

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 [Psalm 146 selected verses]

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!

Praise the Lord, my soul! Praise the Lord!

Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever.

Praise the Lord, my soul! Praise the Lord!

The LORD watches over the strangers, and upholds the orphan and the widow, but the Lord brings the way of the wicked to ruin.

Praise the Lord, my soul! Praise the Lord!

Let us praise and honour God together in prayer...

† Prayer

Great are you, O God, and greatly to be praised in all places and at all times. You have made all things and called them good. You created humans in your image. You gave us breath and life, a calling and a purpose. Filled with love for all creation, you lift up leaders and send out disciples to take part in your reconciling work in the world. Your love is endless, your mercy without measure, your faithfulness without limit. And so we praise you with all our strength, mind, heart and soul, in the name of Jesus, your Son, led by your Spirit who guides us day by day.

Eternal God, we confess that we have tried to hide from you because we have done wrong. We have lived for ourselves and apart from you. We have turned from our neighbours and refused to bear the burdens of others. We have ignored the pain of the world and passed by the hungry, the poor, and the oppressed. In your great mercy, forgive our sins and free us from selfishness, that we may choose your will and obey your commandments. In the name of Jesus we pray. **Amen**

Words of Hope

Hear the good news! Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ – and Christ died for us, Christ rose for us – Christ lives in power for us – Christ prays for us. Thanks be to God – we are forgiven!

➤ *Christ's is the world*

758

† Prayer for Understanding

Liberator Christ, you came into a holy place and read the sacred word about sight for the blind and freedom for prisoners. Come to this place now. Read these words to us until our own eyes are opened, our faith unlocked, and we can see the world as it is – as it could be. Until the yearnings of ordinary people are taken seriously; until your kingdom is celebrated everywhere, and your church is good news to all. Amen

Scripture **Ruth 2**

Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, *"Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favor."*

She said to her, *"Go, my daughter."*

So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, *"The Lord be with you."*

They answered, *"The Lord bless you."*

Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, *"To whom does this young woman belong?"*

The servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, *"She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She said, Please, let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers. So she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment."*

Then Boaz said to Ruth, *"Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn."*

Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, *"Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?"*

But Boaz answered her, *"All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land*

and came to a people that you did not know before. May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!”

Then she said, *“May I continue to find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants.”*

At mealtime Boaz said to her, *“Come here, and eat some of this bread, and dip your morsel in the sour wine.”* So she sat beside the reapers, and he heaped up for her some parched grain. She ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. When she got up to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, *“Let her glean even among the standing sheaves, and do not reproach her. You must also pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles, and leave them for her to glean, and do not rebuke her.”*

So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. She picked it up and came into the town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned. Then she took out and gave her what was left over after she herself had been satisfied. Her mother-in-law said to her, *“Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you.”*

So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, *“The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.”*

Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, *“Blessed be he by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!”* Naomi also said to her, *“The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin.”*

Then Ruth the Moabite said, *“He even said to me, Stay close by my servants, until they have finished all my harvest.”*

Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, *“It is better, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, otherwise you might be bothered in another field.”* So she stayed close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests; and she lived with her mother-in-law.

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

Message

June was a busy month! Initially everyone was focused on the relaxing of Covid-19 health restrictions, but our recent heat wave pushed that onto the back burner (so to speak) as we all came face to face with the realities of climate change. June was also Pride Month – an opportunity to celebrate the LGBTQI+ community and the recent steps toward inclusion in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. We had Father’s Day and National Indigenous Peoples Day – the latter overshadowed by the discovery of unmarked graves and human remains, first in Kamloops and now elsewhere in our country. This led to controversy about how we should best observe Canada Day – as a time to acknowledge the colonial evils of our past and an opportunity to give thanks for the

blessings afforded in this country. It has been a lot for one month... so it is perhaps forgivable that World Refugee Day (which fell on Father's Day – June 20th) didn't get much press this year. So I thought I would focus on refugees today.

On Monday, while preparing I received a message from Rob Boldt, one of our beloved Peter Boldt's children, telling me about a refugee project he is involved with in Victoria. It is amazing to me how God works! It was kind of spooky actually. Rob told me he was approached a couple of months ago by a former colleague who worked with him in the immigrant and refugee serving sector, to help sponsor of a family of Syrian Kurds now living as refugees in Northern Iraq. There is a group of five former colleagues and two others who have agreed to work together on this sponsorship. They are hoping that the PCC will be able to assist under our church's Sponsorship Agreement with Immigration Canada.

Before I tell you the story of this family, I want to tell you why we as people of faith – as the church – need to be interested and involved in the plight of refugees.

The Bible begins with the movement of God's Spirit and ends with John in exile on the Isle of Patmos. Between those two events, the uprooted people of God seek safety, sanctuary, and refuge – and the living God gives directions for welcoming the stranger. The Bible could be seen as the ultimate handbook by, for, and about migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. There is no question that God wants us to think about and to remember refugees. Welcoming the stranger is the central theme of biblical hospitality. It is an inclusive hospitality that always makes room for the stranger – no person is to be excluded.

