

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.

Call to Worship

We praise our divine Creator as we set down our burdens in this time of worship.

(palms of hands facing down)

Our gracious God sustains and encourages us in our journey of faith.

(palms of hands facing upwards)

We are precious in God's sight – beloved and embraced in love.

(arms crossed over chest)

Let us worship God – Creator, Saviour, Spirit...

➤ *Dance with the Spirit*

MV 156 (repeat)

† Prayer and the Lord's Prayer (adapted from PCC resources)

Generous God, you hear the voice of those who cry out to you, and you respond with love. You reach out to us when others have turned away. You offer us compassion when others dismiss our worth. You heal us when we thought we were beyond repair. Your amazing love transforms our lives over and over again, and so, we offer you our humble praise in the name of Jesus, your love made flesh. Receive our gratitude in this time of worship, as we join with your whole creation to bring you honour and glory, now and always.

God of love and mercy, we worship you as the source of every good and perfect gift, but we confess our gifts to you are less than perfect. We honour you when it fits into our schedules, not so much when we have other things to do. We forget that your love should set our priorities and pursue our own desires instead. In your loving-kindness, forgive our wavering hearts and reawaken our commitment to you. We pray together as Jesus encourages us to do **...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

Friends, we are promised that those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Claim your hope in this good news: God's perfect love abides in you through Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God for such great mercy.

† Prayer for Understanding (adapted from a prayer by Julia Seymour)

Divine Source of love and life, we come before you to read the scripture in joy and with humbleness of heart. Prepare us in mind, body, and spirit for the truth that will encounter us today. Open us, through the Holy Spirit, to live our faith in word and deed, becoming more fully the people you have made and called us to be. Amen

Scripture **Hebrews 11: 29 - 12: 2**

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace. And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets – who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented – of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Mark 10: 46-52

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here."

And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you."

So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?"

The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again."

Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

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

Message

Some years ago I took a course offered by Island Pastoral Services Association on Bowen Family Systems Theory. The person who developed the theory saw that human social and emotional behaviour is largely shaped by the systems we are part of and that the key influential system for most of us is our family of origin. He encouraged people to investigate and understand this most significant relationship system. The first step was to make a family diagram showing as many generations as possible. Those involved with genealogy and exploring your family history will have some appreciation for this kind of work.

I'm not sure where I have stashed my family diagram – my own personal cloud of witnesses – but I remember that it showed my parents – grandparents – siblings – nieces and nephews. It showed who is married to whom – traced my family and our shared history back through several generations. There would be much to update in that now – divorce, deaths, marriages and births. There is no doubt that it helped me to see these connections – to explore past dynamics and to talk with family members about the stories they remember. Recognizing and embracing my family system encouraged me in my own personal development.

In a secular context the family relationship is the major system to which many of us belong. However, many also develop extended families – friends and support systems that are often called the family of the heart. In the life of a Christian there is another relationship that is even more central. Our relationship with God in Christ is the one that names and defines us – it is the identity that we have received as a gift and the one we claim with joy. That relationship invites us to another family – a different system – a new and ancient cloud of witnesses.

I have been thinking about the witnesses who have been supporting Mary and me as we trained for the marathon run which I did yesterday. The many people who have encouraged us for months – the support we have been to one another – the Facebook group that Connie started to allow us to cheer ourselves and other on to run the race that was set before us. Spectators, interested bystanders, helpers – a cloud of witnesses.

Think for a moment about the witnesses that surround you in your journey of faith... mentors that are with you in memory and spirit – all of the churches you know with the names *Knox* or *St. Andrew's* and the rich Reformation history that conjures – memorial plaques and decorative window dedications that punctuate our immediate surroundings – photographs and notices and emails that record our shared life as a community of faith – the people from congregations up and down the island that welcome one another at camps and retreats and meetings and worship, the echoes of the past that whisper in ancient cathedrals – the church family of your childhood...These are not merely spectators eagerly watching your race to see its outcome, but those who have experienced the faithfulness that God promises – they are past and present, near and far – fellow travelers encouraging us on the way.

