and our practice always serve to enhance life and promote wholeness and freedom and celebration, or does it sometimes become a source of guilt or restrictions, and stifle the creative enthusiasm of those around us?

In Jesus Christ, God’s cards have been laid on the table:

God values mercy over guilt.

God values acceptance over exclusion.

God values change over loss of meaning.

God values freedom over fundamentalism.

God values life over law.

We live in a constantly changing world and our faith needs to keep building on and adjusting its requirements to reflect the changing reality. When anyone calls for religious practices for religions sake, Jesus calls for fullness of life.

HYMN 601 O Master, let me walk with thee

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CCX5sChezQ>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

We have praised God in words and music.

Let us now praise God in generosity;
in giving as we have received.

God of love,

as you called the man with the withered hand to come forward,
you call us to come forward

into the love of your community and to live as one people.

We pray that the money,

the time and the energy we offer will be gifts of healing in the world.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Wallsend Shortland Uniting Church meets each Sunday at 9.30am with a regular attendance of 20 people and weekly fellowship meetings over coffee and crafts. We are loving and supportive community of people, mainly in their 70s, 80s and 90s, who have been long term members. We have had a few new people come to our fellowship group and are making an effort to promote this in our community as there is a need for connection.

Prayer: We pray for the leaders of the Wallsend Shortland Uniting Church as they lead this community in ways of possibilities for change in a changing world, and maintain the buildings, and for the congregation as they seek to be a place of welcome and hospitality in their community.
Amen.

Today, God, we pray for all in authority.

For all who have the responsibility for making laws and regulations for the wellbeing of the whole community and those who must enforce those same laws and regulations.

We pray for their courage and commitment,

that they may always work toward a community where we are all welcome,
all can live in safety and all can live in peace.

We pray that our lawmakers will be just and fair,

merciful and forgiving and will enact laws that encourage human
flourishing,

not crush the human spirit.

We pray that fair laws will be enforced fairly with no regard for wealth,
gender, or ethnicity.

That those who can defend themselves and those who cannot, will be treated the same.

We pray for reconciliation between the First Nation People in our country and all those who have come since.

That those who seek the shelter and protection of the law will always receive a welcome and a fair hearing.

And we pray that all of us,
privileged as we are to live in lands where we can be heard,
will carry this privilege with the seriousness it deserves,
and that we will monitor the work of those we elect,
and constantly call for laws that make the world a true home for all.

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 540 Christians lift your hearts and voices
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBA08ur9wAU&t=31s>

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.
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.

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 242 I danced in the morning

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xkk0YodJqH8&t=83s>

BENEDICTION

'Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath,
to save life or to kill?'

We know the answer.

It is always lawful.

It is always right.
It is always good to save and to heal.
May God's goodness and healing
and God's love and care
be present with you today and every day.
Go in the goodness of God.
Go in the healing of God.
Go in the love of God.
Amen.

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