

Welcome and Land Acknowledgement

As we gather in the name of Jesus we remember and acknowledge with gratitude the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – on whose traditional and unceded territory we gather. As we remember let us also recommit to reconciling relationships.

➤ *Rise up, rise up*

130 MV (repeat)

Lenten Liturgy

Lent is a journey with Jesus toward Jerusalem, toward the cross, toward resurrection and new life. We will be transformed and blessed on this journey.

We are pilgrims on a journey. We are travelers on the road.

We undertake the journey knowing we will not remain the same.

We are pilgrims on a journey. We are travelers on the road.

The journey will take time.

We will feel the strain in our bodies and in our souls, yet love will urge us onward.

We are pilgrims on a journey. We are travelers on the road.

Let us start the journey with prayer...

God of all times and places, as we begin the pilgrimage from life to death to new life, you will surprise us and nurture us. We put our trust in you, knowing you will guide and provide for us. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen

PWS&D Sharing **Igniting the Power of Women and Girls to Decide Their Future**

In the small village of Bihar in India, 13-year-old Poonam learned that her parents had arranged for her to be married in a few months.

In many parts of India, early marriages are a common practice and a significant issue—58 percent of girls are married before the age of 18. Girls who are forced into early marriages are taken out of school and made vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections and early pregnancy.

At a PWS&D-supported information session that addressed issues of gender, sexual and reproductive rights in her village, Poonam shared her worries about her marriage with the session leader, Meera.

The next day, Meera met with Poonam's family. The information shared by Meera helped Poonam's parents understand how important it was for Poonam to stay in school. As a result the wedding was postponed and a jubilant Poonam will be able to complete her education.

This Lenten season faithfully respond to empower women and girls with the tools they need to break down barriers of inequality. Go to www.werespond.ca / (416) 441-1111

† Prayer for Understanding

Creator God, thank you for never failing to seek us and bless us through your promise of loving care. Open our minds to hear and our hearts to see your word at work in our lives. In Christ's name we pray. Amen

Scripture **Genesis 9: 8-17**

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth."

God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

Mark 1: 9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

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

Message

Recently I decided to try making my own yogurt again. I had done it before when the boys were young and I was working part-time but it's been quite a while. Now I wanted to try making it in my quick cooker – my instant pot. There is a method for doing this called *the cold start method*. With this approach there is no need to heat the milk to 180° F and then cool it to 110° F before adding the starter and then allowing the fermenting process to occur over several hours. With *cold start* you just add yogurt with active bacterial cultures – that's the starter – to milk and incubate for 8-10 hours in your quick cooker using the “proof” setting. Easy peasy.

Except that it didn't work the first time at all and only seemed marginally better the second time. Both batches were disposed of – down the sink. As they say, third time is the charm and I have been successful now in making lovely, creamy, tasty yogurt. But the specifics of the ingredients do matter. You need to use the right yogurt to get started and you need to use the right milk – ultra filtered it turns out – or it just won't come out the way you expect it to.

Before the story of the rainbow covenant from Genesis that Amanda read for us today, God was pretty disappointed with the whole creation experiment. In chapter 6 it says... *The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth... And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind... So the Lord said, “I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created – people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.” But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord.*

That's how the flood comes to be – how the ark is created – how the animals are gathered two-by-two. That is how the story of Noah comes to be and why we learn about God's covenant and the sign of the rainbow. It all comes about because the first batch didn't work out so well and had to be poured down the sink – so to speak. Noah, and the ark full of a sample of all creation, is the starter for batch number two – a renewed creation – a second chance.

God knows humanity is imperfect – that we will fail again and again – but still promises to never again destroy every living creature... *“As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”* This promise forms the background of the covenant made to Noah and the sign of the rainbow as a reminder to God and an assurance to us.

In many parts of the world in the past year hearts and rainbows have appeared everywhere – on painted stones – drawings in windows of people's homes or stores – even in my own neighbourhood. They have been offered as a sign of hope that all will not be lost and healing will come. They have been associated with gratitude for the work and self-sacrifice of health care providers and other key workers during the pandemic. The rainbow has for many years been seen as a sign of inclusion and welcome – forming an arc over people regardless of sexuality or race as well as a symbol of change or of peace across different religions and peoples.

In Genesis it is a sign of the covenant between God and all the earth. The rainbow is set in the sky after the flood, not as a sign for humanity but as a reminder for God, in order that when God sees it God will remember not to let the flood water destroy life again. So it is not primarily a reminder for us, but rather a sign that reassures us that God remembers us – remembers that even though we will go wrong – the waters will not again overwhelm the earth for God can see the rainbow. Perhaps then it is all the more poignant that in times of suffering and disease we paint rainbows on windows, stones and sidewalks as a prayer – as a reminder to God that all living creatures are not to be lost to the world but remembered.

This is the promise of God on which we rely whenever the heavens open and the waters rise. This is the promise that chaos will not prevail because God has promised to keep life safe. Even as we see the flood waters rise or the wilderness stretch forlornly into the distance we can be assured that God's covenant with us is resilient. In the arc of the rainbow is a bold and colourful reminder to God of that relationship to all living things and it will not be extinguished.

