

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.

Celebrations / Joys and Concerns

God's blessing on you. God's blessing on you.

God's blessing, dear friends. God's blessing on you.

➤ ***Dance with the Spirit***

MV 156 (repeat)

Call to Worship

As disciples of Christ – we are learners, together.

As disciples of Christ – we are people on The Way.

As disciples of Christ – we care for one another.

As disciples of Christ – we serve, we share, we pray.

In *this* time together –

May God's presence transform us.

In *this* time together –

We are welcomed to worship!

† Prayer

Almighty and merciful God, from whom comes all that is good. We praise you for all your mercies, given to us in Jesus, the Christ – your goodness that creates us – your grace that sustains us – your wisdom that challenges us – your patience that bears with us – and your love that redeems us.

Forgiving God, we confess that we do not always embody the goodness you desire. We do not always follow your will. We do not reach out to those in need freely and generously because we fail to see the connection between their need and our faith. Forgive us, O God. Restore us. Open our eyes in Jesus' name. Amen

Words of Hope

God is good and gracious – wise and patient. By the love of God we are forgiven. Thanks be to God!

† Prayer for Understanding

O God, Wisdom of the universe, grant us the gift of wisdom today, so that we may discern your way and live justly and graciously amid the struggles of this world. Strengthen and inspire us to do the word we hear and live the faith we confess. Amen

Scripture **Song of Solomon 2: 8-13**

The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag.

Look, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice. My beloved speaks and says to me: *“Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.”*

James 1: 17-27

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act – they will be blessed in their doing.

If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Mark 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly

wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.)

So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, *“Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?”*

He said to them, *“Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines. You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.”*

Then he called the crowd again and said to them, *“Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.*

For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

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

Message

As we meditate and speak about our texts today, we pray in the words of Søren Kierkegaard: *Lord! Give us weak eyes for things that do not matter and eyes full of clarity in all your truth. Amen*

The little epistle of James has had a sketchy history in the church. Some people think that it's more like Jewish wisdom literature than the Christian gospel. Except for two passing references there is no mention of Jesus.

The oldest list we have of the books of the New Testament, from the year 170 CE, doesn't include James. Writing in the fourth century, a church historian admitted that James was *accepted by many* but was still relegated it to the category of *contested* writings. Later in the fourth century another academic noted that James was accepted by the church *little by little*. In the sixteenth-century Martin Luther famously described James as an *epistle of straw*.

James' practical or ethical emphasis reminds us that following Jesus is a way of life and not just a theoretical construct. He writes about trials and temptations, the evils of showing partiality to the rich and oppressing the poor, listening to others rather than always talking, saying versus doing, bitter envy and selfish ambition, and our need for a wisdom that is far different from the wisdom of the world.

James names God *“the Father of lights”* – the creator of the sun and the moon and the stars in the heavens – Creator of all that is. God creates the beauty of the natural world – God creates each one of us to live in it – God hopes much for us and much from us. The Father of lights

breathes life into us by the power of the Holy Spirit so that we will become the very best of creation – the cream of the crop – the fulfillment of God’s desire. James reminds his community of this – reminds them of who they are – whose they are. They are – we are – God’s creation. It is easy to forget in the routine of life that God fills us with the word of truth and hopes what is best for us.

In the letter of James, we read about a community of faith and how it needs to behave. We read about a community that has been blessed with the embedded word that has the power to save souls – a community that needs to connect the truth it has heard and the salvation it has received, with its way of being and living. We are reminded that doing is as integral to faith as hearing – that religion that is all talk and no action is worthless.

I saw a meme on Facebook this week – [a meme is an image, video, piece of text, whatever., that is copied \(often with slight variations\) and spread rapidly by internet users](#) – a quote Marcus Borg’s book, “The Heart of Christianity”, stating that *compassion and justice are the primary ethical fruits of the Christian life*. It stopped me short and made me ask myself if I was bearing worthwhile ethical fruit – was that the focus of my so-called Christian life – was I compassionate and justice-seeking, justice-making? I think so – at least some of the time – and I truly value those ways of being in the world. I think this is much of what James is getting at in his letter as well – remembering to follow Jesus rather than simply listening to what he says.

