

Welcome and Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that the land where we gather for worship belongs to God, as does all of creation. We also acknowledge that the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – lived here before settlers of European descent claimed ownership of it and displaced those for whom this land was home. As we pursue our goals to dismantle racism and attend to growing diversity, we lament this injustice in our history and commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships within our congregation and our neighborhood.

May we live with respect on this land and live in peace and friendship with its people.

➤ *He is Lord*

252 (repeat)

Call to Worship

We gather with joy, for Easter brings us new life.

The Risen Christ is with us wherever we go.

Love breaks all bonds and unites us in hope.

Christ has defeated death. Let us rejoice and be glad!

Come and worship with hearts full of praise.

O God, receive our grateful Hallelujahs!

† Prayer (adapted from PCC resources)

Creator God, we come before you today, giving thanks for all the wonder and perfection revealed in creation: a baby's tiny fingers – pussy willows opening to greet the spring – each rock face worn by wind and water. These details lift our hearts to praise you. So let the details of the story of the Risen Christ lift our hearts also, that we may greet each new week as an occasion to discover him in our midst, making all things new with the springtime of your Spirit.

Redeemer God, in raising Jesus from the dead, you showed us your power to defeat all that brings fear and sorrow to our lives. In his resurrection, Jesus promised to be with us always. Yet we confess we are sometimes uncertain about your presence – unsure if we can trust the promise of resurrection for ourselves. Forgive us when we struggle to trust your goodness for us. Forgive us when we miss the signs of your love in our midst. In your mercy, O God, forgive us 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***

Words of Hope (adapted from PCC resources)

Scripture tells us that there is *a time for every matter under heaven. A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance.* In confessing our sin, we have offered God our tears of regret. Now is the time to rejoice in God's mercy: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven and offered a new start. Thanks be to God.

➤ *Thine be the glory*

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† Prayer for Understanding

God of all Ages, open our eyes so that we may see your truth for our lives this day, open our ears so we may hear your voice with clarity and conviction, open our hearts so we may be warmed with your love and in so doing be prepared to serve you with all that we are. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen

Scripture

Acts 3: 12-19 (after Peter healed a crippled man)

When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, *"You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?"*

The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.

And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you. And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer.

Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out,

Luke 24: 36b-48

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, *"Peace be with you."*

They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost.

He said to them, *"Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."*

And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, *"Have you anything here to eat?"*

They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then he said to them, *"These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled."*

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, *"Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."*

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

Message

You can't manage or control a resurrection. You can't put it into your normal understanding of reality. Like all mystical experiences, resurrection is life-shattering and initially beyond belief. We can neither expect nor program a resurrection. But, when it comes, we are amazed and transformed. Can we who have heard the resurrection stories countless times, almost knowing them by heart, hear them in new ways and allow ourselves to be transformed? Can we who know the happy ending be amazed, astounded, and altered by resurrection?

Luke describes the disciples' incredulity at encountering the Risen Christ. They have just heard of Jesus' encounter with Cleopas and his friend at Emmaus and are astounded. In the midst of their conversation, Jesus appears, greeting them with God's peace. Resurrection life brings peace – it calms, clarifies, unites, and empowers. It also amazes, unnerves, and recalibrates our sense of reality. Perhaps a sense of God's peace is the only way we can accept the radical message of resurrection. But what does peace mean in our broken world when bad news often outweighs good? What does the peace of resurrection mean when we are still trying to find our way out of a pandemic and return to some normalcy in our congregational and personal lives?

The text is full of things to notice – physical presence, witness, and peace – foremost among them. Luke invites us to affirm a number of things:

- 1) Resurrection is real.
- 2) Resurrection is embodied and holistic.
- 3) Resurrection is met with doubt.
- 4) Doubt is part of a larger sense of peace.
- 5) Resurrection leads to mission.
- 6) Resurrection is grounded in the history and hopes of Israel.

The disciples thought they were seeing a ghost, and Jesus is clear in his actions to dispel that idea and recognise his physical presence in the room. More than a ghost or hallucination, Jesus invites the disciples to see him as alive and embodied. He offers up his wounded hands and feet

for them to see and touch – he eats some grilled fish. A gastronomical proof of resurrection! These actions come to disrupt doubt and fear, but they also serve as an affirmation of the physical reality of the resurrection.

Jesus then empowers these disciple witnesses to go out into the world, sharing God’s good news of repentance, forgiveness, and new life. The nature of Jesus’ resurrection body was no doubt a mystery to his first followers and it must be to us. The mystery and marvel open us up to seeing the world with new eyes – embracing new possibilities.

What are we to make of this encounter? How would we respond if Jesus showed up on our live stream or in our home this morning, embodied and giving us a commission to share good news in the world? Would we be skeptical about his embodiment and resurrection life? Would we think we were going crazy or experiencing an hallucination? Would we see this mystical encounter as coming from God and calling us to holy adventure?