In the season of Lent we turn again to the covenant's God has made with creation. When God makes a covenant with us, God says, "I will love you with an everlasting love. I will be faithful to you, even when you run away from, reject me, or betray me." The word *covenant* means "coming together." God wants to come together with us – you see this repeatedly in the Hebrew Bible. *God-for-us*. A new dimension of the covenant is revealed in Jesus who is born, grows, lives, suffers and dies as we do. *God-with-us*. In the Holy Spirit, God reveals the full depth of the covenant. God wants to be as close as our breath – to breathe in us – so that all that we are is inspired by God. *God-within-us*.¹

Throughout Lent, our scriptures remind us of several covenants that shape our faith and point us to those promises, relationships, pledges, arrangements, and commitments we are called to live out in our daily lives. We have recently celebrated Valentine's Day and Family Day in which we remember and give voice to our relationships of love, marriage, siblings, children, parents and extended family. Perhaps we send a card or flowers or chocolates to seal the deal. Often such promises are recognized with a phone call, video chat, walk or special outing. Such observances have taken on particular significance this year it seems.

Lent has become, in the life of the church, an intentional wilderness – perhaps an ark of isolation – a place of self-sacrifice or denial in which the sweet and fat things we enjoy become scarce. It may seem to you – as it does to me at times – that our Lenten journey began a year ago in March 2020 and we have not quite managed to find the way out of it yet!

One thing the past year has taught us all is that context is everything. The particulars of the pandemic experience have depended on where in the world we live – the nature of our work or

¹ Bread for the Journey, Henri Nouwen, 1997.

lack of it – living alone or in community – lockdown in a high rise or with a park nearby – the ability to access the essentials of life – the availability of and comfort with technology – and of course our health and experience of loss.

How does your experience connect with and influence the Lenten journey for you? God's covenant with Noah was sealed with a rainbow. What meanings do rainbows hold for you? How does your experience colour and shape God's rainbow covenant?

In the coming days and weeks may we all be encouraged by God's promise of enduring love – may we share that hope with others – and may we be shaped and coloured by divine grace. **Amen**

➤ *God of the sparrow, God of the whale*

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† Prayer (based on Psalm 25: 1 - 4, 5 – 10)²

In you, Lord my God, I put my trust. I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me.

No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause. Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths.

We are taking our first Lenten steps, O God, remembering how you sent Noah and his family away from the safety of the ark, remembering how you stayed with Jesus to face the dangers of the desert. We are taking our first steps, in faith and in trust.

Show us your ways, O Lord; teach us your paths.

(Silence)

We are taking our first steps, Creator God, knowing we are surrounded by dangers, remembering many of them are of our own making. We pray for this world, and for all the people in it. Make us good stewards of all that you have shared with us: land, water, sky, plants, creatures, and people.

Be with those in places of conflict or danger this day – those who lay down their lives for others – those who lead us...

Make us know your ways, O Lord; teach us your paths.

(Silence)

² Reformed Worship 90, page 25ff.

We are taking our first steps, Nurturing God, knowing many people are in trouble, remembering we are called to bring them your care. We pray for all those who are alone, all those who are imprisoned, and all those who are ill or infirm...

Make us know your ways, O Lord; teach us your paths.

(Silence)

We are taking our first steps, Shepherding God, knowing we are called to be the body of Christ, remembering we are to be the light showing your path to the world. We pray for your holy Church...

Make us know your ways, O Lord; teach us your paths.

(Silence)

We are taking our first Lenten steps, O God.

Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long. Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, Lord, are good.

Good and upright is the LORD; therefore, the LORD instructs sinners in the way, leads the humble in what is right, and teaches them the way they should go.

All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful toward those who keep the demands of God's covenant.

Hear these and all our prayers, O God, in the name of Christ, in whose footsteps we follow and in whose name, we boldly pray... ***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***

➤ ***Unto Thee O Lord***

De-Alleluia

As a symbolic expression of the beginning of the season of the Lent, there is a tradition of not saying or singing the word 'alleluia' until Easter Sunday. I'd like to invite you to write 'alleluia' on a ribbon, strip of fabric or scrap of paper and decorate it joyfully and brightly. Maybe do more than one! Then, when you are ready sometime today, gather your 'alleluias' together and store them away in a box or an envelope. Put them in a safe place, where they will remain until Easter Sunday.

Reflection³

*We put the alleluias away
and clear out the fridge
as symbols of the de-cluttering
that we desire
in our lives.*

*For the call to repentance
comes to us today
to be embraced not as a once for all,
but as a discipline to be repeated
time and again.*

*In high seasons and in low,
in busyness and in quiet,*

*finding wilderness spaces
allows us to turn again
to the God whom we lost
in all the distractions that life presents:
the God who looks into our eyes,
tells us we are beloved children
and then reveals a work
that only we can do.*

*God calls us to trek through the wilderness
in preparation
for striding through life
focused on God's mission.*

† Offering and Prayer

Wandering in the wilderness we are sustained by our living faith. As sign and symbol of that faith we present our offering to God for the work of Christ's church and God's mission.

Gracious God, as we begin our Lenten journey, we present our offering. These are tokens of our love and commitment to travel with you on the path of faith. Receive these gifts and use them to further your will for this ministry. Amen

Blessing

As we end our time of worship together may you go out to find your wilderness place amidst the chaos of life. Find God present there revealing the purpose of your life and, in loving service, know the blessing of God today and always.

➤ *Go now in peace*

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³ Starters for Sunday, <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>