“Don't deceive yourselves,” James repeats in our text today - don’t merely listen to the gospel story, do what it says. To listen without doing is like looking at your face in a mirror, walking away, and then forgetting what you look like. It is like when Jesus says in the Gospel of Luke, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I say?” Today, in the reading from Mark’s Gospel, Jesus similarly contrasts external ritual purity with genuine interior piety. Jesus doesn't condemn ritual hand washing in this story. He doesn't argue that all religious traditions are evil. What he indicts is the legalism, self-righteousness, and exclusivism that keeps the Pharisees from freely loving God and loving their neighbors. What he calls out is their elevation of rite over mercy, heritage over hospitality, ritual over compassion. Vainly honouring God with our lips while our hearts are badly estranged is not what Jesus has in mind. Don’t be deceived – listening and doing are different things.

True piety translates into action. That’s always been the point of the commandments, the teachings of prophets and apostles, even the gospel – to create a community of people who put into practice the commitment to live as God desires. James points us in the right direction when he says we are to *welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls*. That doesn’t mean we are to swallow at face value everything presented to us as “word of God,” but rather we humbly seek to understand and then put into practice the teachings we discern in our faith and in Scripture. We are called to hear the gospel in a way that transforms our hearts and is translated into action – the way we live our lives.

So, what can we do? How can we discern whether our way of doing religion is life-giving or not? Jesus gives his listeners this advice: notice what comes out of you. Notice what fruit your adherence to tradition bears. Does your version of holiness lead to hospitality? To inclusion? To freedom? Does it cause your heart to open wide with compassion? Does it lead other people to feel loved and welcomed at God's table? Does it make you brave, creative, and joyful? Does it prepare your mind and body for a God who is always doing something fresh and new? Does it facilitate another step forward in your spiritual evolution?

Like everything else Jesus offers us, his confrontation with the Pharisees is an invitation. It's an invitation to consider what is really sacred and inviolable in our spiritual lives. It's an invitation to go deeper — past lip service, past tradition, past purity, past piety. It's an invitation to practice what James calls "pure religion." A religion of love for the widow, the orphan, the stranger, the outcast, and the enemy. A religion of trust in a surprising, innovating, and ever-creating God.

Years ago, when I was teaching challenging primary aged children, I used a set of books to assist in developing an understanding of appropriate social behaviour among the children. The stories included two youngsters struggling with a problem — how to make or keep friends, how to deal with their feelings, how to keep from fighting, etc. There were also three main cartoon-like characters in the series: *Heada*, from the land of thinking; *Heartly*, from the land of feeling; and *Doofer*, from the land of doing. In most of the stories The Great *Theysayer*, sends this intrepid team on a mission to help the children with their dilemma. While not great literature, these books helped articulate some important messages for my students and acknowledged that we need to be balanced in our approach to life — thinking, feeling and doing.

When I read the passage from James, I think of Doofer who was sometimes bumbling and headstrong and noisy — but he tried! He got "stuck in" as they say — was never intimidated by the task at hand — and was rarely content to think or feel without also acting. James encourages us not just to think the faith — and I would add not just feel our faith in our hearts, but to do our faith — to truly live it — to be compassionate and strive to enact justice.

Our time of Sunday worship is intended to strengthen us — to support our Christian lives the rest of the week — to nourish and nurture us. Sunday is the day we are immersed again in the word — we confess and are reassured that our sins are forgiven — we receive guidance and encouragement — we hear and sing again the good news of God's goodness and mercy — and we are called — commissioned — sent once more into the world to partner with God in making this world a more trustworthy, safe, and healthy place — bearing the ethical fruits of compassion and justice.

Through the gift of our safe and nurturing community of faith it is possible to move beyond words and feelings to action — to risk more than might have been risked otherwise — to become *not hearers who forget, but doers who act* — and to be blessed in the doing. **Amen**

➤ *God, whose giving knows no ending (Austria)*

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† Offering and Prayer

The Book of Proverbs declares that those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor. Today we offer a portion of God's gifts to us. May our gifts and our labours, whether paid or volunteered, meet the needs of those who often go without.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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Generous God, you call us to reach out to those in need in kindness rather than judgment, and with generosity, not just good intentions. Bless our gifts and our actions for Christ's sake, that our faith in his love will show in through our actions in the church and in the world. 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

➤ *I come with joy*

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Gathering at the Lord's Table

The celebration of communion is always a festival of friends – where we gather around the table with all our hopes and dreams, longing for a glimpse of the holy.

