

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 – have lived on this land since before settlers of European descent claimed ownership and displaced those for whom it 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

Jesus said, I am the Good Shepherd.

We have come to follow Jesus.

We gather in the name of the One who leads us by still waters.

We have come to be restored in Christ.

We gather in the name of the One who prepares a banquet for us.

We have come to be fed by divine love.

Let us worship God as we join in prayer...

† Prayer (adapted from PCC resources)

Holy One, our good and loving shepherd, you nourish our lives and lead us into green pastures. You restore our souls with rest and peace. You give us true joy so our cup overflows with goodness. You walk with us through the darkest valleys, offering courage and compassion. At all times and in all circumstances, you are with us – we praise you Creator, Redeemer and Guiding Spirit.

Patient God, your mercy is abundant and your love endless. Trusting in your mercy, we confess that often we have not shown your love to others, even though we claim it for ourselves. You have called us to show compassion, but too often we are quick to judge others. You have called us to follow Jesus, yet we are distracted by our own plans and desires. Forgive us for falling short of your hopes for us and renew a right spirit within us.

Words of Hope

The mercy of our God is from everlasting to everlasting. Friends, hear and believe the good news of the gospel. In Jesus Christ, God's generous love reaches out to embrace us. We are forgiven and set free to begin again. Let us give thanks for God's most generous love.

† Prayer for Understanding

God of story and song, through the scriptures you teach us of your love and lift our hearts in praise. Send us your Holy Spirit as we listen to the witness of your people, so that we may claim the story of your redeeming love again and praise you with our lives through Christ, our friend and guide. Amen

Scripture

1 John 3: 16-24

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

John 10: 11-18

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away – and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So, there will be one flock, one shepherd.

For this reason, the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

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

Message

Our two readings today – from John’s gospel and John’s first letter – are both filled with love. God’s abundant love – the risky, sacrificial love of Jesus. One commentator I read suggested that John could have written that old Beatles song: *All you need is love* – but we know it was written by another John with a different Paul!

The John of the gospel and the letter speaks often of the importance of loving others and the raw, demanding realities of making relationships work. It seems he is not naïve about the challenges of love and doesn’t infuse it with a sentimental glow. Those who follow Jesus are called to sacrifice for others – **we** are called to sacrifice for others.

Love is a word everyone knows, and everyone understands, right? I love my children – I love my spouse – I love chocolate – I love springtime... Really? The same word for all those – for chocolate and children?

Love is one of those diaphanous, wispy words that everyone uses but no one can fully define. Love is also the keynote of the gospel. *God is love... Jesus is love... God so loved the world... This is my commandment that you love one another... If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels but do not have love, I am nothing... Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind... Peter, do you love me?.. Love your neighbor as yourself... Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love and the greatest of these is love...*

Love is huge. Love’s scope and influence are so vast that it plays a role in the entire sweep of the Christian life. And love is more than a word – it is an action in which we become one in spirit with others – the well-being of others becomes as important as our own.

John is clear that love comes with a price-tag, and it demands all we have. It is shown in sacrifice – putting the needs of others before our own. The motivation to show such love is the self-giving example of Jesus – setting his face toward Jerusalem and for love’s sake going all the way to the cross. So in following Jesus, are we prepared for sacrifice – to give up our rights, our desires and even our lives for others and for creation?

Love was from the beginning because God was in the beginning. Love has something to do with the very creation in which we live and of which we are a part. Creation itself sprang from the bubbling overflow of God’s love. Like a shaken-up bottle of champagne, so also God’s love within the Trinity was so effervescent, so richly pressured and full that sooner or later the cork had to explode out and when it did, sparkling love gushed forth and sprayed everywhere. Creation is that overflow of love. God wanted to share divine life and love.

I just recently read a book called “Becoming Mrs. Lewis” about how love grew between Joy Davidman and C.S. Lewis. It reminded me of one of Lewis’ wonderful works, The Screwtape Letters in which Lewis imagines the demon Screwtape writing the following to his nephew Wormwood, “*God really does want to fill the universe with little replicas of himself. We want cattle who can finally become food; he wants servants who can finally become sons. We want to*

suck in, he wants to give out. We are empty and would be filled; he is full and flows over. Our Father below [the Devil] has drawn all other beings into himself, [God] wants a world full of beings united to him but still distinct.”

Lewis captures not just the essence of God and creation but of love – love always overflows and expands outward to include others. Love reaches out to embrace each distinctive being for who they are created to be.

We are invited to live simply so that others can simply live. Contrary to the dominant ethos, our goods are not entirely our own – our wealth and property are not entirely ours to dispense with. The deep needs of others and our planet make a claim on us. The connections of our wealth and our use of resources – our privilege – to climate change and global food insecurity, reflected in extreme weather and drought, as well as economic injustice is clear and must not be ignored. Even if we feel we are living simply or don't feel all that privileged, we use more resources than those in the developing world. And our impact on the climate, food supply, and distributions of resources has been starkly highlighted during the pandemic along with disparities based on race and community.

What does this mean for how we live and love in the world? And as Earth Day approaches, what does it mean to go beyond *word and speech, to truth and action*?

