

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.

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

There is a table for the world, a feast spread for all people. No one is rich enough to pay for this meal; no one is too poor to join in. This is God's awesome gift to all humankind. With joy and thanksgiving, we come to worship God.

† Prayer

Holy God, whose thoughts and ways are not ours, you alone are God, awesome, holy, and most high. School us in the ways of faith and wisdom, that we, like Job, may learn to truly see and hear, and in humility find blessing.

We come to you broken and in need of wholeness. All of us have relationships that have faltered over time. All of us have wounds that remain hidden in our hearts. The world has distorted the goodness you created. We have allowed friendships to end and relationships to break down. Sometimes, this has been necessary for our own self, and sometimes it has happened outside of our control.

Great Creator, we do not know why these things happen, but we know that you created us in your image. May we strive to live more fully into that image, to do what we can to bring healing and wholeness in our lives and the lives around us. In the name of Jesus, we pray in hope. Amen

Words of Hope (Romans 8: 38-39)

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen

➤ ***Teach me, God, to wonder***

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† Prayer for Understanding

O God, Giver of life and all that is good, everything we have is yours. Open our eyes that we might see as you see, our ears that we might hear as you hear, and our minds that we might understand that hope to which you have called us. As the scripture is read and your word proclaimed, let your Spirit move within us, setting our hearts on what you desire. Amen

Scripture

Job 1: 1, 2: 1-10 (The Message)

Job was a man who lived in Uz. He was honest inside and out, a man of his word, who was totally devoted to God and hated evil with a passion.

One day when the angels came to report to God, Satan also showed up. God singled out Satan, saying, "And what have you been up to?"

Satan answered God, "Oh, going here and there, checking things out."

Then God said to Satan, "Have you noticed my friend Job? There's no one quite like him, is there—honest and true to his word, totally devoted to God and hating evil? He still has a firm grip on his integrity! You tried to trick me into destroying him, but it didn't work."

Satan answered, "A human would do anything to save his life. But what do you think would happen if you reached down and took away his health? He'd curse you to your face, that's what."

God said, "All right. Go ahead—you can do what you like with him. But mind you, don't kill him."

Satan left God and struck Job with terrible sores. Job was ulcers and scabs from head to foot. They itched and oozed so badly that he took a piece of broken pottery to scrape himself, then went and sat on a trash heap, among the ashes.

His wife said, "Still holding on to your precious integrity, are you? Curse God and be done with it!"

He told her, "You're talking like an empty-headed fool. We take the good days from God—why not also the bad days?"

Not once through all this did Job sin. He said nothing against God.

Mark 10: 2-16

Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

He answered them, "What did Moses command you?"

They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her."

But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter.

He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

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

Message

First I want to say something about the passage Peter read for us from the Gospel of Mark. Truthfully, I would rather ignore it but I would feel guilty for not addressing in some way. It is one that all but the most self-righteous of us can hear as nothing less than an attack on a decision that they or someone they love may have taken after much suffering and deep thought. A decision that may still fill that person with guilt, shame and doubt. Divorce is not uncommon in our culture – no matter your opinion on what *should be* the fact remains that most of us are touched in some way by the break-down and break-up of marriage and the suffering that comes with it.

I could tell you things about understanding the passage in the context of its own time. I could insist that if we just read it carefully enough it won't sound so harsh – so clear. And I could equivocate on the sanctity of marriage in general which makes divorce, somehow less of a problem in our minds. But the truth is that I don't question the Christian commitment to marriage as a life-long bond lived in mutual faithfulness. I believe that an enduring promise is just that – not because of a *law* or a sense of *moral righteousness* but because God calls the creation good – very good. God yearns for the creation – for each of us – to come into meaningful relationship with one another in helpful, healthy and harmonious ways – in a marriage this means we desire a promise that endures in hope.

That said, I also believe that the church owes pastoral faithfulness to those who find themselves unable to continue in their commitment to their marriage. To those who are suffering the agony of divorce – not just the immediate participants, but their families, friends and churches as well

– to those in the pain of a relationship shredded beyond repair – to those who by God’s grace may have the blessing and privilege of another relationship – to those who read this passage and shake their heads with anger or despair, the church must minister with compassion despite the words of Mark’s Gospel. To have compassion is to bear another’s burdens – to suffer with – it is about responding in some sort of helpful way to the suffering we encounter in this world.

We all suffer – some more than others certainly, but we all have burdens to bear and we struggle to understand both our own suffering and the suffering of others within the light of our faith – within the light of God. This week we were all encouraged to stop – to recognize and remember the suffering of Indigenous people in Canada as we observed the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation – Orange Shirt Day. We were called to face the suffering that the our white supremacist attitudes of our country and our church held and acted upon caused and continues to cause in our communities. We wore our orange shirts – grieved – took time to educate ourselves and others – we suffered with the survivors and pledged to uncover the truth – to ensure that such horrors are not repeated.

Hopefully our faith supported us in this time of reflection on suffering that we cannot undo and ultimately can feel unfixable – that remains unresolved. The Book of Job wrestles with, but does not explain, the mystery of suffering, especially unmerited human suffering. It does not give us easy answers to the difficult and troubling questions of life, yet it probes the depths of faith in the midst of suffering. In the time that this story – this long philosophical poem – in the time this epic was told, as in our own time, there were those who could see good people getting sick, upright citizens dying, committed marriages floundering, the oppressor inflicting pain and misery – while proud and selfish and seemingly less worthy people prospered. The author, like so many of us, had heard all the learned, clever and pious attempts to explain life – to explain suffering and poverty and pain – and he, like many of us, was wholly dissatisfied with those explanations. And so he writes the poem that is the Book of Job on the subject of why God lets bad things happen to good people.

