

20 June 2021 – Father’s Day / National Indigenous Peoples Sunday

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.

➤ ***Dance with the Spirit***

MV 156 (repeat)

Call to Worship

Give thanks to the Lord, for God is good;

God’s steadfast love endures forever.

We have seen God’s wondrous works all around us,

so we come to praise God’s holy name.

Open wide your hearts in this time of worship!

We lift our hearts to God with thanks and praise.

Let us come together in prayer...

† Prayer

Holy One, we give you thanks and praise for all the blessings of this day. We remember Jesus, who gave us the gift of love, who gave everything of himself so that we may have mercy and forgiveness. We remember the Holy Spirit, who comes to be with us, as a gift from you so that we may always have your strength and guidance with us.

Lord, we know, too, that we can never be perfect. We regret that we have learned the mistakes of our ancestors: we have learned to be condescending and selfish, and we have ignored the suffering of the poor and the needy.

Lord, forgive us and help us to treat all people as we hope to be treated. Help us to reach out to others and share the good news. Help us to fulfill the ministry that Jesus started as we pray together 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***

Words of Hope

As we work together with Jesus, accept the grace of God. Now is the acceptable time – now is the day of salvation! Siblings in Christ, be at peace – we are forgiven.

† Prayer for Understanding

Faithful God, your love comes not only in word, but in the person of Jesus. May we walk the talk of faith as your will is revealed in scripture and in Christ. Amen

Scripture **Mark 4: 35-41**

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side."

And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!"

Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

2 Corinthians 6: 1-13

As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!

We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see – we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you. There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours. In return – I speak as to children – open wide your hearts also.

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

Message

There is a noted theologian, Frederick Buechner, who offers this advice about scripture: *“Don’t start looking in the Bible for the answers it gives. Start by listening for the questions it asks.”* Such wise advice. The Bible is full of questions – some implied, some asked outright. Questions like...

“Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9)

“Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9)

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1)

“Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29)

“How many loaves do you have?” (Matthew 15:34)

“What are you looking for?” (John 1:38)

“Do you want to get well?” (John 5:6)

“What is truth?” (John 18:38)

Buechner goes on to say: *“When you hear the question that is your question, then you have already begun to hear much. Whether you can accept the Bible’s answer or not, you have reached the point where at least you can begin to hear it.”*

In addition to questions from the Bible, there are also many questions that arise for us from our reading of scripture and from our experience in the world. What questions come to your mind? Here are a few of mine...

What kind of culture nurtures ideas that allow people to hate?

How do we change hearts and minds to overcome racism, anti-indigenous attitudes, Islamophobia?

How safe do I feel in my community – in my church?

Why is there so much violence and cruelty in the world?

Where is God in the midst of these situations?

Am I able to forgive?

When we take questions of our life and questions posed in scripture together and look – not for answers – but for resonance with certain questions, then we are really on to something – then perhaps God can make a difference in our lives and in our world.

The Gospel reading for this week is chock full of questions – maybe it holds a question that resonates for you. The miracle it describes – Jesus calming the sea – is one of the most dramatic and beloved stories in the New Testament. The setting is the Sea of Galilee, a body of water 680 feet below sea level, surrounded by hills, and prone to sudden, violent windstorms. The time is evening. After a long day spent preaching to the multitudes, Jesus is curled up in the stern of a boat – his head on a cushion – and sleeping soundly as his disciples steer the vessel to the other side. All at once, the winds pick up, the waves grow huge, and the boat threatens to capsize. Though many of the disciples are seasoned fishermen, they realize quickly that their efforts to

bail water from the boat and save their wind-whipped sails are futile – the storm is far too powerful.

In desperation, they rouse the still-sleeping Jesus. Not with a gentle plea for help, but with a question so full of bewilderment, accusation, and panic, we can feel its bite across the centuries: *"Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"*

Sometimes people judge the disciples for asking this question. They call them whiney and untrusting, but it seems to me to be a legitimate query under the circumstances.

Some come easily to the belief that Jesus cares for them – for others, not so much. Some have been wounded by bad religion – or suffered various forms of abuse – or simply have one of those super skeptical minds that make it difficult to trust in goodness – any kind of goodness – even God's. And some, perhaps those deep in the pit of grief, have cried out for help amid life's catastrophic storms and experienced a sleeping Jesus.

Intellectually, we may believe – we may even know – that the answer to the question is yes. Yes, Jesus cares when we are drowning. Yet it is a question that returns again and again in our lives. The "yes" of God remains a promise to grow into.

The next two questions in the story come from Jesus. He asks them after he wakes up, rebukes the wind, and stills the sea. In the deep calm after the storm, he turns to face his now-even-more-bewildered disciples. *"Why are you afraid?"* he asks. *"Have you still no faith?"*

"Why are you afraid?" It seems sort of obvious doesn't it? They are afraid of drowning! What current circumstance or memory brings real fear to your heart and mind? Perhaps you are fortunate to have escaped personally terrifying situations and look to things that have and are happening in our world as you wonder about fear.

If we extend the meaning of "drowning" to include all the ways in which we human beings find ourselves in over our heads – overwhelmed, overpowered, and terrified – then Jesus' question sounds ludicrous. Why are we afraid during earthquakes, tsunamis, wars, droughts, terrorist attacks, mass shootings, mass graves, large-scale starvation and catastrophic disease? Why are we afraid when we face broken marriages, depressed children, unfriendly neighbors, grinding jobs, and financial uncertainty? Why are we afraid when racism, sexism, and environment collapse fill our news and conversation?

