

Welcome and Land Acknowledgement

As we gather in the name of Jesus we acknowledge with gratitude and respect the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – on whose traditional and unceded territory we gather.

➤ *Rise up, rise up*

130 MV (repeat)

Call to Worship (PCC resources)

Before we were born, God knew us.

God knit us together in the womb.

God searches out our paths and guides us along our way.

We praise God, because we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

There is nowhere we can go where God is not with us.

How wonderful are all God's works! Let us worship God together.

† Prayer

Most loving God, we come to worship gratefully and gladly. We come to join our voices with all those who have welcomed the call of Christ. With people from every nation and tongue we take our place with thanksgiving. You are wonderful: *Creator, Redeemer and Counsellor! Heaven and earth are full of your glory! Glory be to you, O God most high!*

Loving God, we confess to you and to each other, that we have not treated our own lives with the honour worthy of you. We have harboured unhealthy and unhappy spirits. Please search us and know us this day. By your Spirit, overturn and eject everything alien to your eyes. Forgive the folly and rebellion of our lives. Unclutter our inner space and be present within us. Make us more completely yours, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

Words of Hope

God is calling to each of us – giving us strength and confidence. Rejoice in God's love for you this day and always. Thanks be to God!

➤ *Open my eyes, that I may see*

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† Prayer for Understanding

O God, reveal yourself to us, and use us to be a revelation for others. Tune our hearts and minds to recognize your bright call to reflect your steadfast love in all we do. Speak to us, O God; we are listening. Amen

Scripture **Psalm 139: 1-6, 13-18**

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.

Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely.

You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret,

intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.

In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.

How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!

How vast is the sum of them!

John 1: 43-51

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "*We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.*"

Nathanael said to him, "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*"

Philip said to him, "*Come and see.*"

When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "*Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!*"

Nathanael asked him, "*Where did you get to know me?*"

Jesus answered, "*I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.*"

Nathanael replied, "*Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!*"

Jesus answered, "*Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.*" And he said to him, "*Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.*"

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message

We value the Psalms for their authenticity of expression – the way they continue to connect with our experience – to bring all of life – its joys and celebrations, its tragedies and laments, the juxtaposing of the wonder of pure praise with the most self-centered preoccupations – to bring all of the majesty and mess of humanity (and there certainly seems an abundance of that these days) into the presence of God.

Through the Psalms we can confess our frailty, lament the tragedies of our lives, offer praise to God and give thanks for the blessings of our lives. We realize that in the ancient, time-tested language of these poetic works we are able to acknowledge ourselves in the presence of God, to confess that we are naked and that we are sometimes ashamed of our humanity. The Psalms also offer language that explodes in jubilation – that announces we not alone – that breathes a response to the Creator and Redeemer of all life. They are powerful and personal and pertinent.

The poetry of our psalm today draws us into the beauty of some big theological concepts. God omniscient and God omnipresent, drawn out in beautiful language that immerses us and wraps us in imagery of the womb. We read of an intimacy with the *God that goes before* – who shapes our bodies. Our core is formed by the very love of God. Such big concepts – perhaps too lofty for us to understand – are inextricably linked with who we are. God is within – if we know ourselves more, perhaps there is the possibility that we can know God more intimately. God is within – yet boundless. God – who created all – who is so big – does not impose or presume, but longs to be known by us. God is over and above, but not oppressive.

In the passage from first Samuel that I encouraged you to read on your own this week, young Samuel hears a voice in the night. He assumes that it's the voice of his mentor, the priest Eli. Eli, however, tells him to listen for another's voice, the voice of the Holy One of Israel. The next time he hears the voice whispering in the night, Samuel responds, "*Speak, God, your servant is listening.*"

"*Come and see,*" Philip invites Nathanael. Sharing good news is about inviting others to share in the joys we have experienced. Philip does not disguise his joy at encountering Jesus; he lets his light shine. His invitation is welcoming, not coercive. He shares experience, not doctrinal orthodoxy. He wants his friend to experience the life-changing truth he has encountered. Nathanael's affirmation of faith emerges in his encounter with Jesus. Good news is embodied in the person of Jesus – his words, deeds, and presence. Good news is embodied in us – our words, deeds, and presence.

Psalm 139 goes well with these two stories and relates to our own call from God. We see clearly in Psalm 139 the insistence that God has searched and known us – we see also how this Psalm is used to reflect on God's calling of Samuel and to point toward Jesus' calling of Nathanael. God is constantly speaking in our lives through insights, encounters, hunches, dreams, bursts of

energy, and inspirational thoughts. Our calling is to listen and then follow, shaping our encounters with God in our own unique ways.

Psalms 139 meditates on – praises and appeals to God who knows all and who encompasses all. The psalmist admits to God, in effect, “You know where I live – there is no place to hide – in the end I am still with you.” But this is not meant as authority or threat – it is good news. God truly knows and loves us – without limit.

God knows everything – sees every move. Go high, go low – go wide, go deep. Walk in the daylight or try to hide in the darkness of the night. It doesn't matter: God is there. In Psalm 139 this is reassuring rather than creepy. It is affirmed as a supreme good. The psalmist finds comfort in this all-encompassing knowledge and presence of God because God can be trusted. God knows us better than we know ourselves! And God can handle knowledge about ourselves that even we might find difficult to bear! Psalm 139 is a kind of ode to grace. It is a celebration of God's lovingkindness. Only God is wise enough, compassionate enough, forgiving and gracious enough to know all our secrets and hidden faults and remain our faithful God. This is the God who calls Samuel – who calls Nathanael – who calls us.