Our reading today from Hebrews is part of a sermon written or delivered to a community of faith around the time that Paul was active in his ministry. Like most sermons, it was written to address the concerns of a particular congregation in a particular time and place. Amazingly – like sermons today – we find that congregations are both unique and remarkably similar. This message, preached to an ancient community, continents away, seems astonishingly contemporary. The ancient preacher's community is exhausted. Tired of serving the world – tired of worship – tired of Christian education – tired of being peculiar and the-odd-one-out in society – tired of the spiritual struggle – tired of trying to keep their prayer life going – tired even of Jesus. Their hands droop and their knees are weak – attendance is down and they are losing confidence. The threat to this community of faith is not that they are charging off in the wrong direction – or splitting their energy in too many different directions – they seem not to have the energy to charge off anywhere at all. The threat for this congregation is that – worn out and worn down – they will drop their end of the rope and drift away. Tired of walking the walk – many of them are considering taking a walk – leaving the group and falling away from the faith.

Believe me I understand fatigue in a whole new way today! Exhaustion that makes one want to give up before the body, mind and spirit give out completely. And you start to wonder what pushes you to keep going.

Faced with the pastoral problem of spiritual weariness which we may all feel familiar with, the Hebrews preacher sticks with the basics – with theology – with the meaning of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This preacher digs into the depths of faith to inspire once again the religious imagination of the people – to generate surprise, wonder, gratitude, and obedience.

The vision of the cloud of witnesses stays with us. The metaphor of the race is evocative even for those who have never run a marathon. And they make sense together. Anyone who has participated in any sort of running or walking event knows that it is the gathered community that often makes it possible to cross the finish line.

The preacher of this ancient sermon has reminded us in the past that faith is not always clearly visible but can be gleaned by the life and behaviour of those in our history and in our everyday lives. The faithfulness of Abel, Noah and Abraham is highlighted. Next comes Moses – the faith

of those who saved him as an infant – his own political action rooted in faith. Now we can hear the tone of the preacher’s voice rising, the pace increasing and the energy of the community of faith coming to fever pitch...

“Think of the people at the Red Sea – think of Jericho and the walls tumbling down – think of Rahab. There are so many to mention. I don’t have enough time. I’d have to talk about Gideon and Barak, Samson, Jephthah – of David and Samuel and the prophets! I’d have to talk about those whose faith conquered kingdoms and shut up lion’s mouths. I’d have to talk about women who were tortured – men who were mighty in war – children of God who were flogged and stoned. So many heroes – superheroes – so many righteous, obedient, suffering people of faith!”

The writer highlights a roll call of people who stood up and kept going in faith. They were able to step out and do extraordinary things without any solid proof that things would work out. That’s what the “therefore” refers to in the final paragraph of today’s reading – the faithfulness of the people – their steadfastness in the life of faith. The author is focused, in this metaphor of athletic competition, not on the field, but on the stands. The imagery is of Moses and Miriam, Jeremiah and Abraham and Sarah and Rahab and Jacob in the bleachers, cheering us on.

In this way the preacher reminds this weary, worn out, diminished congregation of the faithful that they are not alone – never have been – never will be. The preacher offers this litany of examples who responded not just to what they saw, but to what they believed God wanted them to do – to encourage those listening to live not only by sight but also by faith – to prove that they are in the midst of – and among – the many, many witness to God’s presence in the world

That these great ancestors could be deeply flawed yet deeply faithful is very, very encouraging when we must run such a long, long race! It’s a marathon, says the preacher – a long, sometimes difficult road, and we make it because of those who cheer us on. We are runners – members of the crowd – encouraging and being encouraged. It’s not by our own power that we endure or accomplish or even live – no, we do all these things only and always by the power of God within us that is able to accomplish abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine! That is what enables us to run with perseverance the race that is set before us. Christ is with us always – most often in the person of one of the imperfect saints – part of that witnessing cloud – who accompanies us on the way.

The author sees our running with resolve and determination as our confidence in the future vindication of God’s promises. And the words “we” and “us” are used to signal that this is not a solo run. The community of faith journeys together – not in competition but in a spirit of collaboration and encouragement. The surrounding great cloud of witnesses encourages us to the future that God desires, and that Jesus focuses for us.

