

PWS&D Sunday 2021

Call to Worship

God of our hearts... here we are!

We've come with thirsty hearts, praying that your Word will satisfy us.

We come with aching hearts, praying for good news to comfort us.

We come with overflowing hearts, praying for a chance to share your love.

You, who know our hearts and hear our prayers, be with us now in this hour of worship. Amen

Hymn *Come sin, O church, in joy!* 757

Scripture Psalm 91

You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;
my God, in whom I trust."

For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence;
he will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

You will not fear the terror of the night,
or the arrow that flies by day,
or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.

A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.

You will only look with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.

Because you have made the Lord your refuge,
the Most High your dwelling place,
no evil shall befall you,
no scourge come near your tent.

For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.
On their hands they will bear you up,

so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.
You will tread on the lion and the adder,
the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.

Those who love me, I will deliver;
I will protect those who know my name.
When they call to me, I will answer them;
I will be with them in trouble,
I will rescue them and honor them.
With long life I will satisfy them,
and show them my salvation.

Responsive Prayer

God, we thank you for your harvest which feeds us so many times each day.

We are nourished with your forgiveness and hope. We are sustained with your strength and patience. We are filled with your grace and compassion.

God, we thank you for feeding us with a harvest of plenty.

We are restored through your generosity and healing. We are replenished with your abundance and joy. We are reminded of your selfless abandon.

God, we thank you for feeding us with the bread of heaven.

Your gift of Christ sustains our lives. His presence restores the promise of your love. His life fills our hearts with your everlasting light.

God, we thank you too for filling us with the water of life.

May we drink deeply that our thirst may be quenched. May your river continue to flow over. Amen

Message *Written by Andrea Perrett, convener of the PWS&D Committee*

It is a fair statement to say that 2020 was a difficult year and we know that the challenges continue. We are not in the midst of a 100-yard-dash, rather we find ourselves in the middle of a marathon.

Covid-19 has impacted us all personally; perhaps your work has changed, your children are at home with you, or you have been personally affected by the virus.

The coronavirus has also impacted communities; businesses are closing, and our recreation programs and group activities are no longer available.

And the pandemic has definitely impacted congregations; whether you are able to worship in person, or are staying online, for the first time in our memory our churches have shuttered their doors and our worship services have been altered for the foreseeable future, with the familiar singing, passing of the peace and coffee hours being reimagined.

The impact of COVID-19 goes beyond the borders of our country, too. As a global pandemic, there isn't a nation that has not had its health or economic situation affected: sadly, many countries were already running the marathon against food insecurity or poverty long before Covid-19 became a reality.

While the Covid-19 pandemic is extraordinary, it's safe to say that we have all had things we struggle with throughout our lives. When the pandemic is a distant memory, we will still have sorrows, regrets and losses to contend with in all the important aspects of our lives.

The Bible is a source of comfort and strength for me, especially over the past months. And as I have spoken with others, I have been encouraged by the variety and depth of the scriptures that they have been sustained by during this time.

One of the PWS&D Champions read Psalm 91 earlier in this service. This scripture says, "You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.'" I have found myself particularly drawn to this Psalm as a reminder of where I can find my shelter and strength. It is comforting to know that for thousands of years, great clouds of witnesses—including Christ—have also been seeking comfort and strength in these words.

Empathy is another thing I have been turning towards and grounding myself in these days. Life is difficult - I know that I am in need of empathy from others, and I am trying hard to use a hardy dose of empathy with others – simply acknowledging and understanding another's suffering.

Empathy is one of the foundational values that underlay our Christian witnessing.

Ruth shows us empathy while journeying with Naomi and Jesus embodies empathy in action when feeding the five thousand. Paul reminds us to be empathetic with others, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15), and the second half of the Great Commandment, love your neighbour as yourself, encourages us to take a posture of empathy.

For me, drawing close to God in Scripture and practicing empathy go hand in hand.

We take on a posture of empathy because we first experienced empathy from God being empathetic with us. Through the incarnation of Jesus, God joined in with our human story and experienced the depths of life. Simply put, Jesus understands us. He felt the joy of friendship, the pain of rejection, and died a human death. We know what empathy is because we have experienced it from God.

As we grow more into the likeness and image of Christ, we begin to take on a deeper posture of empathy—and we act on it. Today, on PWS&D Sunday, we are reminded that our work of supporting PWS&D – of responding and lifting up other people and communities around the world—is a witness to God's empathy, care and compassion for people.

During these extraordinary times, PWS&D's partners around the world remain deeply committed to their work, no matter what is going on related to the pandemic. While need was great prior to the pandemic, meeting ever increasing need has become even more challenging.

One of our partners from Malawi commented, "Since the beginning of the outbreak, we have never stopped working." Our partners are so conscious of the vital difference the programs are making at the community level, that they continue despite the difficulties and personal risks.

In many areas the pandemic has amplified the needs that were already present. For example, in Somalia a profound lack of resources and rising food prices due to COVID-19 have meant that many simply cannot access what is needed to sustain their own health and that of their children. Single mother Fatuma lives in a camp with her two-year-old daughter Hawa. A few months ago Hawa was very sick as she was malnourished and severely underweight. Fatuma brought her daughter to a nearby clinic supported by PWS&D, which she had heard about from others in the camp. "I was worried Hawa would die," recounts Fatuma. "She spent 12 days in the stabilization centre where she was given medicine, nutritional feeding and received a transfusion. I was also given meals while she was admitted."

