

Welcome and Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that the land where we gather for worship belongs to God, as does all of creation, and 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.

➤ *Dance with the Spirit*

MV 156 (repeat)

Call to Worship

In a world where many feel helpless, we gather to be reminded that our help is in the name of the Lord.

In a world where many think that there is no hope, we gather to be reminded that our hope is in Christ.

Together we lift our voices to God, our maker and sustainer; the One in whom we hope, the One in whom we trust.

Together we serve our church and our world sharing God's love with everyone we meet.

Together we lift our hearts in joyful praise. Come, let us begin our worship in prayer...

† Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Blessed be your name O God, for your love and mercy is sure. Your word shaped creation and your fingers flung the stars into the heavens. You breathed life into the world and you continue to build your kingdom. You created us in your image and you call us your own. Even when humanity strayed, you called us back to you, meeting betrayal with faithfulness and brokenness with mercy and love. In Jesus you came to us, giving new life to all. We gather this day to give you our thanks and praise.

As we contemplate the glory of your presence, we grow mindful of our own failures. There have been words and actions that we regret. There have been thoughts that bring us shame. For words of healing left unsaid and acts of generosity left undone, forgive us Holy One. Bless us with your grace, that the sin that so easily entangles might not stifle the journey of discipleship that you have set us on. May your grace reign in us so that the result might be praise and glory and honour. We pray together as Jesus taught... ***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

Hear the good news! Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ—and Christ died for us; Christ rose for us; Christ reigns in power for us; Christ prays for us. Friends, believe the good news of the gospel. In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven and made new by God’s generous grace.

➤ *Come sing, O Church, in joy*

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† Prayer for Understanding

God of wisdom, speak your Word to us through the scriptures, read and interpreted. By your Spirit, plant your truth deep within us so that we may grow in the likeness of Christ, who is your Living Word. Amen

Scripture **2 Kings 4: 1-11**

Now the wife of a member of the company of prophets cried to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead; and you know that your servant feared the Lord, but a creditor has come to take my two children as slaves.” Elisha said to her, “What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?” She answered, “Your servant has nothing in the house, except a jar of oil.” He said, “Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbors, empty vessels and not just a few. Then go in, and shut the door behind you and your children, and start pouring into all these vessels; when each is full, set it aside.” So she left him and shut the door behind her and her children; they kept bringing vessels to her, and she kept pouring. When the vessels were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another vessel.” But he said to her, “There are no more.” Then the oil stopped flowing. She came and told the man of God, and he said, “Go sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your children can live on the rest.”

One day Elisha was passing through Shunem, where a wealthy woman lived, who urged him to have a meal. So whenever he passed that way, he would stop there for a meal. She said to her husband, “Look, I am sure that this man who regularly passes our way is a holy man of God. Let us make a small roof chamber with walls, and put there for him a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp, so that he can stay there whenever he comes to us.”

One day when he came there, he went up to the chamber and lay down there.

Jeremiah 32: 1-15

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar. At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him. Zedekiah had said, “Why do you prophesy and say: Thus says the Lord: I am going to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it; King Zedekiah of Judah shall not escape out of the hands of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him face to face and see him eye to eye; and he shall take Zedekiah to Babylon,

and there he shall remain until I attend to him, says the Lord; though you fight against the Chaldeans, you shall not succeed?”

Jeremiah said, The word of the Lord came to me: Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, “Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.” Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the Lord, and said to me, “Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself.” Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord.

And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard. In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

I Peter 4: 8-11

Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

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

Message ***Spreading Hope***

Not that long ago we reflected on the story from Jeremiah that talks about him buying property during a war when Jerusalem is under siege. Jeremiah has been arrested for telling the king of Judah that resistance is futile: the land is going to fall. And suddenly, he has the chance to buy a field. It’s not a wise economic decision. The field has been stripped of anything of value, and the Babylonian army is camped on it. Jeremiah has just prophesied 70 years of Babylonian rule. But he makes it clear that he bought the field because God promised that that the land would be restored to the people—that one day vineyards would grow there again, and fields would be bought and sold. So he takes the deed and seals it in a jar to keep it safe—because it is not a question of **if** God’s promises would be fulfilled but **when** they would be fulfilled. Jeremiah did

not question God – he trusted and had hope for something more. By buying the field, he put his faith into action. And in doing this crazy act, he spread hope to others.

We are continuing to live in the midst of a pandemic. It's a time of physical distancing and rules and more rules and changing rules. News is filled with stories of violence and poverty. We're bombarded with messages of individualism and consumerism. We're told now is time to close ranks, withdraw to our homes and wait. Fear, loneliness, despair and anxiety dominate. But our God is a God of hope.

The Bible shares the story of God's love, throughout the centuries and generations. It is in that love that we find hope for the future. And that hope gives us the courage to live out God's call in our lives. We may not have a plot of land we can buy as a symbol of hope but, like Jeremiah, our actions can live out our faith. And we call that **STEWARDSHIP**.

In the church, we often use three words interchangeably: *stewardship, giving and generosity*. But they are really three distinct (though connected) concepts. **Stewardship** is the management of resources belonging to someone else. **Giving** is the act of sharing something of value. **Generosity** is the amplitude and attitude with which we give.