We are not alone in an isolated history but have survived difficulty and hardship. We have a long story to learn and to share. We have around us, stretching back into the past and on into the future, a great visible and invisible company of faithful. We are surrounded by all who have

served God faithfully – sometimes at great cost – now and in ages past. By those who know our struggles and temptations, because they have struggled with them too. We are surrounded by those who point us toward Jesus and who help us to gain the strength and determination to be faithful ourselves. Think about the great cloud of witnesses in your life and remember that you too are members of the cloud – part of the body and part of the hope.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Amen

➤ *Guide my feet*

† Offering and Prayer

As we give our gifts to God today, let us remember times when God has given us strength in the face of our challenges, and know that our generosity will help others face theirs, as we reach out in Jesus' name.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

Good and gracious God, we bring our offering in gratitude for all that makes our lives good, even in uncertain times. Bless these gifts with your Spirit and use them through the ministry and mission of our church to touch lives in need of your goodness, in Jesus' name. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers (portions from PCC resources)

God of life, you open our eyes on the world you love and show us your presence and purpose all around us. We see the beauty and wonder of your creation in autumn changes, and in gifts of love and compassion offered through friend and stranger. For these many gifts, we give you thanks. We pray for those who cannot recognize these gifts in their lives and find themselves lost and alone...

Open their eyes to your presence through our companionship and open our eyes for opportunities to reach out with understanding.

We thank you O God for the good news of Jesus Christ – that he died for our sins, that he is risen and alive and that he shall return as both Saviour and Judge. Give us we pray greater understanding of and insight into this good news. Help us to live every day in a manner that is true to that good news. Where you give us opportunity, help us to speak confidently to others about our faith. We thank you for all those who have encouraged us in our spiritual journey. Thank you too for the community of faith that is the church – that you have not called us to

follow you on our own. Thank you for those whose example and words have kept us trusting, kept us following you especially when the way has been hard or perplexing.

God of justice, you open our eyes on the world and show us struggle and conflict. We see the stressful times in which we live and the burdens many are carrying. Today, we pray for those whose businesses are still struggling as the pandemic stretches on – for producers unsure their harvests will be sufficient this season – for workers uncertain about their jobs or looking for new work – and for families carrying the stress of economic uncertainty...

Open their eyes to new possibilities and open our eyes to ways we can support them.

Holy One we pray for one another as go out into another week with all the opportunities and challenges we may encounter. We thank you that there is no aspect of our lives that is outside of your concern. We pray for the enabling grace of your Holy Spirit in all that we undertake.

God of compassion, you open our eyes on the world and show us suffering and despair. We pray that we may be sensitive to the needs of those around us, that you might open our eyes and our hearts to see those who need encouragement and those who are struggling. We pray for nurses, doctors, hospital staff and home-care workers, so weary and worried, for those facing acute or chronic illness, and delays in needed treatments, and for communities struggling with COVID-19, overdose deaths and mental health challenges...

Give strength and compassion to all who offer treatment – and courage and hope to all who wait for healing. Open their eyes to your mercy and open our eyes to needs we can meet.

God of wisdom, you open our eyes on the world and show us its complexities. We pray for the millions displaced by current conflicts and natural disasters and for leaders everywhere, trying to find solutions to complex problems – may they be given wisdom and understanding and courage. We pray that each one of us may use whatever power we have with a view to seeing the poor and vulnerable protected and supported, and to promoting good relationships throughout society. We pray that in Christ we may be an influence for God, the gospel and the common good.

God of hope, we offer you our prayers, longing for your peace and promise to break into the lives we care about, for the sake of Jesus, the Christ. Amen

➤ *One more step along the world I go*

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Blessing (adapted from a prayer by Julia Seymour)

May the manifold wonders of the Creator make themselves obvious to you. May the Spirit of unity and community encourage and strengthen you. May the One who is Perfect Love accompany you all of your days. Go in peace to serve in Jesus' name. Amen

➤ *Go now in peace, never be afraid*