

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.

Advent Candle Lighting

Hope is a flame that is given by God.

Hope for a new world burns in our hearts.

Hope burns in the message of the Law and the teaching of the Prophets.

Hope is revealed in Jesus Christ.

(The candle is lit.) Let us pray:

Source of light, burn in our lives and in your world with your renewing hope.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

➤ ***Christ be our light (verses 1 and 2)***

† Prayer and the Lord's Prayer / Words of Hope

God of light and love, our praises and prayers overflow with hope as the season of Advent opens. You come to your people to dwell with us. You come with power – not to dominate, but to transform. You come with promises – not to give us what we want, but to make all things new. You come with signs of your deep love for the world. You come, and your truth breaks forth, shattering lies and half-truths, setting your people free. Your coming is our hope, and so, we offer you our worship in gratitude and anticipation. Come into our lives again, O God, and show us how to hope in the face of all that is discouraging, for we gather in the name of hope made flesh – Jesus Christ – your promise and our desire.

Surprising God, forgive us when we divert our devotion away from you and when we worship with sluggish spirits. Forgive us when we assume that our faith can survive without the nourishment of study and reflection and prayer. Forgive us when we stifle our capacity for wonder and when we insulate ourselves against your grace. Forgive us when we neglect to consider the ways your will can be done on Earth. Forgive us when we forget that the Messiah comes as bearer of peace and as challenger to powers that rule this world. Forgive us and free us to experience a spirited faith as we pray together in Jesus' name... ***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***

God is gracious indeed! This very moment, the steadfast love and thorough forgiveness of our Creator grants us a new start. Thanks be to God!

➤ *Hope is a star*

119

PWS&D Sharing **Hope for Single Mothers in Somalia**

For single mothers living in internally displaced persons camps in Somalia, life is a balancing act. Time is split between caring for their infants and tireless efforts to find work to afford necessities like food.

Single mother Fatuma lives in one such camp with her daughter, Hawa.

At just under two years old, Hawa weighed less than 14 pounds. Despite Fatuma working three jobs, a prolonged lack of nutritious food meant Hawa had lesions on her skin and was terribly anemic—she needed a blood transfusion immediately.

Fatuma brought her daughter to a nearby clinic supported by PWS&D.

“She spent 12 days in the stabilization centre where she was given medicine, nutritional feeds and received a transfusion. I was also given meals while she was admitted,” she shared.

Now, Fatuma can once again hold her daughter close, knowing Hawa has made a full recovery.

This Advent season help make sure children have access to nutritious food so that they can lead healthy lives. *(This project is a collaborative effort led by Development and Peace with matching funds from the Government of Canada at Canadian Foodgrains Bank.)* **WeRespond.ca**

➤ *Emmanuel, Emmanuel*

114

† Prayer for Understanding

Spirit of God, move within us and among us today, as the scripture is read and proclaimed. Shine a clear light to guide us to your truth. Just as we read the signs of the seasons, help us to discern and understand the signs that are in your Word, pointing us to the Living Word – Jesus Christ. Amen

Scripture

Jeremiah 33: 14-16 [OT 738]

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: “The Lord is our righteousness.”

Psalm 25: 1-10 responsive
To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.

Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

**Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord!**

Good and upright is the Lord;
**therefore the Lord instructs sinners in the way, leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches them the way they should go.**

All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep God's covenant and decrees.

Luke 21: 25-36 [NT 85]

There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. Then he told them a parable: Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

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

Message

I remember having a discussion with one of our professors after class one day while attending seminary about what is the greatest evil – the greatest challenge – in our world today. I thought despair – the complete loss of hope, an overwhelming discouragement because circumstances seem too much to cope with. Our professor contended that it was greed – intense and selfish desire, wanting more than one’s share of money, power, food which ultimately results to conflict. Maybe greed leads to despair – or perhaps despair leads to greed. I’m not sure – both are unhealthy.

I read someone else’s assertion this week that the greatest challenge we face today is not war, or economic inequity – not prejudice or unrest – not greed or despair, but fear because it is the root of all the other things.

From Pharaoh in the first chapter of Exodus to today’s despots, fear is the means by which we turn those who are in some fashion different from us into an enemy – people to go to war with. Fear causes us to act with greedy selfishness – to horde, assuming we will never have enough and seeing those around us as competitors for scarce resources. We have certainly seen that in the past week or so very close to home with gas line-ups and empty grocery shelves. Fear drives wedges of distrust into our communities that fracture solidarity and compassion. Fear causes us to define ourselves and those around us not by what we share but by what makes us different. Fear creates an “either/or” and “us/them” mentality that makes it nearly impossible to find common ground, let alone see each other sympathetically. Fear overwhelms our sense of hope and causes us to despair. Fear drives us inward – hardens our hearts, darkens our vision, and stunts our imagination.

I can even see it on the personal level with what my sister is experiencing. Her husband’s diagnosis of a fatal disease is fearsome. It is fast and unrelenting, causing her to face so many decisions and uncertainties. The only thing she is sure of is that he is dying and the hopes and dreams they had as a couple and as a family have been fully shattered. There is much to fear in that unknown.

Perhaps the observation is correct, and fear is our greatest challenge. Perhaps it has always been so. Why else would the most common command and promise in scripture be, “Do not fear” – “I am with you”? More than 120 times across the biblical narrative, some angel or priest or prophet or absolutely ordinary person says, usually on behalf of God, “Do not fear!”

So, listen again to the words of promise and courage embedded in Luke’s gospel today, “*Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.*” It’s a promise that is easy to miss, because “these things” refers to foreboding signs in the earth and heavens, distress and tumult among people, the powers of the day being shaken, and the coming of the apocalyptic “son of man” in power and glory.