The experience of encountering the risen Jesus transforms the disciples to be witnesses – more than witnesses to the moment in the room with a resurrected body. They have seen the scriptures – known to them since childhood – brought to life in the presence of Jesus and in the midst of human life. They are part of the story of God in human history.

The passage opens with Jesus’s greeting of *Peace, be with you*. A greeting, yes, but in a room full of anxious followers, it also functions as a dispeller of doubt and fear. Peace includes tranquility for nations – reconciliation between individuals – security and prosperity – a sense of contentment – wholeness – well-being and harmony. It is a spoken assurance that all is well with the world, just as God intends.

“While they were still talking about this . . . Jesus himself stood among them.”

I wonder how often we realize that far from being an isolated incident in Luke’s gospel, this kind of thing happens all the time. I have often mentioned to our boys to watch what they say and do – someone who knows you is almost always nearby – or at least someone who knows someone who knows you! When we were kids that sentiment when something like *watch your language when we are in polite company*. But growing up in a small town it seemed we were invariably in “polite company”. Maybe we guard our lips and monitor our behaviour because we know deep down that someone who knows us is always in range. In Philippians, chapter 4 Paul says: *The Lord is near* – indeed he is.

The truth is that every time we get together – however we are able to do so – with whatever energy we are bringing to the table – every time we get together to talk about Jesus, to debate a theological point, to prepare or listen to a sermon, to sing or pray with conviction – every

time... Jesus comes and stands in the midst of us. We can never merely talk about God or Christ or the Holy Spirit without being aware that we are speaking in the presence of the Trinity.

True, this can lead some people to all kinds of spooky *Big Brother* or *Kafka-esque* scenarios of paranoia. Yet as Psalm 139 reminds us, God does indeed know us inside out and top to bottom – at every moment of our lives. In fact, the psalmist says that God knows us better than we know ourselves! And the good news of this is that God can be trusted with such comprehensive knowledge. This is a loving God, not a tyrannical despot who will use what we say against us. God knows us fully and loves us completely.

Still, it's startling to think that when we speak of Jesus, he is always standing right in the midst of us whether we notice him or not. And like the disciples, there may be times when, upon realizing this, we too are startled and frightened by his presence. Maybe remembering that we live all of life in the presence of Christ could have a properly humbling effect on us in terms of what we say about Jesus and how we interact in the world. It certainly is a good reminder for those of us who like to engage in theological discussion or muse about spirituality that what we are doing is not to be dismissed as idle chit-chat. We are not talking only about ideas but about a person – about a very personal God.

This is a key teaching of Easter and the resurrection story from our gospel reading today: that what we celebrate at the core of the Christian faith is the risen Christ – even if we fail to understand or fully fathom it – we believe that Jesus lives! We affirm that Jesus is alive and, through the Spirit, is a very real and personal presence in our lives.

The church made clear long ago that our faith is not first and finally about ideas and concepts only. We're not Gnostics seeking to be saved through a word of knowledge. We're not mystics who believe that the key to spirituality is to find ways to transcend this world's physicality so as to drift into realms of pure thought and consciousness. No, our faith is gritty and fleshy and tangible – it involves the renewal of all things: lakes, mountains, tadpoles, tangerines, real human bodies.

Two weeks after Easter, this passage from Luke's gospel reminds us that Jesus is always present in our midst – calling us to witness in word and deed and offering abiding peace. Would we want it any other way?

➤ *Jesus, stand among us*

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† Prayer

Holy Lord, we thank you that you have brought us salvation through Jesus. We also give thanks for the peace that has come into our lives with Jesus. We pray for the peace of this world. We

know that true and lasting contentment comes by your grace and so we come to you, asking for your help and your peace.

We pray for leaders in our communities, nation and throughout the world. May they search through all the problems that torment us today to find your answers.

We pray for Christians and people of faith around the world. Support and encourage us as we seek to live faithful lives of integrity and justice. Open our hearts for your service.

We pray for those in any kind of need today – especially those who are suffering oppression, physical and emotional hardship, or grief.

Help us speak your word to one another in love. Prepare us to enter the lives and hearts of others by the power of the Risen Christ. Amen

➤ *Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord* 260

† Offering and Prayer

God's faithfulness blesses our lives and gives us strength for daily living. In thanksgiving for God's goodness and generosity towards us let us present our tithes and offerings.

Holy One, these gifts are a sign of our gratitude to you. In using the earth's resources for daily living, you also invite us to share what you have entrusted to us. By your transforming love, use these gifts so that lives may be healed and blessed through your gracious and tender care. Amen

Blessing

Go from this time of worship in joy and peace, alert to signs of God's grace within. May the love of God, the grace of the Living Lord, and the companionship of the Holy Spirit embrace us all. Amen

➤ *Go now in peace, never be afraid*