

Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church
BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,
ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKEY

22 October The Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost

HYMNS: 166 457 757 356 71 556

INTROIT: Psalm 96

Sing to the LORD a new song! Sing to the LORD, all the earth!

Sing to the LORD! Bless His name! Proclaim His salvation from day to day!

Declare His glory among the nations, His marvellous deeds among all the peoples!

For the LORD is great and very worthy of praise. He should be feared above all gods.

For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD has made the heavens.

Splendour and majesty are before Him. Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.

Ascribe to the LORD, families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to His name! Present an offering and come into His courts!

Worship the LORD in holy splendour! Tremble before Him, all the earth!

Say among the nations: "The LORD reigns. The world also is firmly established. It will not be moved. He will judge the peoples justly!"

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice! Let the sea, and all that fills it roar!

Let the fields and everything in them be jubilant! Then all the trees of the forest will shout with joy before the LORD.

For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with His truth.

COLLECT: O God, the protector of all who trust in You, have mercy on us that, with You as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

READINGS: Isaiah 45:1-7 God makes Cyrus His instrument.

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 The good example of the Thessalonians.

Matthew 22:15-22 The Pharisees' question about paying taxes to Caesar.

Isaiah 45:1-7

¹ This is what the LORD has said to Cyrus, His anointed one, "whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him, whom I shall use to undo the weapon-belts of kings and to open doors before him, so that the city-gates will not be shut: ² 'I Myself shall go before you and smooth down the elevated places. I shall break bronze gates in pieces and cut through iron crossbars. ³ I shall give you treasures from dark places and riches stored in secret places, that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, and that I am calling you by your name. ⁴ For the sake of My servant Jacob and Israel, My chosen one, I have called you by your name. I am giving you a title of honour, although you do not know Me. ⁵ I am the LORD, and there is no one else. Apart from Me there is no other God. I shall equip you for action, although you do not know Me, ⁶ that people from the sunrise to the sunset may know there is no one except Me. I am the LORD, and there is no one else. ⁷ I form light and create darkness. I cause prosperity and create calamity. I am the LORD and I do all these things."

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

¹ Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you!

² We always thank God for you all when we mention you in our prayers. ³ We continually remember before our God and Father that your faith is working, that your love is toiling and that your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ is enduring patiently. ⁴ For we know, fellow-Christians, whom God loves, that He has chosen you, ⁵ because our Good News did not come to you simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with great conviction. You know what kind of men we were among you for your good. ⁶ You also became imitators of us and of the Lord when, although you suffered greatly, you received the Word, with joy, given by the Holy Spirit. ⁷ As a result, you became models for all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸ For the Word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only through Macedonia and Achaia but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. ⁹ For they themselves report concerning you what kind of reception you gave us, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve the living

and true God,¹⁰ and to wait for His Son to come from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, namely, Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Matthew 22:15-22

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went away and plotted how to trap Him in His Words.

¹⁶ They sent their disciples to Him with Herod's supporters to say to Him: "Teacher, we know that You are honest, that You teach the Way of God in truth. You pay no attention to who people are, since You do not show favouritism. ¹⁷ Therefore, tell us: What do You think? Is it right to pay a tax to Caesar or not?"

¹⁸ Jesus recognised their evil intent and asked, "Why are you testing Me, hypocrites? ¹⁹ Show Me the coin used for paying the tax!"

They brought Him a denarius. ²⁰ He asked them, "Whose portrait is this, and whose inscription?"

²¹ They said to Him, "Caesar's."

Then He told them, "Therefore, pay to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's!"

²² They were astonished when they heard this. Then they let Him alone and went away.

"PAY TO CAESAR THE THINGS THAT ARE CAESAR'S AND TO GOD THE THINGS THAT ARE GOD'S!"

Sermon for the 21st Sunday after Pentecost, 2023

Matthew 22:15-22

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Gospel read before, Matthew 22:15-22:
Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth.
Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The Passover would be celebrated in Jerusalem in a couple of days. Jesus hadn't been in Jerusalem for long, yet His enemies had been trying to figure out a way to trap or trip Him. They would either get the crowds to turn against Him or get the authorities to come down on Him. Jesus' enemies would like to get their hands on Him, but they must deal with the political realities. So, in order

to trap Jesus, they decided to figure out a question to ask, but it was a question that no matter which way He answered, *it would get Him into trouble*.