These few verses from the prologue of Job open the door to the whole story. It is a *once upon a time* tale about a man named Job who is so good, so perfect, that you realize at once that he can’t be a real-life person but is in truth a character in a story meant to teach us. Job is an excellent and righteous man. One day when all the members of the heavenly court were gathered, the Satan comments on the things he has seen on earth. God asks if the acuser, Satan, has noticed Job; to which the Satan responds, *“Of course Job is pious and obedient – you make it worth his while, you bless him. Does Job serve you because it is profitable? Would he remain faithful if you pulled the proverbial rug out from under him and really allowed him to suffer?”*

And so the plot line develops – Job’s family, home, livelihood, possessions, and health are all gone. His every moment becomes physical torture compounding the mental and spiritual agonies. He is urged by those closest to him to denounce God – anything it takes to get some relief.

One way to read the story is that Job never curses God but remains steadfast in his faith and is ultimately rewarded. A comforting reading for some – others keep their doubts and complaints about that interpretation to themselves. The poem's author would be bothered by such a simplistic, moral-of-the-story take on things – wonders what kind of God would bring such suffering on creation – wonders what kind of faith urges blind obedience in the face of injustice and cruelty.

Job **does** complain against God – condemns the divine in the bitterest language. Job's friends try to convince him not to lose faith despite the calamities that have befallen him. They try repeatedly to make the point that God will eventually see to it that the good prosper and that the wicked are punished. They suggest that Job must be to blame for the suffering he is experiencing. Job complains and the friends defend God until, at the climax of the story, God appears and God speaks.

Unfortunately, when God speaks in the Book of Job not every question is cleared up. We come to the end and we still wonder... If God is just and powerful, then Job must be someone who deserves what is happening to him. If Job is good but God causes his suffering, then God is not just. If Job deserved better and God did not send his suffering, then God's power is not what we thought it was. So we wonder still about suffering.

The usual response, and the direction chosen by Job's friends in the story, is to assert that Job must not be a good person – he must deserve what is happening to him. Unfortunately the first verse of the story makes it very clear that **Job is a good person** and God reaffirms it with almost the same words in Chapter 2: *"Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason."*

The Indigenous people who suffered at the hands of Christians and the Canadian government – those who continue to suffer as survivors of residential schools or experience intergenerational trauma did not bring that evil upon themselves – they did not deserve such treatment. Contrary to the beliefs of the time there was no sin on their part and no righteousness on the part of white colonialist and Christians. They suffered at the hands of others who held to unsupportable values. Today people continue to suffer in the same way – in Canada and around the world. And any one of us might suffer disease or hardship or pain in relationship not because we are bad people but just because suffering is part of life.

I believe that the author of the Book of Job concludes that **God is good** and that **Job is good** and that **we have misunderstood what God's power is all about**. Bad things do happen – good people do suffer along with those who are perhaps not so good, but it is not God who wills it. God desires that all people experience the abundant blessing promised in creation. God chooses to be in communion with Job in the whirlwind – reminding us again that God is not about power but about relationship. We are not compelled to obey but invited to do so – encouraged to serve

God and one another as a free gift – called to participate in God’s compassion for the world without guarantee of material reward or the promise of comfort in this life.

God is at work in the universe. God cares for creation – God cares for Job so much that there is a moment of divine self-revelation – an experience of the vision of cosmic responsibility. A God who confesses the divine burdens to a human being is one profoundly engaged in human destiny – a God to committed to being in relationship with the creation even if it means letting go of some power in respect for human independence. How could God be in any kind of meaningful relationship with humanity if God manipulated all circumstances?

Innocent people suffer – things happen that no one deserves. But when it happens, it does not represent God’s punishment – our misfortunes and suffering do not come from God. Our Creator is one of justice and goodness rather than one of power – and so our loving Creator can still be with us when bad things happen. God made us and called us good. God does not desire our suffering – and any suffering we experience is not the result of God’s hand. We can however turn to God for help. We can seek God and be strengthened – comforted – given hope.

This understanding of God as a God of relationship is affirmed each time we come to the Lord’s Table. Here we are reminded of the lengths to which God will go to draw us into relationship – to lead us to grace. God comes to us – not in a position of power, but in the fragility of the manger and the brokenness of the cross. God comes to us in all circumstances of life: joy – suffering – and all that lies between. We are invited to come and to rest in God. **Amen**

➤ *Jesus’ hands were kind hands*

631

† Offering and Prayer

World Communion Sunday reminds us that we are part of a global family committed to serve our neighbours in Jesus’ name. The gifts we offer join the gifts of many others to bring the love and compassion of Christ into places of deep need. Let us bless others as we have been blessed in Christ.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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Gracious and generous God, we offer you our gifts with humble thanks for all you have provided. Bless them with your Spirit and use them to bless those in deepest need with love they can taste and justice they can celebrate in Jesus’ name. 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

➤ *Put peace into each other's hands*

560

Gathering at the Lord's Table

The table that is set, is set for all – around it there are no divisions.

Just as one loaf is made from many grains, and as one cup is filled from the fruit of many grapes, so, we, though many, are made one in Christ, nourished by him to nourish the world.

Jesus calls us to this table, and all are welcome here.

Taste and see that God is good.

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

➤ *In Christ there is no east or west*

480

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 and Blessing

Holy One, you have nourished us in this meal, and fed our bodies and souls. We have heard your love – now send us out to speak it. We have seen your love – now send us out to show it. We have been fed by your love – now send us out to share it. And let all things be done for your glory. May we go from this celebration at the Lord’s Table feeling blessed – in peace and in hope to be the church today. We sing our prayer together as Jesus taught...

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

➤ *Go now in peace, never be afraid*