

Welcome, Announcements, 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.

➤ *Gathered in the love of Christ*

Call to Worship

For a tree to flower and bear fruit it must be planted in the proper soil, showered with water and warmed with the sun.

We, who want to fulfill the will of our Creator, seek the solid ground of God, the living water of Jesus and the radiant light of the Holy Spirit.

We come for nourishment and encouragement as we worship together. Let us pray...

† Prayer and Words of Hope

We gather this morning as a circle of friends within the greater circle of faith O God and we give you thanks that you embrace us with your love and power.

Holy God, encourage us to love our true selves. To cherish that deep soul which is poor, meek, hungry, sorrowful often persecuted, and which yearns for communion with you. Set us free to reach for you with joyful worship, overflowing with wonderment and love.

We know you root those who trust in you by streams of healing water. As we gather today, release us from the bonds of disease, free us from the power of evil, and turn us from falsehood and illusion, that we may find the blessing of new life in you through the power of Christ. Amen

Christ has been raised from death, and because he has been raised, we are no longer lost in sin. Blessed are you, for Christ will raise you to life and laughter. Your sins are forgiven – be at peace.

➤ *I rest in God alone*

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† Prayer for Understanding

O God, our strength, lift us up on wings as a mother eagle supporting her young. When we are weary, restore us to your purpose and fill us with your hope. Open your word this morning to our yearning hearts. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen

Scripture

Jeremiah 17: 5-10 [OT 719]

Thus says the LORD: *Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the LORD. They shall be like a shrub in the desert and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.*

Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought, it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.

The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse -- who can understand it? I the LORD test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.

1 Corinthians 15: 12-20 [NT 176]

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain, and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ – whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised.

For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.

Luke 6: 17-26 [NT 64]

He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon.

They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said: *"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets."*

"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets."

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

Message

Our texts today are connected by the theme of identity – who and whose we are. In Jeremiah we are either those who place our trust in mortals or those who place our trust in God. Who are you? God knows – God *searches the heart*. Paul says we are those who believe in – put our faith in – the resurrection. Otherwise *our faith is futile*. Luke, in this Sermon on the Plain, identifies us as disciples – followers – and apostles - messengers. Who am I?

Henri Nouwen, A Dutch Catholic Priest, whose work many of you may be familiar with, wants us to identify as beloved – as beloved children of God. It is at the core of much of his writing and teaching about spirituality and identity.

Who am I? It is a question we ask ourselves – a question we need to answer for others from time to time. Nouwen says we approach our answer in three ways: *I am what I do; I am what other people say about me; and I am what I have.*

Who am I? I am a minister, a teaching elder, a teacher and leader. I am a runner, a reader, cyclist. I am hardworking, reliable, smart, impatient, kind. Some say I'm funny and a good cook. I am a homeowner, a member of a family, a dog parent. I have two degrees and a respectable vocation. Am I what I do, what people might say about me, and what I have? Or am I perhaps one who trusts in God, believes in the resurrection, and seeks to follow Jesus, sharing the good news?

Who am I? Who are you?

In Luke's gospel today, Jesus comes down from the mountain where he has been praying, and where he has appointed twelve of his disciples to also be his apostles. He walks among the crowd made up of people who have come from up to a hundred miles away to hear him teach and to be healed by him. Along with the crowd and the twelve, there are other disciples as well – disciples and would-be disciples. And into that multitude Jesus offers an invitation to a new understanding of self – a invitation to a new connection and relationship through these *blessings and woes*.

It is while Jesus is going among the crowd and healing them that he looks up to his disciples to deliver this sermon. Luke makes it clear that Jesus is speaking to the disciples, even though the crowd is obviously listening in, and has, in fact, come to listen to Jesus teach. But he looks right at the disciples and, without saying it directly, presents a list of blessing and woes that name some of the very fundamentals of human self-identity. Who am I? Am I what I have? Am I what I do? Am I what people say about me?

In his words, we can hear various answers to the “Who am I?” question: *I am poor, I am hungry, I am weeping, I am rejected and ridiculed. I am rich, I am content with myself, I am laughing about my success, I am someone whom everyone admires...* I am what I do (weep or succeed) – I am what I have (plenty or not enough) – I am what people say/think about me (good or ill, truth or lies).

Our sense of self is about reckoning with how we self-identify and what we feel connected to. Underlying the blessings and the woes is a necessary understanding about connection. These disciples have chosen a particular relationship to Jesus – a special connection. They have left jobs and a way of life to learn from their rabbi – they have chosen to identify intimately with Jesus. The crowds who have come to hear and to be healed have come for the moment, but the disciples/apostles are in it for the long haul. To disciple/apostle – to follow and proclaim – is for life – it truly answers the question, “Who am I?”

The descriptions we use to identify ourselves are deeply rooted – they describe the connection we hold with what we believe to be true (positively and negatively). Nouwen’s desire for people to know that they are the beloved of God was not only extremely biblical, it is also life-giving, worldview transforming, and purpose shaping. When we identify as God’s beloved we root ourselves in God and Christ. We place our trust in God above all else. That is the persistent invitation from God in scripture.