In our worship and our lives how are we responding to God's call – celebrating the beauty and wonder of all those in our communities? How are we getting to know them? How are we helping them sing out and bring their stories and prayers and songs like Hannah? How are we sharing good news like Philip and inviting others to *come and see*? How often have we made or heard prejudiced judgements like Nathanael's – *can anything good come from...* (name your place). For me this week it was people on social media engaging in racist conversation about the COVID outbreak within the Cowichan Tribes community.

We live amid political unrest and pandemic dis-ease. How do we respond? How do we make sure we are seeing beyond numbers, statistics, and stereotypes to see real people? How do we ensure that we know, hear and see humanity rather than our prejudices about where they are from, their ethnicity, age, gender, and so on? Each of us is a human being that originates in Christ – fearfully and wonderfully made – carrying the divine fingerprints of our Creator.

God comes to the writer of the Psalm – knows them. God also knows Samuel and Nathanael and each one of us – knows me. The psalm proclaims a relationship with God that is profoundly personal. “*Search me and know me.*” We are known completely by God and everything we do matters to God. God's knowledge is grounded in love. God's awareness and God's creativity are one graceful movement. Nothing is too small or large for divine awareness and activity. God is constantly speaking – continually searching for us.

More than one writer calls Psalm 139 a creation psalm, but not one about the vast mysteries of the heavens and earth or even the marvelous workings of nature around us. This creation is

God's own ongoing work in bringing the human person to fullness of life – unwrapping the mystery of us and loving us all the while. While much of the Bible is about “the people,” this selection is about a person – each one unique and of immeasurable worth. The news brings constant reminders of the devaluing of human life – displaced persons, disease, death – all reported with numbers rather than names, let alone the sacred story of each person's life. This psalm is about creation – our own identity within it – and how near God is to it all.

We are reassured by this psalm that we belong to God and that we are intimately and steadfastly loved, with a tender and everlasting love by the One who fashioned each one of us. This profound sense of our identity and our belonging to God – of God's ongoing creation – each of us with our unique gifts and life story – connects with God's call to us. God's call is an invitation to a lifelong relationship that – amid life's challenges and adversity – is charged with the assurance of divine presence and connected to a deep awareness of God's sovereign purposes of justice and peace for all creation. We are invited to an understanding of ourselves as precious children of God with a call to live out God's purposes for our lives, and for all of creation.

Psalm 139 is one of my favourites – a dazzling affirmation of the mystery of life and the reassurance that no matter what anyone says – no matter what happens – in every moment of our lives we are cherished by God – magnificent examples of God's creative expression. Unlike the rest of the Bible, the psalms are mostly addressed directly to God – an ancient prayer book. Even today they express our deepest feelings – fear and joy and anger and confusion. What Psalm 139 tells us is that God is with us at the core of our very being – deeper than anything we can ever measure or understand. It reassures us that no matter what – even in deepest darkness – God is with us. God knows all about each and every one of us. We are precious in God's sight.

Isn't this good news? And don't we need to hear it, here, at the beginning of a new year in times that can only be described as troubling? Don't we need to know that God is the one whose heart searches for us – the one who is with us, no matter what and no matter where?

This is our God – the one with a name and a history, the God who chooses Israel and me, the God who sent Jesus, the God who calls me not only to look within but to look without to see others wrongly treated and to call them friends. The psalm writer does not know all the details of Paul's confession – does not yet know Easter – but the psalmist knows God – recognizes that God knows every part of creation and so is willing to listen for God's voice – to go wherever God leads. God is constantly speaking – continually searching for us – God is always present. **Thanks be to God.**

➤ *Lord, speak to me*

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† Prayer (adapted from PCC resources)

God of all life and each life, each week our prayers combine with those of people in many places. We face many different challenges and also a common challenge – responding to the pandemic, though in so many different contexts. We thank you for honouring all our prayers with the gift of your Spirit, so that we can find strength and wisdom we need in you.

We remember before you today people living face to face with war and violence – in those places where hatred has been stirred up and fear stalks people on their own streets. We pray for all those displaced by violence – seeking refuge among us or in camps and communities around the world. God, speak to us a word of peace...

We remember before you today people living face to face with so much economic uncertainty – for those who have lost their jobs or worry what may happen as this year unfolds. God, speak to us a word of reassurance...

We remember before you today people living face to face with discrimination and social prejudice – those who are bullied at school, at work or at home – those who are made ashamed of who they are. God, speak to us a word of dignity...

We remember before you today people living face to face with illness and suffering – those struggling with disability, made more complex these days – and for those who know grief or anxiety, especially those cut off from comfort or support by months of pandemic isolation. God, speak to us a word of healing...

We remember before you today people divided by differences of race or creed – of culture, gender or generation – and we pray for all who seek to build bridges of understanding and co-operation across differences. God, speak to us a word of reconciliation...

We remember before you today your whole creation and its many vulnerable facets and faces. Teach us how to care for the rips and tears in the fabric of the world you love so we may live together wisely. God, speak to us a word of wisdom...

Embrace us with your love as we pray together in Jesus' name... *Our Father, who art in heaven – hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come – thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen*

➤ *Jesus calls us, o'er the tumult*

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† Offering and Prayer

In today's stories from scripture, God called people to give their lives in service God's holy purposes. May the gifts we offer today serve God's holy purposes in the church and in the world for the sake of Christ our Lord.

God of Samuel and Philip and Nathanael, you call, and we answer. Part of our response is through gifts of money that contribute to the ministry and mission of Knox Church. Accept our offerings as you accept our answer to your call. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Blessing

Today we have been called to serve God. Go into the coming week confident of God's presence with you. Bring words and actions of healing love to all. And may the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all. Amen

➤ *We will go out with joy*

539 (PCUSA)