Among Jesus' enemies were the Pharisees. Jesus has been exposing their hypocrisy for a couple of years now, challenging their religious leadership, and they hated Him for it. But so far, they haven't been able to catch Him out. Even so, they're going to try once again. So **“the Pharisees went away and plotted how to trap Him in His Words.”** After coming up with a plan, **“they sent their disciples to Him with Herod's supporters.”**

There is an old saying that politics makes strange bedfellows. Here, the Pharisees and Herod's supporters display a common hatred for Jesus that overshadows their sharp disagreements with each other. The Pharisees were ardent nationalists who opposed Roman rule and despised Herod's supporters for their cooperation with the Roman government. So now, if Jesus tells people not to pay taxes to Rome, Herod's supporters will report Him to Pontius Pilate and have Him executed for *treason*. And if Jesus tells people to pay taxes to Caesar, the Pharisees will spread the word that Jesus is *unpatriotic*.

The trap is set. A question will be asked of Jesus that, if He answers it one way, will disappoint and anger the masses. But they also bring Herod's supporters along to witness Jesus' answer so that if He answers it the other way, they, Herod's supporters, will not like it and report Jesus to the Roman authorities. It is a trap that will see Jesus in trouble no matter how He answers.

To gain Jesus' confidence and goodwill and to encourage Him to speak freely and loosen up His tongue, the Pharisees have their spokesman start out with some flattery. They come to Jesus and say, **“Teacher, we know that You are honest, that You teach the Way of God in truth. You pay no attention to who people are, since You do not show favouritism.”** Now, the irony here, of course, is that all of this is true! Jesus Himself is true - genuine, authentic - and He does speak and teach the way of God truthfully. Yes, that is exactly right! And yes, *Jesus does not care about man's opinion*. Neither is He swayed by outward appearances. He has demonstrated that over and over in His bold and controversial ministry. The irony here is that it's the Pharisees themselves who are not being true or speaking truthfully. They're being dishonest, deceitful and devious in their attempt to butter up Jesus and get Him to slip. Of course, Jesus will not fall for it, but this is how they're leading into their trick question, **“Therefore, tell us: What do You think? Is it right to pay a tax to Caesar or not?”**

That's a pretty clever question. Is it lawful, is it right, for us Jews as God's own children, who should be slaves to no one, to pay taxes to a foreign, pagan emperor who has us under his thumb? If Jesus says yes, He has just lost the crowd; they'll turn against Him. If Jesus says no, Herod's supporters will hear it and mark Him as someone disloyal to the regime, a rebel against Caesar, and a potential insurrectionist.

Jesus, as He is wont to do, answers their question with a question. He asks them: **"Why are you testing Me, hypocrites?"** Jesus sees right through their phony flattery and calls them on it. He is aware of **"their evil intent."** Even so, He decides to use this occasion for His purpose, and so He tells them, **"Show Me the coin used for paying the tax!"** **"They brought Him a denarius."** And now Jesus asks them another question, a question about the coin they themselves have just provided. He asks them, **"Whose portrait is this, and whose inscription?"** Rome minted this coin with the image of Tiberius Caesar and identified him as the "son of the divine Augustus." This sounds like a pretty straightforward, simple question, so the Pharisees quickly reply: **"Caesar's,"** without realising that now Jesus has caught them in a trap because what He says next is wisdom that cannot be refuted. He will answer their original question about paying taxes, but He will do it in a way that neither the Pharisees nor Herod's supporters could dispute. And He lifts their sights, and the sights of the crowd - and our sights, too - to see a question about ourselves in relation to Jesus and God.

Here is Jesus' answer: **"Therefore, pay to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's!"** In one fell swoop, that answer gets at it in our relation to Caesar and God.

First, **"pay to Caesar the things that are Caesar's."** This is really the *minor point* because their question never really was a sincere question in the first place; it was just a set-up designed to trap Jesus. But Jesus does address briefly the matter of our responsibility toward civil government. Whoever the "Caesar" is over you at any particular time and place in history - Caesars need taxes to run whatever government is in place. The government may be doing a good or bad job with those taxes; they may be collecting too much or too little in taxes, but the point remains: *Nations need governments, and governments collect taxes*. It's what they do. Caesar needs - and demands - his denarius. That's the nature of life in this world.

So it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar. We do “**pay to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.**” But as I say, this is only the minor point that Jesus is making. He has something more to say that goes beyond taxes and Caesar. And that is, that we are to render “**to God the things that are God’s.**” This is the most important thing Jesus has to say, and it applies to everyone, *including us*. Pay to God the things that are God’s. And that has everything to do with how we receive - or reject - the Man who is saying this, namely, Jesus of Nazareth.