From the very beginning, the Bible tells us that we are created by God and everything we have belongs to God. As God's stewards we are called to use EVERYTHING God has given us to show our love for God – to care for one another and to look after God's creation. We can't be stewards of God—whose very nature is giving—without giving resources away – time, talent, treasure. The Bible shows us that giving can care for the poor, build people up, instill dignity, celebrate life. It can also assert power differences, make people feel dependent, take advantage of people.

As Christians, we want to give the way God gives – generously, abundantly, unconditionally, sharing love, joy and faith. And when we do, when our actions live out our faith, like a deed being sealed in a jar, hope spreads.

Karen Plater says that she has learned a lot about stewardship, giving, generosity and hope working with PCC partners around the world. One profound lesson came early in her career when visiting projects in Central America which had been supported through PWS&D. A group sat in a circle under a tree, while the director of one of the programs read the passage we heard earlier today from II Kings, and then told the group why the story of this widow, asking Elisha for help in her time of desperate need, was an important scripture to her.

She said that in Nicaragua there are many women, like the widow, raising families on their own. Like the widow, who was about to lose her two sons as slaves to pay off her debts, many of them felt like they were losing their children to despair, drugs, poverty, gangs. So she was particularly interested in the response from Elisha, the prophet, the man of God.

Who knows what the widow was expecting—maybe some charity so she could pay off the creditor, at least for a while. I don't think she was expecting Elisha's question: *What do you have in your house?* She might have been a bit confused. If she had very much, she wouldn't be there! But she thinks for a bit and says she has a little bit of oil. *We can work with that*, Elisha says. And he gives her instructions: Go to your neighbours. Borrow some vessels—and not just a few.

The widow must take her faith and put it into action. She must trust Elisha. She gathers the vessels, locks herself in a room with her children and starts to pour the oil—which keeps flowing and flowing, until all the vessels are full, and then it stops. The widow takes the oil back to Elisha and asks what to do. He tells her she can sell it, pay the debts, and live off the rest. He gives her HOPE.

This story teaches us about how God gives—in a way that cares for and nurtures the recipient. It helps us see that God has given everyone gifts. It helps us think about how we can give in a way that restores dignity, that walks with people in their journey, that empowers them to use their gifts in a way that shares hope.

But the director also said it taught her something as one who gives. Sometimes she felt like the widow. She came from a poor community herself. She didn't have a lot of resources. The needs she saw around her were so great—systemic problems which created high unemployment in Nicaragua, that forced people to migrate from their communities to find work and send remittances back home. She saw despair all around her, and felt helpless. She would go to God and pray for the people in her community, asking for—demanding—help. This scripture reminded her to see the gifts she had—what God had given her, even when she thought she had nothing—and to see how she could use those gifts to respond to the needs around her. She took her courage and determination and started programs. A breakfast program for kids at school, with local shops donating supplies. Small income generating projects with women in the community. And people saw, and funding came from partners like PWS&D, and the projects grew. And she had peace, because she was doing what she could, where she could, with all the resources made available to her. When she did, she was surprised by how the gifts grew – how people donated goods and time and opportunities in ways beyond her imagination. God blessed the work and the oil kept flowing and flowing. And HOPE spread That's how giving—and stewardship—works. We all have something to give and when we give our gifts to God, in the way God gives, the oil keeps flowing.

God gives without expectation of return... When Jesus heals the 10 lepers only one of them returns to give thanks. Often the message is about the one who returns—a reminder to us to be grateful, and not to be afraid to express gratitude. But Jesus healed **all** the lepers. Jesus knew they wouldn't all return to give thanks, but he healed them all anyway. There was no prerequisite, nothing they had to do to earn the healing. It was freely given.

God gives to all... When Jesus taught us what it means to be good neighbours, he told the story of a good Samaritan. The Samaritan happened upon a victim of crime and saw him and his needs. He didn't care that the victim was of a different religion or a different ethnicity. That didn't matter to him. He used his own resources—his money—to help, and asked nothing in return, simply going on his way after taking care of the man.

God's gifts are given in love... People know when a gift is given in love. People know when it is cheerfully given. People know when it is given reluctantly. People know when it is given to gain favour. And so does God.

When a woman poured expensive perfume on Jesus (perfume worth a year's wages) some of the disciples grumbled, imagining all it could have accomplished for the poor. But the disciples missed the point. Jesus showed them the heart of the giver—and how she was showing her deep love for Jesus with her gift. And he graciously accepted it.

The Bible is filled with stories of stewardship and of giving. As stewards, we are called to give the way God gives. Extravagantly, unconditionally, with nothing expected in return. When we give to our congregation—we give with love, generously, without the expectation of return. We trust God will bless our gifts—as they participate in God's mission, share God's love in our community, provide a place of praise and worship for people to come, and people to carry the Good News out from—and the oil will keep flowing.