It is here where bread is broken, and the cup is shared that we can be most truly ourselves – seeing ourselves and others as children of the living God.

Here, that which is earthly becomes divine and that which is human becomes more than have ever been dreamed.

Come to the table – you are all welcome. Christ invites us to meet him here.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give God thanks and praise.

Gracious and loving God, we praise and thank you, for you are the creator of all goodness and the source of abundance. In the beginning, your Spirit danced on the waters and brought us life. In your generosity, you created a garden of delights and nourishment – you called us to live with respect in creation and to care for one another.

You brought your people out of slavery into a land of milk and honey – flowing with streams of living water and planted with groves of olive trees.

When we turned away from you – living in greed and violence – you sent us prophets to call us back and remind us to live for a day when no one would be hungry, and we would live together in justice and peace.

Generous God, we give you thanks for Jesus, who came to live with us. We remember how he called his disciples to follow him and become fishers of all people. He told stories and taught us to pray. We thank you that he loved eating and drinking around tables where strangers became friends and where outcasts were included.

Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried, but you raised him from the dead – and like his disciples we meet him again in the breaking of bread as we gather around his table. We remember and give you thanks, O God, that as he sat at the table with friends – sharing the fruit of the vine and the harvest of the fields – he took bread, blessed it, broke it and shared it, saying: *“Take – eat – this is my body which is for you. Do this to remember me.”*

When supper was over, he took a cup of wine and raised it, saying: *“This is God’s new covenant, made possible because of my death. Drink this all of you, to remember me.”*

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 ~

In Christ, with Christ, through Christ – by the power of the Holy Spirit – all glory is yours, now and forever. Amen

➤ *Come, know my joy, the Maker says (Kingsfold) 788*

Sharing Bread and Wine

The one whom the universe could not contain is present for us in this bread.

The one who redeems us and calls us by name now meets 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.

Those in person have received a pre-sealed package of elements. Everyone consumes the elements together in their own space...

† Prayer (adapted from PCC Resources)

God whose Word created life, we give you thanks for the abundance we enjoy from earth's goodness. Make us wise caretakers of the earth's fragile balance, so vulnerable to drought and disaster. May your world become a place of abundance for all creatures.

God of transforming love, we are grateful to live in a land which is mostly peaceful, with leaders accountable for their decisions. We pray for those who suffer from the burdens of racism, violence and greed in our communities and around the world. Open hearts and minds to recognize abuse and exploitation, and help us build a common life where all people find dignity in their work, are rewarded fairly and respected fully.

God of vigilant care, thank you for the strength and comfort you offer in times of sorrow and stress. We pray for those who do not know security in their lives day by day, for those facing violence at home or on the streets, for the vulnerable who must depend on others for their care, and for those who experience unpredictable acts of hate or manipulation. Guide us to shape a society where violence is not tolerated, where the weak are protected, where the elderly are honoured for their experience, and children are cherished for their gifts.

God of all times and places, as the summer moves toward autumn, and activities must reorganize while the coronavirus is still present, we pray for families who face decisions about schooling, and churches and organizations trying to make wise choices. Equip us all with the wisdom we need to plan well, and act with understanding for those eager to get things going and for those anxious or reluctant to move too quickly.

God of sweet bread – God of tart juice and wine – we give thanks that you have fed us at your table again. So much more is received than just what we swallow. So much more is absorbed than just what we taste. We give thanks for each person present with us today. Bind our hearts by the receiving of the sacrament in remembrance of you. Bind us in your Spirit.

God who hears our desires even in the silence of our hearts, listen now as we name before you the people and situations on our minds today:

Receive all our prayers in the name of Jesus, who invites us to pray together, singing...

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

Blessing

Go forth with the good news of our Creator anchored in your heart – ever present with and within you. And may the grace of the risen Christ, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all. Amen

➤ *Go now in peace, never be afraid*