Fearful indeed. Even if the unprecedented rain hasn't directly impacted our property or person this past week, we have all seen images of mudslides and bridges washed out – of highways under water or swept completely away. So fearful that *“People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world”*. And yet Jesus tells his disciples – tells us – to *“stand up and raise your heads”*. Not because this is code language or some secret sign that the end of the world is nigh and so eternal victory for the faithful is just around the corner. Rather, because even though *“Heaven and earth will pass away, my words will not pass away.”*

What words? What words will not pass away? What words can we hang onto to push that fear down? What words can help us *stand up and raise our heads*?

We can look to the context of this scene – to its proximity to the commencement of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection – and we find words like... *“This is my body, given for you; this is my blood shed for you.”* Jesus' promise of his continued and real presence with his disciples. *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”* Jesus' promise of forgiveness... no matter what. And one of my favourites, *“Today you will be with me in paradise.”* Jesus' promise of eventual and ultimate rest and comfort. *“Peace be with you.”* Jesus' promise that his resurrection spells an end to death and the cycle of violence and revenge. *“You are witnesses to these things.”* Jesus' promise of purposeful and fruitful work for his disciples to spread the message of goodwill and peace articulated from the very beginning of the gospel.

Jesus continually promises not to abandon his disciples – not to abandon us – amid the tumult and trauma of the world but to be with them – with us – to strengthen and encourage – to equip, not merely to endure the challenges of the day but to flourish. Remember, Jesus' promises do not eliminate fear or hardship from the lives of his disciples – then or now – but they can create courage, the ability to be faithful, to do one's duty, to retain vision and compassion and empathy, even while afraid.

Which means that even amid the tumult and trauma of our age, we are not helpless. While we still await Jesus' complete redemption, we have good work to do in the meantime. And we undertake the good work of being Jesus' disciples in the world – the work of compassion for those who are hurting, encouragement to those who are afraid, solidarity with those who are oppressed, resistance to evil, forgiveness for those who have wronged us, and acceptance of all of God's people – not because we believe our actions will change the world, but because we know Christ's resurrection **has already** changed the world. We act with the confidence that Jesus' promises are trustworthy.

At times our various actions of compassion and encouragement and solidarity and resistance and forgiveness and acceptance may seem like very small gestures. But in light of Jesus' promise, we realize that there are no small gestures, only actions motivated by the love and courage of

Christ. And I firmly believe that no action done in love and courage – no matter how small – is ever wasted.

So, our words of encouragement to those who are suffering, our financial donations from limited resources, our challenges to those who horde or ignore the dignity of others, our forgiveness of those who have wronged us, and our willingness to accept the tragedies that befall us – they all count – they all make a difference. This is how we *stand up and raise our heads*. This is how we dispel despair and keep our hearts open. This is how we keep seeing the good and retain our imagination.

When we were driving to the hospice on Thursday morning – a trip Anne makes every day so that she can spend twelve hours with her husband, never knowing for sure if he recognizes her or can understand what she says to him, never knowing when those last hours will come – while we were stopped at a light, she turned her head to the left and the right looking at the wide open Calgary sky saying, “Look at the clouds, they are so beautiful. They are different in each direction. So amazing.”

As I reflect on that it seems to me that she is somehow able to *stand up and raise her head* despite the fear and disappointment and anger and fatigue that must fill her. Somehow, she is seeing the good and keeping her heart open to the power and majesty of God’s creation. In that moment she inspired me and reminded me that it is not our job to fix it all – to save the world – because Jesus has promised to do that – Jesus is the saviour who has come and is coming again. We can care for those in our circle. We can offer an alternative to the fear that corrodes and disables. We can offer courage and compassion as we obey Christ’s command in the context of current local disasters and global strife and personal heartbreaks to *stand up and raise our heads, because our redemption is drawing near*. Thanks be to God.

➤ *Lo! Christ comes with clouds* 120

† Offering and Prayer

We make our offering today with hopeful hearts, trusting that the Holy One who comes to us will bless our gifts and our lives, to make us signs of hope in the world God loves.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

Holy and Righteous God, we offer our gifts with humble hearts, knowing the need in your world is great and our gifts alone will never fill that need. We offer our gifts in hope that you will bless them and use them to help fulfil your purposes revealed in Jesus Christ. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers

Holy God - help us to look forward in hope – to keep this present moment with all its troubles and all its joys in context, to remember that Christ is coming again just as surely he came at first. Help us Lord to look forward in hope and to live now in peace...

As we enter the Season of Advent, O God – as we prepare for Christmas, let this be a season that is more than hustle and bustle, make it more for us than a time of buying and selling, more than a time of worrying and of celebrating. Make it for us a time of true blessedness, a time of ceasing – a time of Sabbath in which we pray and share your love with others, a time in which we turn to your word and speak hope to those who despair...

Gracious God, we pray that you would move in the lives of those feel that no light can shine in their darkness, in the hearts of those who are depressed in mind and spirit; and in the bodies and souls of those who are sick and suffering and alone. Be too with those who are oppressed and afflicted – with all who suffer unjustly in this world...

Strengthen and bless those whom we especially hold before you now in our hearts and lift up before you within this time of silent prayer...

We offer these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour, he who has died and who has risen and who will come again. Amen

➤ *Come, thou long-expected Jesus* **110**

Blessing (from 1 Thessalonians 3)

Now may our God and our Lord Jesus direct our way. And may the Lord make us increase and abound in love for one another and for all. And may God so strengthen our hearts in holiness that we may be blameless before the Lord at the coming of Jesus with all the saints. And may the grace and peace of Jesus, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Spirit embrace us all. Amen

➤ *Go now in peace (round)* **622**