Biblical law is remarkably generous towards and supportive of strangers, acknowledging that such people have no power – are frequently poor and needy – yet they are accorded fair and hospitable treatment. Strangers were protected from abuse, protected from unfair employment practices, and protected from unfair treatment in the courts. They were also offered various degrees of social inclusion. The biblical laws relating to the stranger model a generous and hospitable approach to the foreigners in the midst. In Israel's case this was motivated by the personal experience of once being strangers themselves.

God's chosen people were refugees. For ten generations, they grew in numbers and prospered in Egypt. Then a new Pharaoh arose in Egypt. Regarding the people of Israel with suspicion and hostility, he mistreated and persecuted them, and forced them to work as slaves. God raised up a leader, Moses, and sent him to tell Pharaoh to set the people free. When the king refused, God led the people out of Egypt. But their suffering was not over. For forty years, these refugees wandered in the wilderness until they found a new home. We could characterize much of the Old Testament as an anthology about refugees.

In the book of Ruth, one family is the focal point. It begins with Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons, who take Moabite wives, having to leave Judah and move to Moab because of a famine. Eventually all the men die, and the women are left alone. Naomi is a stranger in a strange land. She learns that there is no longer famine in Judah, so she exercises her right to return. However, she does not go alone. Ruth, her Moabite daughter-in-law, returns with her. The tables are turned – Ruth becomes the stranger in a strange land – Ruth becomes the refugee. In the reading from today we hear about Boaz adhering closely to God's requirement to offer hospitality to the stranger. He permits Ruth to gather food, protects her, and eventually marries her – bringing the undocumented sojourner into the fold, making her part of the family.

What did Jesus do? He broke into history with a kingdom from heaven which encompassed those conventionally thought to be the least likely subjects – the poor, the women, the children, the socially excluded – even Gentile sinners like us. Jesus redefined the people of God saying, *many who are first will be last, and the last first*. And

Jesus insisted that those who acknowledge him as the Christ should care for the poor and the powerless. Jesus expected his followers to imitate his deep concern for those in trouble, whoever they may be.

When Jesus reaches out to the Samaritan woman his disciples are scandalized. He risks serious loss of reputation in a society obsessed with status, honour, and shame. When he heals the blind and the lame, he risks being inundated with needy people, and sometimes that is just what happens. Such risks did not deter him – among the risks is the possibility that by showing *hospitality to strangers, some have entertained angels without knowing it.* [Hebrews 13:2]

The Christian response of welcoming the stranger, in full knowledge of the risks, is not based on some idea of Christian “niceness”. Rather, the Christian warrant for a humanitarian response to refugees is grounded in God’s love for all, especially for the outcast and the stranger...*Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.*

Food for refugees – here and abroad; water to the migrants crossing the desert; an open church door to the stranger with nowhere to turn; clothing to the migrant newly arrived or the refugee being resettled; medical care for migrant workers, immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers; prison visits to detained asylum seekers and immigrants – all are ways to fulfill the mandate to offer hospitality to the stranger. Responding to these needs is the foundation of a ministry to the strangers in our communities and our land and are ways to practice inclusive hospitality. Jesus was clear in his message: solidarity with *the least of these* indicates relationship with him – hospitality and generous welcome to those most vulnerable is a sign of people on the journey of Christian faith.

There are at least 26 million refugees living in the world today. Some of these millions are victims of persecution, as the people of Israel once were. Others are displaced by wars, earthquakes, fires, floods, drought or famine. While there are those refugees who wander in the wilderness, many more find temporary food and shelter in refugee camps. Most refugees want to return to their home communities, but sometimes, refugees are not welcomed home. **Listen to Shorash’s story...**

Hello, I am Shorash. I am a Kurd from Syria living in Iraqi Kurdistan with my parents, my wife Kalat, and my four children, a daughter aged 16 and three sons aged 15, 9 and 8.

I grew up with five siblings in Damascus and enjoyed a quiet life. I had to pause my schooling when I was a teenager because my father needed help at the shop. We sold children’s toys and clothing. My brother and I took turns helping my father so that our younger siblings would continue school.

Khalat and I married in 2004. I continued to live with my parents and work at my father’s shop. We had a simple and comfortable life and began a family.

Our lives were turned upside down when war erupted. Everything became difficult for us. Bombs fell in our neighbourhood. It was dangerous to go outside. We feared for our daughter who left for school every day, worried that she wouldn’t make it back home. My family feared for me every day when I left for work. One day while riding the bus on my way home from work the bus was stopped when shooting took place between government soldiers and people demonstrating against the government. Some people fell to the ground. We fled on foot to reach home. To this day this scene does not go from my mind. Going to work became more and more frightening. There were checkpoints in the streets and both young and old men were forced into the military. People we knew were arrested and never heard from again. We don’t know if they have died or are in prison. We decided to leave Damascus and move to a village that we thought was safer than Damascus. Very soon the situation in the village became unsafe as well as many forces fought against each other in the area around the

village. Roads were blockaded. Food could not get through. There was no electricity and bombs were exploding everywhere. I left to seek out relatives in Iraqi Kurdistan and to secure a place to live before my parents, wife and children came to join me.