When our congregation gives to Presbyterians Sharing—the mission and ministry fund of our denomination—or we make special donations to Presbyterian World Service & Development—our church's development and relief agency—we give with love – generously, extravagantly, without the expectation of return. We trust God will bless our gifts—as they join gifts from Presbyterians across Canada to participate in God's mission—sending mission staff around the world, equipping congregations, training students, caring for the vulnerable. And now especially helping congregations and communities adapt to challenges brought on by COVID 19.

We may not be able to travel to India to care for people affected by COVID—but we are standing with our PCC partners in India, both through the PWS&D appeal and by encouraging and supporting our long-term mission partners through Presbyterians Sharing. Years ago, a consultant evaluating PWS&D programs wrote of the PCC partners working in India. She found that PWS&D's programs/projects were well planned and successfully implemented, but they were also successful because of the *“never-ending, hopeful optimism” the workers had in light of “the hard realities they face in areas of excessive poverty, unspeakable violence, human rights abuse, natural disasters and human calamities.”* That hopeful optimism amid despair came from their faith – their willingness to never give up and to use all the gifts God had sent them—to do whatever they could to make a difference, spreading hope. It is with this same spirit that PCC

partners are responding to COVID 19 in India today—and your gifts will give them hope, just as they continue to share hope with us.

By the gifts we give – by the way we choose to live our lives through this pandemic and beyond – we can spread **HOPE** – in our community and around the world. May it be so.

Sermon by Karen Plater, Associate Secretary, Stewardship & Planned Giving. Reflection on Jeremiah passage inspired by Presbyterians Sharing service 2019 prepared by the Rev. Amanda Bolton-Henderson.

➤ *Called as partners in Christ's service*

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† Offering and Prayer

God loves a cheerful, courageous and confident giver. People of the One whose giving knows no ending, people of the Risen Christ: with trust and gladness we come together to present our tithes and offerings, grateful for who we are and who we can become in faith, hope and love.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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Generous God, in countless ways you have gifted us with your amazing grace. What joy is ours to be of you and for you through Christ our Lord! As instruments of God's good news, we give what we have and who we are. By your Spirit, encourage and equip us in the service of Christ so that all people may know of your love and experience hope in you. We dedicate our gifts in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers

Holy God, yours is an eternal generosity, a giving that knows no ending. We come to you as beneficiaries of a grace that spills into our world in all kinds of ways, from many directions. We pray today, that we might see and know the truth about our situation deep in our hearts; that we would appreciate the depth and the richness with which we have been and continue to be blessed.

We thank you for material comfort, for wealth of relationships and for joys both human and divine. We are surrounded with voices that stoke our fears about scarcity and want and play on our insecurities. Save us from the restless heart that feeds on greed, from those who foster habits of consumption and entitlement for their own advantage. Help us to choose our luxuries carefully and to learn how to share them in ways that build up relationships and strengthen people in love and in gratitude. Help us to lay up treasure in heaven where it is safe from the uncertainties, grief and anxieties of the marketplace.

Grounded in your generosity, may we be open to share and to participate in generosity. In you we lack no good thing. May our world be shaped by the reality of your abundance rather than by illusions, disordered desires and distorted imaginations.

We thank you for the opportunities you give us as a congregation to conduits of your generosity. When we live in your image, we find our true selves. May we know ways beyond our ability to count the joy of giving.

Nourish seeds of generosity and hospitality in us so that we can be a community of your people and a witness to the life that really is life. Help us swim against the stream of individualism and the loneliness and isolation and spiritual death to which it leads.

We pray for our congregation. Even as we continue in the uncertainty of this pandemic, we pray that you will continue to work through us, that our community, our country, and our world, will know your love.

We pray for those who are struggling – for those who are sick – for those have lost work – for those who are lonely and uncertain. We pray that you would be with them on the journey, providing comfort and hope.

We pray for all those who have spent many months working on the front lines – for health care workers and those who support them – for those store clerks and bus drivers and delivery people who are providing services we need to sustain life – for any who are out there serving people, sharing joy and comfort. We pray that you would ease their fears and anxieties and wipe away their tiredness.

We pray for all those whose businesses and livelihoods are at risk. Help us to support them in tangible ways. We pray for families and teachers and all programs providing mental health care and support for children and young people. Instill in them patience and give them hope.

We pray for programs serving people who are homeless, marginalized and isolated. We pray that you will infuse them with your strength, your love and joy.

We pray for our government leaders at every level – for your wisdom to guide them, for an end to blaming and a willingness to work together. We give thanksgiving for their willingness to serve. We pray for the people of India who continue to face this surge in sickness. Help the world to fill the lack of medical equipment. Give breath to those who are struggling to breathe.

We pray, O God, that this pandemic will end soon. In all that we do, we know you are always with us, that you are a God of love, joy, peace and hope. Help us share your love with the world. Amen

➤ *I'm gonna live so God can use me*

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Blessing

May the seeds of faith and hope we plant continue to grow and multiply among us. And may we see ourselves, not just receivers of God's abundant grace, but also as instruments of God's grace. May God be with us in the world, as we share the wealth God has entrusted to us and plant seeds of hope, today and for generations to come. Bless us all in the name of the Creator, Sustainer and Spirit. Amen

➤ *Go now in peace, never be afraid*