Think about that Roman denarius, with the likeness and inscription of Caesar on it. If that coin had the image and name of the emperor on it, and it did, then that meant you recognised it as such, received it, and used it for operating in that kingdom. The coin bore the image of the current Roman emperor, and the inscription gave his name and title: “*Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus.*” Did you catch that? The Roman emperor claimed to be divine, the “*son of the divine Augustus.*”

Now, here is Jesus, standing right before the crowd, telling them these things. They have observed His person and ministry for several years now. They have heard His words and seen His deeds, words of heavenly wisdom, deeds of divine mercy. So now the question comes: *Whose image and inscription does he bear?* The answer: **God’s**. Jesus’ words and His works attest, most clearly, that *He is indeed the Son of the living God, the only one there is*. Then why, O Pharisees, do you not receive this Jesus as your Messiah, your King and Deliverer sent from heaven? That would be the right way to pay to God the things that are God’s. By believing in the One whom He has sent! The image and the inscription are there for you to see!

That image and that inscription are there for us to see! Look to Jesus our Saviour. See in Him the image of God, the God of all compassion and mercy. So great is His love for us that He was willing to be rejected by His enemies and to be crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. The inscription on that cross read, “*This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.*” But really, the inscription could read, “*This is Jesus, the King who was willing to suffer shame and suffering and death for our salvation.*” Yes, Jesus pays to God the things that only He could pay: payment for all our debt of sin, a tax we could never pay. But Jesus, the holy Son of God, does pay it, declaring in His dying breath, “*It is finished. Paid in full.*” That the debt is paid is shown when Jesus rises from the dead, offering life, peace, and eternal salvation as a free gift.

So today, as we see the image and inscription of God resting on this Jesus, pay **“to God the things that are God’s!”** Namely, faith and trust in the Saviour that has been sent for us - Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty God, heavenly Father, we come to You in the precious name of our Saviour Jesus Christ, to praise You and pray to You. We thank You for Your constant love to us in days of happiness and prosperity, and for Your unfailing mercy in times of trouble and hardship. We thank You also for the joys of family life, the warmth of friends, and the blessings of all other God-pleasing human relationships. We praise You for giving us clear and sure directions for our life, and for standing by us when the future looks dark and uncertain. But, above all else, we thank and praise You for the gift of Your dear Son, through whose death and resurrection You have made us Your own for ever, and shown such great love to us.

We trust You to continue to supply our food and clothing, and pray You to make us content with what You provide. Grant that we may not set our hearts on uncertain riches. Keep material things from competing with our duty to love You with our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Bless your church with faithful pastors. Give Your Church warm love for You, joy in its fellowship around the Gospel, faithfulness to Your Word, and eagerness to do Your work. Give us opportunities to witness to people who need to hear the Gospel from us, and bless our efforts for Your kingdom. Lead us daily by Your Holy Spirit, that we may understand Your Word and will more clearly, and to walk the path of faith, obedience, and love. Guide us by Your light, that we may turn from every folly of our evil age, and use every opportunity to claim Your grace and to live in Your wisdom. Give us joy and happiness, not in evil, but in a life lived in fellowship with You and Your people.

Make all rulers obedient to You, so that all tyranny and oppression may be put down, all lust for power wiped out, and all love for man-made gods destroyed. Protect us from every enemy, so that we may live to serve You and our fellowmen in peace and safety.

Teach all in our families to look to You for every need. Provide them at the right time with everything they need for body and spirit. Guide them, above all else, to rejoice in Your Word, to give thanks to You for everything, and to sing hymns to Your praise.

Be with those who face sickness or sorrow, trouble or danger, and free them from all worry and distress. Be with those who suffer persecution and injustice, and increase their faith and trust as they wait patiently for Your deliverance.

Grant us all these things, and anything else we need, in Christ's name and for His sake. Amen.

Article: When You Are Weak, Christ Is Your Strength

Difficult days can sneak up on you. Everything is going well, but suddenly you find yourself in the pits. Those stormy stretches sometimes linger for quite a while - often, in my experience, the storms follow each other in rapid sequence. Likely, you know how that feels: hardships and uncertainties, losses and calamities keep coming.

You begin to wonder if you've been targeted for failure. Distressing times present a problem for the faithful Christian, who knows that our lives aren't random chaos. This is our Father's world, after all. Our loving God made the universe and everything in it. He hasn't gone on an extended holiday, leaving us on our own. As Jesus taught, nothing happens by blind chance: not even a sparrow falling from its nest escapes the Father's notice (Matthew 10:29).

Great minds in philosophy and theology have wrestled with this issue for millennia: If God is good, why is there evil? Logically we may conclude that either God is not good or that He's powerless to do anything about evil.

