

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 (from Psalm 47)

Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with loud songs of joy!

**For the Lord, the Most High, is awesome, a great king over all the earth.**

God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.

**Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises.**

For God is the king of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm.

**God is king over the nations; God sits on the holy throne.**

The Lord is highly exalted. Let us worship God!

† Prayer

Gracious God we rejoice – we give thanks – we lift our hearts to you in prayer.

Because you made the world, and intended it to be a good place – because you called us your children – because you come to us in Christ to bring out the best in each one...

we proclaim that goodness is stronger than evil,  
love is stronger than hate,  
and truth is stronger than lies.

Because confusion can reign inside us, despite our faith – because anger, tension, bitterness and envy distort our vision – because our minds sometimes worry small things out of all proportion – because we do not always get it right...

we want to believe completely in your way.

Because you have promised to hear us – are able to change us, and are willing to make our hearts your home...

we ask you to confront, control, forgive and encourage us, as you know is best.

We cherish your promise of forgiveness, O God. Change our lives until we illustrate the grace you freely offer as we prayer with confidence together... ***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

As Jesus instructed his followers, the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in his name. Friends, your sins are forgiven – be at peace.

➤ ***God forgave my sin / Freely, freely***

**774**

### † Prayer for Understanding

**Wise and wondrous God, we seek your guidance. Send your Spirit to lead and enlighten us as we read the scriptures today. Teach us to order our lives and our church in ways that are pleasing to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen**

### Scripture

#### **Acts 1: 1-11**

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. *"This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*

So when they had come together, they asked him, *"Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"*

He replied, *"It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, *"Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."*

## **Luke 24: 44-53**

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. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."*

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

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

### Message

With whom have you shared the good news lately? Have you stood on a corner in the street and proclaimed the word of God to anyone? Have you walked up to a stranger and asked them to listen as you tell them about Jesus? Have you talked to your parents or siblings or children about what it means for you to follow Christ? Have you put an ad in the paper?

No? Why not?

As weird and frightening as it might sound, sharing the good news – in some way – with someone – is what Jesus calls us to do. Maybe the ways that I just suggested aren't the ones for you, but Jesus calls his disciples witnesses in the readings from both Luke and Acts and to be a witness is to share in words and actions what they have seen and heard. What Jesus asks of the disciples, he asks of us – we have seen, heard and believed the good news of Christ so we are to give audible and visible evidence of that by explaining and demonstrating who Jesus is and our salvation through him.

What is it that makes people hesitate to share their faith? Here are some of the fears that people mention: "I am afraid I might do more harm than good." "I don't know what to say." "I may not be able to give snappy answers to tricky questions." "I may seem bigoted." "I may invade someone's privacy." "I am afraid I might fail." "I am afraid I might be a hypocrite." Perhaps the most common fear, however, is that of being rejected. A survey conducted at a Billy Graham crusade training session asked the question, "What is your greatest hindrance in witnessing?" 9% said they were too busy to remember to do it. 28% felt the lack of real information to share. 12% said their own lives were not speaking as they should. But by far the largest group was the 51% whose biggest problem was the fear of how the other person would react. Do any of these reasons ring true for you? Is the main reason we fail to tell people about our faith our fear – fear of rejection – fear that people won't like us?

In the gospel of Luke, the crucified and risen Christ is spending time with the disciples before he ascends to heaven. Jesus is explaining – encouraging – trying to address their fears because they are uncertain about how the future connects to the past – unsure of what to do next – apprehensive. Jesus tells them that the gospel is in continuity with God’s purpose from the beginning. To say, *thus it is written*, may be the equivalent of saying that it has been God’s plan all along – the message that the Messiah should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead – the offer of repentance and forgiveness freely given – the mission to share this news with the world. None of this is new but the old properly interpreted. Jesus knows that this work of witnessing will be difficult for the disciples – it challenges their natural inclination to ignore the truth that Jesus will soon no longer be with them physically – it challenges their concerns about reaching out to all people and all nations. Jesus knows that this will even be impossible for the disciples without the power of the Holy Spirit which will come to fill and support them.

In the Book of Acts, we also read about Jesus spending time with the disciples following the crucifixion and resurrection. The disciples begin to question what purpose Jesus has in mind and true to form they seem to misunderstand. Jesus gently reminds them that the future God intends is not for them to know. Instead, he gives them a mission – tells them they will be empowered to witness *to the ends of the earth* to what they have seen and heard.

The disciples are given – we are given – a job to do. And the disciples will be given – we will be given – the power with which to do it. So, the angels ask, “Why do you stand looking into heaven?” Why are you hanging around? Get busy – get on with it! The goal for the disciples – and for us – is not to stand around waiting for the return of Christ – not to look to the clouds or keep our head in the sand – our goal is to witness, not to speculate about the signs of the future. We are assured that Jesus will return in God’s time – our work is now – in the meantime.