With the help of relatives in Kurdistan my father and I managed initially to find temporary work in factories. But we faced a lot of hatred and discrimination. It is difficult to find stable work because we do not have permanent status in Iraq. We now sell children's clothing on the street.

Since the beginning of COVID all schools are closed in Kurdistan. My younger ones have no other learning opportunities. They dream of simple things like going to school and playing football. Fortunately my daughter likes to bury her head in books and is still hoping for a chance to complete her studies. My oldest son is learning to become a barber and he seems to like it. But I know that there is no future for them here. We are not citizens in this country. It is not safe for us to return to Syria, not for the foreseeable future. Some people I know sneaked into Europe illegally. That is too much risk for my children and my parents.

We are heartbroken for Syria, and we all have dreams for our future. Unfortunately, our dreams may not be realized anytime soon, and most likely not in Kurdistan or Syria.

In the current refugee crisis around the world, we all have an opportunity to live out the gospel, to illustrate the gospel in which we receive, unexpectedly, a lavish welcome from God. We can recognize the stranger as one of us – learn to see the borders and barriers between “us” and “them” are merely human constructions that serve to justify exploitation and violence. The truth is that we are family – siblings – one people under God. Paul writes to the Galatians: *God came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near... So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. Amen*

➤ *When the poor ones*

762

† Offering and Prayer

Jesus met both trust and unbelief in his ministry. We know that our ministry is also challenging and meets with different responses. Whatever we offer to God, we give in faithfulness, trusting that God will bless all our efforts in Jesus' name with surprising results.

Faithful God, we bring our gifts with trusting hearts, seeking your blessing on the ministries these gifts support. Work through our gifts and our lives, to touch the world with your healing grace through Christ, in whose name we offer ourselves to you. Amen

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

➤ *Eat this bread (repeat)*

527

Gathering at the Lord's Table

This is the Lord's Table – a table of companionship with Jesus – all who love him and all who want to love him more.

It is the table of sharing with the poor and broken – the table of relationship in which Christ becomes flesh. We come seeking strength and healing. We come seeking unity with Christ.

Come to this table you who have much faith and you who would like to have more – come you who have been here often and you who have not been for a long time – come you who have tried to follow Jesus and you who have failed. Come.

It is Christ who invites us to meet him here.

We remember with thanksgiving the gracious acts of God throughout history and in all creation. We praise our God that we have been invited – to serve one another without pride, to forgive one another as we have been forgiven, to feast together as members of one family.

Around this table our voices fall silent as we pray for the Holy Spirit to come upon us and upon these gifts of bread and wine. Fill them and fill us with the abundance of Jesus.

~ Silence ~

1 Corinthians 11: 23-26

I received a tradition from the Lord, which I also handed on to you: on the night on which he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread. After giving thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this to remember me." He did the same thing with the cup, after they had eaten, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Every time you drink it, do this to remember me." Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you broadcast the death of the Lord until he comes.

➤ *Come now, you blessed, eat at my table*

724

Sharing Bread and Wine

The one who breathed on the first disciples is present for us in this bread.

The one whose Spirit stirred the Church at Pentecost revives us in this cup.

The bread of life – the cup of grace – we remember and share with thanksgiving these gifts in which God comes to us so that we may come to God.

Everyone consumes the elements in their own space...

† Prayer

God of Abraham and Sarah, you are a God who cares for people, especially when they must leave their homes and travel to new places. We pray for all who are leaving home behind today, especially those who are leaving because of war or persecution. Protect them from danger and provide for all of their needs.

God of the Exodus, you are a God who cares for people and who hears the cries of the oppressed. We pray for all who are suffering oppression, especially economic oppression. Bring relief. Send your Spirit to work among the rich and powerful. We pray that all peoples in our world may flourish. Use us to bring about change.

God of Ruth, you are a God who cares for the stranger and who provides the homeless with homes. We pray for all who are settling in new homes in strange lands today. We pray for their embrace into new communities. We pray for work and ways to provide food for families, for help in learning new languages.

Lord Jesus, you lived among us and showed us how to live. Please help us by your Spirit to show your love and compassion and to see you in the faces of those who are the least among us. Help us to feed the hungry and thirsty, to clothe the naked, to care for the prisoners, to welcome the stranger. And help us to work for justice. Bring your kingdom here on earth quickly.

Loving God, we thank you for the mystery of being joined with Christ in this meal as a community of faith. Grant us the humility and enthusiasm to return again and again to feast together at your table so that we may be continually nourished for the journey. We join in singing our prayer as Jesus taught...

➤ ***Our Father in heaven (The Lord's Prayer – no repeats) 469***

Blessing

May the God who feeds the hungry and frees the prisoners – who gives sight to the blind and release to the captives – fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit as you work toward the kingdom of God. Amen

➤ ***Go now in peace, never be afraid***