That's where logic would lead us astray. The cosmic riddle of evil cannot be solved using human reason and our unaided senses. Rather, as we undergo the reality of human calamity and pain, we need to be guided by the Holy Spirit through His Word: ultimately, you don't solve suffering - you endure it.

Suffering is natural for the Christian; it's sure to come your way. However, you needn't suffer all alone.

Suffering in itself is a bad thing; let's remember that. Christians are not masochists, looking for suffering wherever they can find it to impress God or others somehow. We Christians should take an unvarnished approach to reality. We shouldn't deemphasise pain or dilute suffering. We ought never to call evil good any more than we would call good evil.

So there's nothing wrong with avoiding suffering and trying to relieve pain. We should commend health professionals who facilitate healing for physically or mentally suffering people. In their darkest days, suffering people need skilled physicians of mind and body to obtain whatever measure of relief they can find.

If you're stuck in a tight spot, please do reach out for healing help. And while you're at it, look for a spiritual physician, too. A caring pastor's attentive ears and

heart can soothe your aching soul in times of calamity. God has healing gifts for all His saints in His sure Word and holy sacraments - seek out such care.

And please, for God's sake, remember this: if you're imperilled emotionally or strung out spiritually, don't conclude that your faith is wrong. If you're a pastor or companion to a suffering soul, never belittle their pain or give the impression that their situation isn't bad. Your calling in times of calamity is not to paint smiley faces on human misery. Don't discount suffering and pain of any kind. You can't wave a wand and make ugliness magically disappear. So let's call a spade a spade: Misery upsets. Fear paralyzes. Sickness wearies. Pain hurts. And the most searing pain of all, the final indignation: death stings.

The mystery: God hides Himself in the midst of sorrow and distress. Just ask Jeremiah, God's prophet to Judah. If you've read Jeremiah's prophecy, you'll know why he's often called "the weeping prophet." It was his misfortune to serve as God's spokesman through some of the most turbulent times in the history of his people. Jeremiah's earnest appeal to turn from their habitual idolatry and adultery and return to the God of their salvation repeatedly fell on deaf ears. Ultimately, Judah was sent into captivity in Babylon because of their hardened hearts and open rebellion.

The book of Lamentations, which reflects Judah's calamitous experience in Babylon, is usually attributed to Jeremiah. Though often overlooked, it offers a rich balm for suffering souls. It's a literary work of art, an elaborate poetic expression of lament-filing a complaint with God. The five chapters of this poignant lament reach their epitome squarely in the middle of the book, in chapter three: human calamity eloquently summed up in sixty-six exquisite verses.

The prophet pulls no punches and minces no words as he paints human calamity. As far as suffering people can tell, God alternately seems like a tormentor, a jailer, a hunter, a wild bear, or a ravenous lion looking for prey to devour. Meanwhile, sufferers subsist on bitterness and wormwood, taunted continually by insults and ridicule, treated like scum and garbage. The brutal honesty of Lamentations 3 is not for the faint of heart. Have a read for yourselves.

If you've got the stomach to digest the whole cumulative deluge of human affliction encapsulated in these sixty-six raw verses, you will not only hear overtones of Judah's captivity and the voice of the weeping prophet Jeremiah but also echoes of the cry of dereliction from the cross of Calvary, where Jesus - the man of sorrows - died a tortured death, bearing our sin and shame in His own body.

At the very heart of this rushing torrent of pain stand the following key, visceral lines, powerfully evoking God's tender care for his wounded people: "*Though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast*

love; for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men” (Lamentations 3:32-33).

That’s the awe-filled secret concealed within affliction: God is right there in the middle of it.

Ever since Eden, God has disguised Himself to get closer to us mortal beings. He hides His glory in shame, power in weakness, riches in poverty, and majesty in lowliness. We can see this most clearly in the incarnation of God’s eternal Son in human flesh. Christ’s divinity is wrapped in humanity, His life enclosed within His death. It sounds weird, but that’s God for you: He deliberately wraps His faithfulness around those of us who are in misery. As Paul put it: *“God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are”* (1 Corinthians 1:27-28).

As much as you and I would like to escape suffering, dark days will come to us sooner or later. When those days arrive, it’s essential that we do not yield to the inevitable panic. We can find grace and gratitude in times of calamity when we see that Christ Himself is the Helper rushing in. We were lost and without hope; He rushed from heaven to earth, all the way into our frail flesh, to intervene and save us. He rushed into death itself and then further down - even into the death of the cross. But by that death, He conquered death and vanquished hell.