The importance of the ascension is that we are now left without Jesus physically present – that means **we** must do it now – **we** must do the work that Jesus has been teaching and preaching about. No excuses, no right-there Jesus to do it for us – just the Holy Spirit to be our advocate. Jesus’ ascension means that Jesus really is asking us to get to work. Looking back on Luke and moving ahead into Acts, we must take what Jesus has lived, and then live it ourselves without being deterred by the possible consequences.

The ascension of Jesus described in our readings today is not as significant in the details as in what it means for believers. Ministry is shifted from Jesus to us – we are to be his witnesses under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Being a witness means being open to where God’s spirit is working – being led into an unknown future. We cannot predict where that will be, but we can be sure that some will reject God’s good news and some will embrace it. So perhaps our fears are well grounded – perhaps we are right to be afraid that sharing our faith will not always make us popular. The thing is what else can we do?

The church is not intended as a mere memorial society for a dead Jesus. We aren’t meant to just sit around wistfully longing for some departed leader – yearning for the good old days when

Jesus walked among us. We have been promised that the same power that filled Jesus will be present with the church – that we are not alone in our witness. This is unsettling to say the least. The Holy Spirit empowers us and moves the church into new and challenging work in the world. The power of the Holy Spirit disturbs the way things are.

If we are not supposed to stand around looking up to heaven – not supposed to sit comfortably in our favourite pew waiting impatiently for Jesus to make things happen – if we are supposed to do the work of Jesus ourselves, how can we begin? And if we are afraid to witness because we might be rejected and disconcerted by being filled by the Holy Spirit, how can we fulfill the desire of God? Do we all need to be missionaries in far off lands or sidewalk preachers or televangelists?

Thankfully, no!

God will fill us with the Holy Spirit where we are and use the gifts we may not even know that we have. It takes courage to witness – courage if the person is a stranger to you, and even more courage if the person is a close friend or relative, so give thanks that God is with you always. Share yourself with others – act on your concern for them – ask for prayer when you are suffering – trust that you do not need to know exactly what to do and say because the Holy Spirit will fill and support you. Don't forget to ask God to guide you and ask God to guide those with whom you share your faith.

We live now – in the meantime – in a special time – and we have been called to a special task: to share the good news. We have been given the power to witness, why are we just sitting here – standing around looking up toward heaven? Say something – do something – try something – take a chance and tell others what you have seen and heard and believed. **Amen**

➤ *You, Lord, are both lamb and shepherd*

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† Prayer<sup>1</sup> (responsive)

Lord God, in Jesus, you came in the body: flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone, one with us in searing pain and delirious laughter. We thank you that you did not remain an idea, even a religious idea, but walked, wept and washed feet among us. By your love, change our ideas, especially our religious ideas, into living signs of your worth and will.

**Through our lives and by our prayers, may your kingdom come.**

Lord God, in Jesus, you touched the suffering, listened to the ignored, gave the depressed something to hope for. You bandaged the broken with love and healed them.

**We believe that your power is still present, so on your help we call, remembering...**

- those whose minds are menaced by thoughts which worry or wound them,

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Present on Earth, WGRG, Iona Community, Glasgow, Scotland, © 2002, p. 224-6.

- those whose hearts are broken because love has gone or because the light they lived by has turned to darkness,
- those whose feet walk in circles, stopping only when they are tired, resting only to walk in circles again,
- those whose flesh and bone or mind and spirit are filled with pain, those who feel discarded or disposable.

**O Christ put your hands where our prayers beckon. Through our lives and by our prayers, may your kingdom come.**

Lord God, in Jesus, your body was broken by the cowardly and powerful. In word and silence, take on the powerful of the world today.

**O Saviour of the poor, liberate your people. Through our lives and by our prayers, may your kingdom come.**

Lord God, by the authority of scripture, we learn that we are the body of Christ... yes, even we who worship in different ways, even we whose understanding of you is so changeable, even we who, in our low moments, make an idol of our insignificance.

We are your body, we are told. Then, Lord, make us like you that our souls may be the stained glass through which your light and purpose bring beauty into the world.

**Through our lives and by our prayers, may your kingdom come.**

Your kingdom come, in joy and generosity, in the small and the large, the ordinary and the special, and to you be the glory now and always. **Amen.**

➤ *Jesus shall reign where'er the sun*

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† Offering and Prayer

We have received and continue to receive gifts from God. In praise and thanksgiving, we bring forth our offering to support the mission and ministry of our congregations and Christ's church in the world.

**Creator God, we bring our tithes and offerings, praying that your Holy Spirit will transform them into creative ministry and blessings for those in need. In Jesus' name. Amen**

Blessing

Let us go now to be alert and alive for the sake of our God. Receive the Word of hope – speak the Word of truth. May God's spirit be in each one of us as we spread the good news. And may the grace of the Risen Christ, the love of God and the blessing of the Holy Spirit embrace us all.

➤ *Go now in peace, never be afraid*