

Welcome and Land Acknowledgement

As we come to worship in Jesus' name we acknowledge with gratitude and respect the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – on whose traditional and unceded territory we gather. We 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.*

Call to Worship

Beloved, God chooses us and calls us by name.

We belong to God.

Our lives have purpose because we belong to God.

We are called to be like Christ and follow him.

We find joy, peace, and restoration through God's amazing grace.

Let us worship God who claims us and loves us! Praise be to God!

➤ *Gathered in the love of Christ (chorus only – repeated) attached*

† Prayer / Words of Hope

Holy One, to you all hearts are open, all desires known and from you no secrets are hidden. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your name.

Creator God, you revealed your son in the swirling waters of the Jordan – draw near to us today. Enlighten us and hear our prayer...

Redeemer Jesus, you stooped down to gently wash the feet of those who followed you – draw near to us this morning. Teach us and hear our prayer...

Sustaining Spirit, your presence broods over us always – draw near to us now. Comfort us and hear our prayer...

By the waters of baptism, you immersed us into the life and work of your church, O God – you welcomed us and called us to abundant life.

We confess that the lure of the secular is often more powerful than the call of the sacred. We wait in humble silence, asking that you reveal to us those things we have done or left undone that are against your will...

Forgive us, we pray, and shower us with your grace that we may find renewed joy in witnessing to your glory through our words and our work. Amen

With confidence we immerse ourselves in God's love – knowing that in faith we rise again as Christ's disciples and our sins are forgiven!

➤ *Today I awake*

† Prayer for Understanding

Gracious and loving God may your light descend upon us like a dove – filling us with your word, your wisdom, your hope. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen

Scripture

Isaiah 43: 1-7 [OT 672]

But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life.

Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; I will say to the north, "*Give them up,*" and to the south, "*Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth – everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.*"

Psalm 29 [responsive]

Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and strength.

Give unto the LORD the glory due unto God's name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.

The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thunders: the LORD is upon many waters.

The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

God makes them also to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn.

The voice of the LORD divides the flames of fire.

The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

The voice of the LORD makes the hinds to calve, and discovers the forests: and in God's temple every one speaks of God's glory.

The LORD sits upon the flood; the LORD sits enthroned for ever.

O LORD, give strength to your people!

O LORD, bless your people with peace!

Acts 8: 14-17 [NT 126]

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22 [NT 60]

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, *"I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."*

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, *"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."*

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

Message

Crazy times – right!? We really thought we had turned the corner on Covid and then the Omicron variant showed up. Now all those cloth masks are deemed not effective enough and we all need a vaccine booster too. I got mine on Friday. We were getting comfortable again and suddenly we are reluctant to let our guard down.

We were expecting visitors for New Years – nothing wild mind you, just a few family members and games and a bottle of bubbles or two. But no one came. Uncertainty about whether it would compromise one's health or the health of someone in long term care – if those visits would be curtailed. Uncertainty about the weather – what is with all this snow and cold and black ice anyway? So Steve and I enjoyed a nice dinner and an early evening and hope to celebrate with family in 2022.

I fell a few times shortly before Christmas – nothing serious but I couldn't run for a few days. And then the weather changed and even walking the dog has become a challenge – an Olympic level feat! So although I was planning to get out for some long runs, try out my new headlamp and maybe even get a bike ride in – none of it happened. I was looking forward to it but things have not turned out as I planned.

Maybe that has happened to you too this year – or at some point in your life. It shouldn't surprise us that plans get interrupted by "life". You plan a trip and you or your partner gets sick so things

are rescheduled – canceled. I know that has happened for some of you in the past year or so. Or events you have signed up for were not able to go ahead and your registration fee was deferred to the next year – or the year after that! Maybe you budget to buy new glasses but when you go for your check-up your prescription is unchanged so now you have “extra” cash! You are preparing for a quiet evening at home – dinner and TV or reading a book but you get a chance to go to the opera with someone who has a ticket they can’t use. You think your family is complete when suddenly you are expecting another child. You plan to work five more years until retirement, but the company is downsizing so you “take the package” and wonder what you will do with all your free time. You think that this Christmas will be just like all the others when suddenly a loved one dies, and all your plans are thrown out the window – gone like so much dust in the wind.