So we need to reconsider our thoughts about identity and how this passage shows answers to the “Who am I?” question. What Jesus is saying here isn’t that we, as his disciples, must choose to be poor – to be hungry – to always be full of mourning – or to willingly seek out rejection and defamation – just as we are not to seek to be rich – content with ourselves – callous to the needs of others while we live the good life – nor to cultivate a persona that makes us a friend to all.

No, the point that Jesus is making is about connection – relationship. He’s helping to give the disciples something about their identity to hold onto when the bad times come. In spite of having experiences of need – poverty, hunger, grief, rejection – as his disciples who are connected to him, they are blessed – beloved. And not only are they blessed because they belong to him, they will experience the great reversal that is the coming kingdom of God. This is such a major theme in Luke’s gospel – we hear it in the magnificat, in the story of the Samaritan, the prodigal...

In a beautiful reflection on Jesus’s upside down kingdom, Frederick Buechner writes: *“The world says, ‘Mind your own business,’ and Jesus says, ‘There is no such thing as your own business.’ The world says, ‘Follow the wisest course and be a success,’ and Jesus says, ‘Follow me and be crucified.’ The world says, ‘Drive carefully — the life you save may be your own’ — and Jesus says, ‘Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.’ The world says, ‘Law and order,’ and Jesus says, ‘Love.’ The world says, ‘Get’ and Jesus says, ‘Give.’ In terms of the world's sanity, Jesus is crazy as a coot, and anybody who thinks he can follow him without being a little crazy too is laboring less under a cross than under a delusion.”*

The disciples are promised the kingdom – to be filled – promised that they will laugh. Their identity, connection, and rootedness in Christ propels them into the great future God will bestow. Jesus says that his disciples are blessed when these sufferings present themselves – when we are rejected by others on account of our relationship with him. And he says that when other people see this connection to Christ so clearly that they respond to it – even if their response is negative – then his disciples ought to rejoice and leap for joy and to know that their reward – the fulfillment of their identity – is yet to come. They have – we have – everything to look forward to.

The woes are like warnings to those who, instead identifying with and being connected to God or Jesus, appear to be connected only to themselves and to the present moment. Their futures are dark and woeful, full of the trouble and the suffering they seemed to not have worried about others experiencing.

In The Message, Eugene Peterson’s interpretation of the Biblical text, it is put this way: *“But it’s trouble ahead if you think you have it made. What you have is all you’ll ever get. And it’s trouble ahead if you’re satisfied with yourself. Your self will not satisfy you for long. And it’s trouble ahead if you think life’s all fun and games. There’s suffering to be met, and you’re going to meet it. There’s trouble ahead when you live only for the approval of others, saying what flatters them, doing what indulges them. Popularity contests are not truth contests...”*

So, Jesus is standing among the crowds and speaking to his disciples – his apostles – about identity and connection. He is inviting them to continue to choose to be his follower and his messenger – to be rooted in him rather than themselves or their circumstances. He is laying before them the mindset that will allow them to be rooted in the truth, no matter their circumstances. Who am I? Who are you? In this world, we will have trouble, but our identity is connected to Jesus so we are the blessed disciples – beloved children of God. Amen

➤ ***This is the threefold truth*** **365**

† Offering

Our faith does not rely on human wisdom, but on the power of God working in us and among us. So we bring our offering, trusting that each gift has a power beyond itself, the power God gives. Trust in the miracle of God at work in the world through the gifts we bring.

➤ ***Praise God from whom all blessings flow*** **306**

God, you are the Source of our lives. From you, all loving kindness, justice and mercy flow. Bless these gifts so that acts of kindness, justice and mercy may flow through them, too. And bless our lives so our words and actions show your Spirit at work in us and through us, in the name of Jesus Christ, our friend and Saviour. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

God of light and truth, as your blessing rests upon us may our eyes be open to your word that lives in us, written on our hearts. May our eyes be open to your light and truth that guides us in every part of our daily walk. May our eyes be open to your light and truth that lead us to walk in ways we do not yet know with companions we may not choose. May your light and truth enable us to see your unpredictable Spirit walking alongside us every step of the way, giving us courage to venture into unknown territory.

Spirit of God, we pray for peace. Not only the cessation of war, but that peace that is beyond our understanding. Peace that is forged when closed fists are opened in sharing, when closed hearts are opened in caring and when closed minds are opened to possibility for all to share in the rich resources of the earth and of all creation.

Loving God, you have equipped your church with all the gifts needed to fulfil your divine desire for a restored creation. May we be willing to change the narrative from one of scarcity to one of abundance. May each of us seek to discern your purpose for our lives and offer ourselves willingly in service. May we harness the gifts and know the power of your Spirit as she weaves her way in and around us, changing us and enabling us together to bring good news for every generation.

May we nurture one another in faith, learn from one another and work together with you – Creator, Redeemer, Spirit. You have blessed us with every good thing, may we be a blessing to others, here and everywhere, now and always as we join our voices in prayer... ***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, forever. Amen***

➤ ***God of the sparrow, God of the whale*** **307**

Blessing

Go in peace – serve and love the Lord your God. Go in the power of the Holy Spirit – fulfil our calling as the people of God – the body of Christ. And may the grace of divine presence embrace us all. Amen

➤ ***Go now in peace (round)*** **622**