Now, Fatuma can hold her daughter close, knowing Hawa has made a full recovery.

Through Canadian Foodgrains Bank, in countries like Somalia and Afghanistan, PWS&D is responding to increased food needs due to COVID-19 by ensuring that families and children have the food they need to survive.

In a number of countries, PWS&D has supported local partners as they repurpose program funds to provide COVID-19 support. Even as we work to carry on with our long-term sustainable development work, families have received food kits, as well as hygiene and sanitation items, including hand soap and disinfectant wipes.

Lester, a recipient of these items commented, "I'm so thankful for your support, for the masks, for these small expressions of love. We're so thankful. Honestly, we didn't have access to buy these things since we're so far out. But now, thanks to you, we have masks, and won't have to use our little bit of money to buy them. Thankfully you are here supporting us with these. We're so thankful."

Part of finding our shelter with God is taking steps to extend that shelter to others around us. As a denomination, our support of programs like this, driven by our empathy, help to provide comfort and refuge to others around the world. When we see people seeking the comfort and refuge of God, we are called to use empathy to invite them into God's embrace.

This has been a difficult time for us as individuals, as congregations and as nations around the world. And it seems like the coming months will continue to be difficult. Yet, as we turn towards God to sustain us during these hard times, we find that God's care, comfort and empathy is not limited or finite. As we draw close and find refuge in God's shadow during these uncertain times, let us work together to reflect this care to others and invite them into God's care as well.

God sides with the vulnerable. Right now, it might seem like we are all vulnerable – but God is big enough to shelter each of us and to come along side us in our hurt and suffering. There is plenty of room in the shadow of the Almighty, where we can all find comfort and refuge.

Prayer *Written by the Rev. Dr. Sarah Travis*

God of abundant growth, in the mystery of the mustard seed, you gift us with the possibility that your kingdom is among us even when it is not yet visible.

Those things we desire most—long for—yearn for are within reach. We yearn for a world in which every person, young or old, is safe and protected and filled with good things. Fresh water, fresh fruit, fresh air are simple commodities and yet so inaccessible for many in our world.

Many wander far from home, seeking shelter and belonging, a place to grow and put down roots. Mothers and fathers cry in fear for their children, anxious about the availability of medical care, education, food, water, hope. In your mercy, Gracious God, cause seedlings to emerge out of the dry ground.

When we cannot perceive your kingdom, direct us toward streams in the wilderness, flowers sprouting out of the rocks, life emerging from the empty tomb. May we be signs of your kingdom, living proof that you bring miraculous and amazing growth from even the smallest seed, the smallest beginning.

May we continue to plant seeds, through the work of Presbyterian World Service & Development. We pray for the organizations that partner with PWS&D, that their work will flourish and comfort those who need it most. We pray for the staff of PWS&D, that they will be courageous and creative in their planting and watering. We pray for The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and all those who support PWS&D, that we will see signs of green, lush growth in unexpected places, and be able to celebrate your kingdom made visible.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Hymn *For the fruits of all creation* **802**

Benediction

Go now and invest your lives in the works of faith. Make a name for yourselves for generosity and compassion. Fulfill God's holy law by putting love into action as eagerly for others as you would for yourselves. And may God be your defender and provider; may Christ Jesus dispel all that disturbs or immobilizes you; and may the Holy Spirit make you rich in faith and loving and merciful in action.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord, in the name of Christ. Amen

Mission Moment – March 7, 2021

Staying Connected During the Pandemic

Serving Palestinians in Gaza, Jerusalem, the West Bank, Jordan and Lebanon since 1948, the work of the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR) in health care, education and food security is essential. When COVID-19 struck, DSPR Director, Dr. Bernard Sabella, knew they needed the support of their friends. DSPR invited partners to attend five webinars to learn and understand the economic and political challenges, and to hear from people working on the ground. Partners were asked to fund the webinars, and International Ministries was one of the first to respond. Gifts to Presbyterians Sharing have supported DSPR since 2011 in their ministry of maintaining human dignity and hope for Palestinian refugees.

Prayer Partnership

Sunday, March 7 (Third Sunday in Lent) We pray for the ministry of the Revs. Jon Wyminga and Shannon Bell in the Dakelh communities of the Cariboo region of B.C. as they bring hope in the face of much despair and many deaths in the past year.

Monday, March 8 (International Women's Day) We give thanks for Presbyterian World Service & Development projects that work to break barriers to gender equality and empower women to achieve economic independence and improve their well-being.

Tuesday, March 9 We pray for an end to violence and rights abuses of women and girls, and ask for the willingness to challenge systems that underpin gender inequality and to celebrate women's achievements.

Wednesday, March 10 We pray for the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) and the newly appointed officers of the General Assembly, including the Rev. Mwawi Chilongozi, the first woman to serve as General Secretary of the CCAP General Assembly.

Thursday, March 11 We pray for Cathy Reid, President of the Women's Missionary Society (WMS), as she meets with WMS groups and members online to study and pray.

Friday, March 12 We pray for Commander Bonnie Mason, Deputy Director of Chaplaincy Services in the Canadian Armed Forces, who offers spiritual and moral guidance to our military leaders.

Saturday, March 13 We pray for the Rev. Cheryl Gaver, Presbytery Ministry Animator for the Presbyteries of Ottawa and Seaway-Glengarry in Ont.