We plan our life, but we also learn to adapt to whatever comes our way because it is rare that our plans remain completely intact – sometimes the interruptions are welcome and sometimes they are devastating but they happen none the less. Which is exactly what it suggests in our scripture from the prophet Isaiah today. It is the little word “When...” in verse 2 that tips us off. God does not say that the people will avoid deep waters, raging rivers, and fiery trials – rather it is implied that believers in the God of Jacob and Israel can pretty much expect to face such struggles. The promise is not wholesale avoidance of difficulties but an abiding divine presence in them. And, while it is good to know that God sticks with us in life’s trials – is present no matter what – in the events we plan and in the unexpected that excites, overwhelms, or confuses – that doesn’t necessarily make the trials and disturbances of life comfortable or easy to take.

There is no question that we will have interruptions – things we hadn’t expected to get through – and in all of it the promise is that God will be with us. Our text today is shot through with lyric imagery and hope. We are assured that all is forgiven – all is restored – the lost will be gathered in, and we will be protected no matter what. Do not fear – I have redeemed you – I am with you.

There is a literary device called an *inclusio* that brackets the passage in which God makes clear that the people being addressed through the prophet Isaiah – you and me – belong to God alone.

Verse 1 says: *But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel...* Essentially: I made you and so you are mine. You belong to me. I am the potter – you are the clay – and whatever shape you have is due to my creative work. I own you.

And at verse 7: *everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.* Which is something like: my name is your name, and you don’t exist for your own sakes or to make a name for yourself or to generate some sense of glory or pride as an end unto itself. No, I made you so you could glorify me. You exist to make me known, not yourselves or your own accomplishments. The bragging rights are mine, says God!

God’s good news is true for us as we recognize and accept our identity as God’s people. God loves us because God made us – we are held by loving hands. When we abandon ourselves to

the God who made us – we can be confident that God will never abandon us, even when our best laid plans are interrupted for whatever reason.

It would be wonderful to begin the year telling you that everything is in order – that all is right with the world – that all is unfolding according to plan. It would be lovely to suggest that it is all sunshine and light and that it will be a perfect year. It would be nice to say – and in God's time such promises will be fulfilled – but for now all we know is that not everything is happening exactly as planned – interruptions are certain – trials do come, will come. Some are personal and some are worldwide – some are exciting opportunities – some fill us with despair or fear or profound sadness – some are mixed blessings.

It has been said that tough times don't last but tough people do, yet that flies in the face of our message today. There are many whose lives are filled with difficulties – a litany of tough patches. Sometimes it is a string of challenges one after another. Sometimes it's one overarching problem or wound that goes on and on for decades that colours everything in a person's life. Sometimes tough times do last – sometimes the interruption becomes the norm – a way of life and so we must cope with that too.

Whether challenges come and stay for years or prove to be more fleeting interruptions in the pattern of our lives, it is not the toughness of the people that makes the difference but the tough and fierce providential love and care of God. Nowhere in scripture are we thrown back onto our own resources. We're not told that our own optimism or strength of character is what will see us through. When the waters get deep, when the rivers in which we're sunk neck-deep get violent, when the fires of life's trials lick at our flesh, it is the abiding presence of God that reassures us.

This promise is for you – whoever you are and whatever the circumstances of your drought and danger. And this promise is also for us as a community of faith – for the church. Hang in there. Trust in the Lord. You don't need to be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel before you can take the next step. Give us today our daily bread. Not tomorrow's – just enough for today. Keep going, resolutely and faithfully knowing that you are precious in God's sight - beloved.

God is with us – this is what God does, over and over and over – in scripture, in history, in your life and in your circumstances, in the world. God is with us – the Spirit of God is at work – God's people are sustained.