Where we can help, we should. Where we have more than others, we can share. Words are powerful and transformative, but, if they are not backed by actions, they are soon mere noise. Of course, we all repeatedly fall short. Then we are blessed to be able to confess our need of forgiveness for the past and strength for the present that enables an abundant life in which we are free to love one another daily, in small things as well as big. Whatever God has given us – skills, home, food, time – is a gift to share. What is your gift?

Berta Caceres had gifts of leadership and courage. She exemplified the idea of sacrificial love and is a relevant example for Earth Day. She was the leader of a group of indigenous Lenca communities in Honduras fighting to stop a mega-dam from being built on the sacred Gualcarque River. On March 2, 2016, she was shot and killed in her home for her outspoken voice of dissent. Berta worked tirelessly to protect a river and a way of life at risk. The Gualcarque River provides Berta's community with food and drinking water, and Berta's murder sent a clear message to anyone standing up to protect the earth that they were in danger.

The lone witness to her murder said, *“Our dream is to build a different world, to generate life amid so much violence and death, but they do not even allow us to do that.”* Surely Berta, and her community, were walking in the most fearsome valleys in the days and months before her murder. As an outspoken and committed woman leader, she had been defamed, criticized, and threatened, yet her struggle for the earth and the sacred water continued – evil surrounded her, yet she walked proudly in the footsteps of her ancestors, listening and answering the call of her Creator to protect life.

There's a common chorus in Latin American hymns, "*God is not in heaven. God is in our brothers and sisters.*" We hear this also in John's letter today: *We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.* Berta laid down her life for her kin – her death is remembered as the day her seed was sown to be reborn in a million others who would live by her example. She wasn't only fighting for the river sacred to her people, but for all rivers and lakes. Berta's abundant life included a risky, sacrificial love of others and all creation.

Jesus proclaims that he came that we might have abundant life. Out of his abundance, the good shepherd cares for the flock and is willing to sacrifice for their well-being. The good shepherd's love embraces the stranger, the lost, the lonely, the outcast, and persons of other faiths – those *that do not belong to this fold.* We are all recipients of God's saving grace.

What does it mean to have abundant life? How can we seek abundance for all creation – not just ourselves – our family and our country? Are we open to hearing God's voice in the cries of the non-human world – the whole of creation? Will we respond to God's call and expand our circle of compassion to include strangers – not only human ones from other cultures and faiths, but strangers from other species – all creation – different yet intimately connected will us?

Out of the abundance of divine blessing and protection, and God's sacrifices for us outlined in scripture, we bless and protect others. Confident in God's care, we are free to care for others – and as we sacrifice in God's name, we experience even greater abundance. We can make decisions based on the well-being of the whole – all people – all creation – our precious earth – knowing that God is with us always. *All we need is love* in truth and action. **Amen**

➤ *We are one in the Spirit*

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† Prayer (adapted from PCC resources)

Gracious and loving God, as a shepherd cares for the flock, so you care for each one of us. Move in our hearts and minds – our congregations and communities – and lead us to care for one another.

Today we thank you for the gift of rest. We pray for all those who are tired from work or worry, especially in these days of pandemic. Grant peace to those who are worn out with anxiety or frustration, and rest for all those who are weary from the responsibilities of their work.

God our Guide, we thank you for the gifts of truth and wisdom. We pray for those who cannot discern truth amid conspiracy theories, and for all who suffer under authorities who distort reality for their own ends. Grant wisdom and common sense to all who must make decisions in these confusing days of competing arguments.

God our Strength, we thank you for the ways you refresh our souls. We pray for those whose lives are burdened with poverty or with uncertainty about the future. We remember all who

face any sort of trial or difficulty, those who are sick, in pain, or facing death, and those who are bereaved by the loss of someone dear. For all these precious souls, be their source of healing and peace.

God our Shield and Defender, we thank you for staying with us when we face danger or death. We pray for all those who live in fear – prisoners – exiles and refugees – victims of oppression, racism, and hatred – those who know the threat of violence day after day. Be for them a steady companion and their source of courage.

God our Provider, we thank you for all the ways you fill our cup to overflowing. Thank you for offering peace and calm amid turmoil, for the return of happiness after times of strife, and for insight emerging after confusion and indecision. Help us recognize your redeeming gifts which guide us and give us hope. Show us how we can be part of your redeeming work unfolding in the world around us, and bless the ministries undertaken through The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Bless those who serve in challenging missions in Canada and around the world. Equip them well to reach out in love and respect, together with local partners, to accomplish your will in Jesus' name. Hear our prayers as we join our voices in confident hope... ***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***

➤ *Saviour, like a shepherd lead us*

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† Offering and Prayer

John reminds us that because Jesus laid down his life for us, we ought to lay down our lives for him. What we offer today is not such a complete sacrifice, but our gifts show our love and commitment in gratitude for what Christ has given for us.

O God, you are our Shepherd, strong and wise. We offer our gifts, asking you to bless them. Multiply their impact in the world to accomplish your will. May they be used wisely in mission and service, here in our community and through the outreach of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and its partners for the sake of Christ, our Risen Lord. Amen

Blessing

Let us go rejoicing in the forgiving love of God. Let us go resolved to continue as servants of the risen Christ. Let us go strengthened by the blessing of God the creator who formed us, by Jesus Christ who calls us to be the Church and by the Holy Spirit who equips us. May God's power be upon us all.

➤ *Go now in peace, never be afraid*