Maybe it's because we're human. Maybe it's because fear is a reasonable response to a frightening world. Maybe it's because God created us with the capacity to feel fear, so that we'll know to pay attention and take reasonable measures to protect ourselves.

"Why are we afraid?" It seems a baffling question in some ways. But maybe Jesus asks his question in love rather than in irritation. Maybe all we can do is trust that the question is an invitation to be honest with God and with ourselves.

And then Jesus' second question: *"Have you still no faith?"* Because sometimes we do and sometimes, we don't – it isn't always easy to trust God in the midst of things we really don't understand. In the book of Job – a discussion on the question of undeserved suffering – the conclusion is usually something like: *God is the creator, and we are not – who are we to question God.* But what if the point is that God does not give an answer to the question of suffering because it is beyond our understanding? What if the truth is that how the world works is something we will never figure out and so we need to trust God without completely understanding what God is up to in the world?

In our story from Mark, we find Jesus asleep in the boat during a storm. The disciples are afraid. *"Don't you care about us? Don't you love us? You can save us and you're doing nothing!"* Jesus wakes up, tells the wind to calm down and then tells the disciples to calm down. He says to them, *"Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith – don't you trust me?"*

We are called to trust God amid life's difficulties. Not easy because life is dangerous and unpredictable, and God's involvement is often hard to see and appreciate. We often find ourselves like the disciples in the boat trying to decide if we really do trust God. And the witness of the church, from the first disciples down through the ages is that – even though we will seldom understand exactly God is doing – God can indeed be trusted, now and always.

The last question in the story returns us to the disciples. After Jesus calms the storm, it's no longer the elements that terrify them – it's Jesus. *"Who then is this,"* they ask each other in awe, *"that even the wind and the sea obey him?"*

The disciples thought they knew Jesus, but he was wilder, more powerful, less predictable, and more mysterious than they had yet imagined. If we feel we have Jesus pegged, then we're in serious trouble. If he's familiar enough to make us complacent or contemptuous, then it's time to start looking again for questions and wondering...

Who is this man?

Does he care that I am perishing?

Why am I afraid?

Do I trust God?

† Prayer (the first section is from United Church Worship Ideas)

O God, we come together as a human family, blessed to be alive, blessed to be on this land, blessed to have neighbours as diverse as your creation. You surround us with air we breathe, water we drink, all manner of living plants and animals that delight us and sustain us. Thank you, Creator, for all you provide. We take a moment in silence to ponder the blessings you give us—of family, friends, places to call home, the food we eat, the web of life in which we with all creatures live, move, and have our being. Hear us as we give thanks...

O God, we thank you for Indigenous neighbours and friends this day. And yet we lament, too. We lament that historic and contemporary racism continues to mar our relations. We lament the church's role as beneficiaries of an economic and governance system that privileges settler peoples at the expense of the First Peoples of this land. We lament apathy in the face of the need for change, change that recognizes the sovereignty of the First Peoples and recognizes at long last, in ways that make a difference, the sacredness of the land and the need for all of us to walk humbly upon it.

O God, for the witness of strength, caring, and love of Indigenous peoples, and for the struggle for what is just and right, open our hearts this day. Encourage us to listen more, speak less, participate in the movements for change that will bring us together in good and respectful ways. Encourage us to make friends, get to know someone's story, and share our stories too, without fear, for in Christ we know we are all kin, relatives, with you and with each other and with all living and non-living things.

We thank you, Holy One, for never leaving us alone, not even when we behave poorly. You are a saving God, and we give you thanks for your great mercy and grace. Today we bring the concerns we hold in our minds, and the heartaches we carry deep within our being...

We bring before you those unfortunate people featured in the news: the victims of accident, war, disease, violence, greed and natural disasters. Those who are ignored by the mass media: the forgotten minorities suffering oppression, the humble ones who suffer constantly and die obscurely.

We bring before you the church where there is persecution and the church where there is complacency. Those members of the church whom we do not really know, those we can't seem to understand, and some who annoy or disappoint us.

We bring before you the political parties we don't vote for, leaders we do not trust, high profile people we dislike, and the neighbours or work colleagues who exasperate us. We bring before you friends with secret wounds and grief, relatives with hidden temptations and anxieties.

Let there be hope – let there be love – let there be peace. Sift through our prayers, O God – letting all that is good align itself with your love. Through Christ, for Christ, and with Christ, may divine love deepen, spread and rule through all things, we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen

† Offering and Prayer

The scriptures teach us of the courage it can take to serve God. Giving takes courage, too. So give to God as you are able, trusting that God will honour your courage and generosity, blessing your gifts with the power of the Holy Spirit.

God of promise and perseverance, we offer our gifts with thankful hearts, grateful for your patience with us as your purposes unfold in us and among us. Bless our gifts with the Spirit's power so that your church can accomplish your purposes in our community with courage and compassion for the sake of Christ, our Lord. Amen

Blessing

Go out into the world in peace, and whatever you do in word and deed; do everything in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, giving thanks to God through him. And may the grace of the risen Lord, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all.

➤ *Go now in peace, never be afraid*