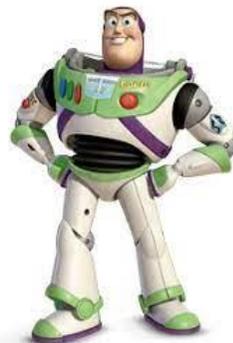
As a result, the darkest valleys of your life can also hold hope. Since He Himself was wrapped in lowliness and degradation in His suffering, He is able to comfort you. He knows your suffering intimately well. After all, *“we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need”* (Hebrews 4:15-16).

In your sorrow and distress you have a Helper who’s been there ahead of you. Jesus embraced your pain and misery and sanctified it at the cross by the touch of His sacred body, given for you. Whenever trauma comes your way, Jesus rushes to your side to help with His comforting Word. He will never leave you forsaken in your suffering. Be consoled by His sure promise: *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”* (John 11:25-26).

Martha answered “yes” that day in Bethany. You can, too. But Jesus knows our every weakness, and this reply will work as well: *“Yes Lord; I believe. Help me with my unbelief.”*

Children's Message:

How many of you know who this is a picture of? His name is Buzz Lightyear. Buzz flies through the galaxies and goes after the bad guys. His biggest enemy is a villain called Emperor Zurg. Two things Buzz is famous for saying. One is "To infinity and beyond." The other: "Evil never wins." Do you believe that? Well, it can be hard to believe because bad things do happen to people, and bad things happen to you. And when they happen, it hurts, doesn't it? But the Bible agrees with Buzz. Evil will not win.



One example of this is found in the Book of Isaiah. God used a king who didn't believe in Him. This king, whose name was Cyrus, was able to raise an army and defeat a mighty empire called Babylon, but we find that it's God who allowed this to happen for His reasons. And God's reasons were good reasons. God used Cyrus to defeat Babylon in order to bring God's people home to their Promised Land - the land from which the Babylonians had taken them. After God enabled him to defeat Babylon, Cyrus didn't believe in the true God. But that didn't stop God from using him.

What do we learn from this? We learn that God won't allow the evil of human beings to change what He's promised you. When you were baptised, God promised that no matter what bad things happen to you, He'll never leave you or forsake you. The true God is telling you that evil never wins. God wins! Your baptism connects you to the cross of Jesus. When Jesus was put on the cross, evil people put Him there. But just as with Cyrus, the Father was allowing them to crucify His Son. Why? The one reason is because He loves you and won't let evil win. He let Jesus pay for all that evil's done.

Through the cross where Jesus died, your sins - the bad things you think, say, and do - have been paid for. Even the evil sins in you will never win. Instead, we, as God's children, confess those sins. And the Father forgives us because Jesus made sure evil never wins. So even when bad things happen, those bad things will not win because Jesus rose from the dead, and you are also baptised in that resurrection. You and I shall rise with Him, away from all the evil of this world. Jesus made sure of that. It's His promise to you. So you can go home rejoicing that Buzz is right and, more importantly, God is right. Evil never wins.

Thank You Jesus for making sure evil never wins! Amen.

Welcome to all worshipping with us!

Pastor Peter Ziebell, Phone 0407583922.

Email him at paziebell@gmail.com or to the church office at ddaalc@gmail.com.

Please notify pastor of anyone who is unwell or in need of a visit.

WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS

29 October The Reformation	5 November All Saints' Day	12 November 24 Pentecost
10.00am HC AELC Service at Trinity Marburg, followed by our Children's Sunday School Picnic. 9.00am OAK LR	9.30am OAK HC Confirmation Service 9.00am TMBA LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am LOWOOD LR	8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA HC Harvest 9.00am GRN LR 10.45am AUB HC Harvest 9.00am MARBURG LR
Sunday, 29 October		
READINGS: Revelation 14:6-7; Romans 3:19-28 Matthew 11:12-19		
HYMNS: 468 195 418 (368 285) 465		
Sunday, 5 November		
READINGS: Revelation 7:2-17; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12		
HYMNS: 164 213 199 436 OAK: 301 213 296 164 293 299		

18 November, 10.00am. CoC/Sem Committee meeting at Marburg. Could the Seminary Committee reps please meet for a quick meeting at 9.30am?

Reformation Day Service

Everyone is invited to the AELC service at Marburg, followed by the Children's Sunday School picnic. Could each family please provide something for a shared lunch? A BBQ will also be running, with the loose offering for the day going towards the cost. Please come along if you can! For those that cannot make it, a 9.00am LR service will be held at Trinity Oakey.

October Bible Studies

Thursday, 26 October, 7.30pm Greenwood.

Friday, 27 October, 7.30pm Oakey/Aubigny at Oakey.