What we cling to in utter hope is that God goes with us in and through all that we plan and all that interrupts those plans. God is with us in every moment – transforming and renewing our experience. Things may well get worse before they get better, but still the promise remains, we will not be finally swept away or drowned or burned up. There will always be a new thing yet to come in God's grace and in God's slow kingdom coming.

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you – Do not fear, for I am with you...

† Offering and Prayer

In the season of Epiphany, God's gift to us in Christ is revealed to the world. Our gifts to God in Christ's name reveal our commitment to the love and mercy – the forgiveness and hope we have received. Our gifts proclaim that we are beloved to God and God is beloved to us.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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God our Maker, we bring our gifts to you in thanksgiving for your gifts to us in Christ and in creation. Bless what we bring and who we are, so that our gifts will bless the world you love in Christ's 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

Gathering at the Lord's Table

This is the table of the Lord. It is the table of companionship with Jesus – all who love him and all who want to love him more. Come, not because you are strong, but because you are weak. Come, not because any goodness of your own gives you a right to come, but because you need mercy and help. Come, because you love the Lord a little and would like to love him more. Come, it is Christ who invites us to meet him here. Come, let us feast!

➤ *Deep in our hearts*

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to our Creator 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...

Through the words of your prophets, you gave your people hope by promising them a redeemer. And now we rejoice that in your Son – Jesus Christ – the Savior has come and will come again in power and glory making all things new.

When we were nothing, you made us something. When we had no name and no faith and no future – you called us your children. When we lost our way, or turned away, you did not abandon us. In Jesus the Word became flesh, giving us a vision of your glory that all people might be brought into your marvelous light.

When we came back to you, your arms opened wide in welcome. You prepare a table for us – offering, not just bread, not just wine – but your very self so that we may be filled, forgiven, healed, blessed and made new again.

...In gratitude, we join our voices with the whole creation to lift our hearts in joyful praise...

O holy, holy, holy God, O God of time and space. All earth and sea and sky above bear witness to your grace. Hosanna in the highest heav'n, creation sings your praise. And blessed is the one who comes and bears your name always!

Generous God, we give you thanks for Jesus, who came to live with us...

For us you were born... for us you healed, preached, taught and showed the way to heaven; and for us, after death, you rose again.

We give you thanks, O God that on the night of his arrest Jesus sat down to eat with friends. During the meal, he took bread, said a prayer, broke it and shared it with everyone at the table, saying: "This is my body which is for you. Do this to remember me."

At the end of the meal, 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."

Gracious God, following Jesus' example, we take this bread and this wine, the ordinary things of the world, which Christ makes special. We know that with you is mercy and the power to change us. Therefore, we proclaim the mystery of faith...

Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again! Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again!

Pour out your grace upon us, O God, and upon the simple gifts of this meal. Send your Spirit on us and on what we do here as we gather at the Lord's Table to eat and drink of the living Word. May we be one in Christ and one with your vision of peace and plenty.

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

Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen! Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen!

Sharing Bread and Wine

The one who was first held by Mary is held for us in this bread.

The one whose body was laid in a manger, is cradled 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 communion package. Everyone consumes the elements together in their own space...

† Prayer

Most holy God, you led people from far away, to find the mystery unveiled in Christ Jesus. May we, who have come from even further away, never take your revelation for granted. Keep alive in our hearts wonder and praise – make us eager to share that light with everyone, without exception.

We give thanks, O God, for this holy mystery in which you have given yourself to us. We ask your blessing as we seek to serve you willingly and cheerfully, affirming your command and desire that we love one another. During this time of silence, we name in our hearts those for whom we crave your healing touch...

Holy One be to each of us inner warmth and light. Bless all whose hands reach out to others this day. We bring our prayers in the name of Jesus who encourages us to taste and see the wonders of your grace as we sing together...

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

Blessing

Live each day knowing that you are a beloved child of God. And may the grace of the Living Lord, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all.

➤ ***Go now in peace (round) 622***