

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

People of God, hope in the Lord.

The Holy One hears us and welcomes us as God's own!

We are as sure of God's faithfulness as we are that the sun rises each morning.

The Lord who loves us unconditionally will lift us up and keep us in God's care.

Together, let us worship God with joy! Let us come together in prayer...

† Prayer

Living and faithful Spirit – God in whom we live and move and have our being – God made known in Christ Jesus, bless us one and all as we wait on you this day.

Remove from our minds and hearts whatever impediments hinder our worship or dampen our joy. Increase within us that holy longing for closeness which can open our lives to fuller delight and to a deeper commitment.

May our hymns and prayers, our searching thoughts, and our hearing of Scripture, sustain and nourish us for the days ahead.

If you were to keep a tally of our sins, O God, who could stand? Mercifully you promise unlimited forgiveness as we come to you in worship. We offer our confession in silence...

Holy One, from you generous forgiveness comes. Grant us wholeness of body, mind and spirit in Jesus' name as we boldly pray... ***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

Jesus reminds us that our faith has made us well. Go in peace and be healed of your dis-ease. Thanks be to God!

† Prayer for Understanding

Loving God, open our eyes and our ears to the wonder of your Word so that we may be changed as we grow in understanding. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen

Scripture

2 Corinthians 8: 7-15

Now as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you – so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking. I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others.

For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something – now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has – not according to what one does not have.

I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.”

Mark 5: 21-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.”

So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him.

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.”

Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?”

And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’”

He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth.

He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?”

But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.”

He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.”

And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!”

And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

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

Message

One thing many of us have been missing during the Covid-19 pandemic is social and physical contact. There has not been as much hugging, hand shaking, shoulder patting going on. We have been afraid that our touch could spread the virus from us to others or that we could be putting ourselves at risk. We want to be good citizens and “follow the rules” so we resist – we visit from a distance – we nod and smile – we video chat. But we are longing for that freedom to touch one another again.

It seems a simple thing yet so often when I visit in hospital or care facilities people want me to hold their hand, to touch their shoulder or brush their forehead, to embrace them even if there is a certain awkwardness to it. I remember holding hands in a circle of strangers as we blessed a family and their daughter who had died at birth. It was almost like we were holding one another up – each one keeping the other from falling. I remember praying with a man who was dying – grasping his hand in both of mine. Afterward he said he felt a power in that moment – from the touch as much as from the prayer – and it encouraged him. It happened during a visit this week – the first thing the person asked was, “would I give them a hug”. And of course, I did.

Some would call that healing touch – certainly there is energy and comfort in it. On some level there is mystery in the connection made when we touch one another. I am not sure what to call it but the power of touch – of holding hands, of embrace – the significance of laying-on hands is evident in our text of two miracles from Mark’s gospel today.

Here are two stories of healing, and Mark has stuck one inside the other. It’s called a Markan sandwich, with the bread and the filling both throwing light on the other. What is this light that Mark wants to shine into the dark corners of these stories and our hearts? What is the good news here?

The story begins with a desperate father, a leader of the synagogue, pleading with Jesus to come heal his critically ill daughter. Jairus falls at Jesus’ feet. He begs Jesus to place hands on his daughter. Jesus has already performed any number of miracles that do not involve a physical touch. Yet Jairus very carefully requests the laying on of Jesus’ hands to bring about his daughter’s restoration.

People are milling around – swarming – and then the request for Jesus to come and “lay hands” on the little girl – a daughter – is interrupted by a woman who wants to “just touch” – not even Jesus himself – but the edge of his clothes – just a brush, an amazing act of faith. In the midst of a hundred grasping hands, Jesus feels a powerful connection with one hand. It is about the power of a touch.

In first century Judaism, people with uncontrollable bleeding were considered ritually unclean. The town would have defined the woman suffering from hemorrhages as a sinner – one who was in some way morally responsible for her illness. Her disease not only alienated her from her husband, if she had one, and polite society, but also from God, whose stern hand of punishment had been visited upon her. No one would touch this woman – ever.

She had a chronic illness – something many people can identify with – many know what it is to be ill and long for healing over months and years. Chronic illness can wear away hope and optimism. Each day, like the one before and the one to follow, begins and ends with infirmity, which limits physical and spiritual adventures. Sometimes pain and frustration become the defining realities of life. And sometimes – even today – those with chronic illness or chronic need can be alienated from society – longing to be hugged and noticed.

The woman’s chronic illness impoverished her too. In a time prior to social safety nets *“she had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse.”* She is doubly poor – ostracized because of her condition; she is also literally poor, having spent what money she had on ineffective medical care – a perennial problem for the poor in the world of antiquity and also for many today.

With fear and trembling, this broken woman goes in search of the healer. I think she was apprehensive, maybe terrified – afraid of failure, afraid of “chickening out” and living with regret in addition to her other ailments, afraid of discovery among the crowd and the punishment that might entail. It may be that she needed to summon all her courage to seek this healing touch – she may have had to remind herself that she was a child of God despite her circumstance.

Ultimately, she touches Jesus – the hem of his cloak – and releases the energy that created the universe – the energy of love that flowed from the Nazarene healer. A power flows from Jesus that transforms her life. Jesus calls her “daughter” – her faith has made her well – her faith and God’s healing power. Healing emerges from a dynamic synergy of divine intentionality and human openness.

The story shifts again from one daughter to the next as Jesus makes a beeline to Jairus’ house. Some mourners come to tell the father that his daughter has died – there is no point in having Jesus come to heal her. When Jesus tells the crowd that she is not dead but sleeping they laugh at him. They must laugh because the promise he makes is impossible. Yet, despite the ridicule – despite what we know to be impossible – Jesus takes the little girl’s hand, and she is restored to the community of her family. A meal is prepared, and they feed her – a symbol of the communal joy and sharing Jesus desires for all. There is no better sign of life’s vibrancy than when we share food and drink.

Something more is going on here than two healing stories simply sandwiched together. The woman has been sick for twelve years and the little girl is twelve years old. The number twelve stands as an indicator that there is abundant life in Jesus, not only for an unclean woman and a dead girl, but for the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve disciples – life for the whole people of God. Jesus addresses the woman as daughter – the girl is Jairus’ daughter. Jesus is touched by the woman, and he touches the seemingly dead little girl – both are ritually and ceremonially unclean. Not only is Jesus not contaminated, those he touches are made holy and whole. Jesus has crossed the boundaries that once defined the community – has rewritten the rules – has revealed a new day. This interwoven story reveals that Jesus is on the loose in the world with divine power to restore life – abundant life for everyone.

This passage from Mark’s gospel shows that anyone could touch Jesus or be touched by him – anyone could encounter him – be with him. Jesus would not let any barrier stop him from loving someone. In this story two dead daughters connect with Jesus – are touched by Jesus just as they are but they leave their sacred encounter changed – renewed – transformed.

There is no doubt something miraculous happens in these sandwiched together stories – acts of power, grounded in faith. Jesus creates a circle of affirmation and healing around these hopeful people. Such affirmation and healing is not unlike prayer circles and visits where I have found

myself and others transformed by the power of touch that is not explainable. The fact that so many rushed to hug a loved one as soon as they could safely do so this year reminds and reinforces our need for touch and it's power to restore us.

The good news in this passage from Mark is not only in the miraculous deeds of Jesus and in the faith of those he encounters but in what is revealed to us about the “hands on” grace of God. The good news is that we are invited to know God through the incarnation of Jesus – to experience the physical presence of God in Christ. The good news is that we are invited to participate in God’s love for the world as we reach out to one another – as we take one another by the hand. The light of hope Mark shines forth through these healing accounts is good news indeed. God calls the broken and the dead, “daughter” – heals them with a touch – and calls us beloved children as well. **Thanks be to God.**

➤ *As water to the thirsty*

688

† Prayer

We give thanks to you, O Lord. Your mercies last forever. We give thanks to you, O Lord...for the whole creation and that you, O God, from earliest days spoke and called us into faith and service – that you have come to us in Christ Jesus, bearing our sins and healing our brokenness – that we belong to a community of faith where Christ lives on in love by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We give thanks to you, O Lord.

Most loving God, you have put it in our hearts to pray for one another. Please hear our prayers, correct their errors, and bless all that is wise and loving.

We pray for the young and the strong, and all who are full of joy and high hopes. We pray for the elderly, the weak, and all who are utterly weary or disheartened today.

We pray for the wise and the generous, and those who are looking for new challenges. We pray for the foolish and the selfish, and those who evade their responsibilities.

We pray for peacekeepers and peacemakers – for all who work for justice and peace throughout the world. We pray for the hostile and the treacherous, and all who will resort to violence today.

We pray for the well housed and well fed, and those who share their good fortune. We pray for the homeless and the hungry – for all whose plight is ignored today.

We pray for the patient, the merciful, and all who will make new friends today. We pray for the hasty and the judgmental, and those who will create misery in their wake.

We pray for the healthy and the buoyant, and those who share their joy. We pray for the dying and the sad, and those who weep inconsolably.

We pray for the faithful and the loving, and all who worship with delight. We pray for the faithless, the cynical, and all who find life disappointing.

We pray for our loved ones and our friends, and all those whom we will meet today. We pray for strangers and enemies, and those who think evil of us.

Loving God, please bring the day nearer when our prayers and our deeds will work in perfect harmony – when we will be a blessing to all whose lives touch our own. Amen

➤ *Oh, I know the Lord's laid his hands on me*

579

† Offering and Prayer

The stories of the scriptures remind us how much we need God's healing love and mercy in times of loss and loneliness. Our gifts to God support ministries of care and compassion through our congregation and in the mission of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Consider your gift as an outreach to those in deepest need.

Compassionate God, we offer you our gifts with grateful hearts, glad to know you keep reaching out to us and the world you love. Bless what we bring to you. Use us and our gifts to touch the world with your healing grace through Christ, our Saviour and friend. Amen

Blessing

Remembering that the universe is much larger than our ability to comprehend, let us go forth in wonder – opening our minds and hearts to the healing of Jesus in our midst. And may the grace of the risen Christ, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all.

➤ *Go now in peace, never be afraid*