

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.

➤ ***Gathered in the love of Christ***

Call to Worship

God who made all things and is beyond our imagining...

Thank you for the gift of life – the gift of today – the gift of this space.

Jesus Christ who came into our world to be with us...

Thank you for your healing presence – your life – your friendship,

Divine Spirit who animates us with the resurrection life of God...

Breathe on us – be in our midst – enliven our worship.

We are here – you are here...

May that be enough.

Though we see dimly – though we know only in part – though you are a mystery...

We long for you – we look for you – we wait for you in worship together.

➤ ***Let us build a house (verses 1, 2, 4, 5)***

† Gathering Prayer and Words of Hope

Living God, come to us this day. Prepare our hearts and minds to meet you in this time of worship. We gather in the company of your people that we may know you better – love you with a fresh love – and delight to do your will.

Out of our darkness we come to you for light – out of our sorrows we come to you for joy – out of our doubts we come to you for assurance – out of our worries we come to you for peace – out of our failures we come to you for forgiveness. Draw near to us, O God, and meet our every need.

We come, conscious of our need for forgiveness – for words spoken which we cannot take back – for opportunities missed that we now regret and foolish or willful decisions that have affected others. Forgive us for attitudes that have puffed us up and put others down – for actions that have hurt others and harmed ourselves. Lord, have mercy on us.

Take our lives – cleanse, heal and renew – that we may worship and serve you with grateful hearts. **Amen**

Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, as you have been forgiven. Thanks be to God.



† Prayer for Understanding

God of wisdom, your Word brings life and hope. By the power of your Spirit, open our minds to understanding, teach our hearts to love, and strengthen our wills to follow Jesus, your Living Word. Amen

Scripture

Psalm 37: 1-11, 39-40 [responsive/displayed]

Do not fret because of the wicked; do not be envious of wrongdoers, for they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb.

Trust in the Lord, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security. Take delight in the Lord, who will give you the desires of your heart.

Commit your way to the Lord; trust in the Lord, who will act. The Lord will make your vindication shine like the light, and the justice of your cause like the noonday.

Be still and wait patiently before the Lord; do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices.

Refrain from anger and forsake wrath. Do not fret – it leads only to evil. For the wicked shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land.

Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there. But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.

The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; who is their refuge in the time of trouble.

The Lord helps them and rescues them; rescues them from the wicked, and saves them, because they take refuge in the Lord.

Luke 6: 27-38 [NT 64]

But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.

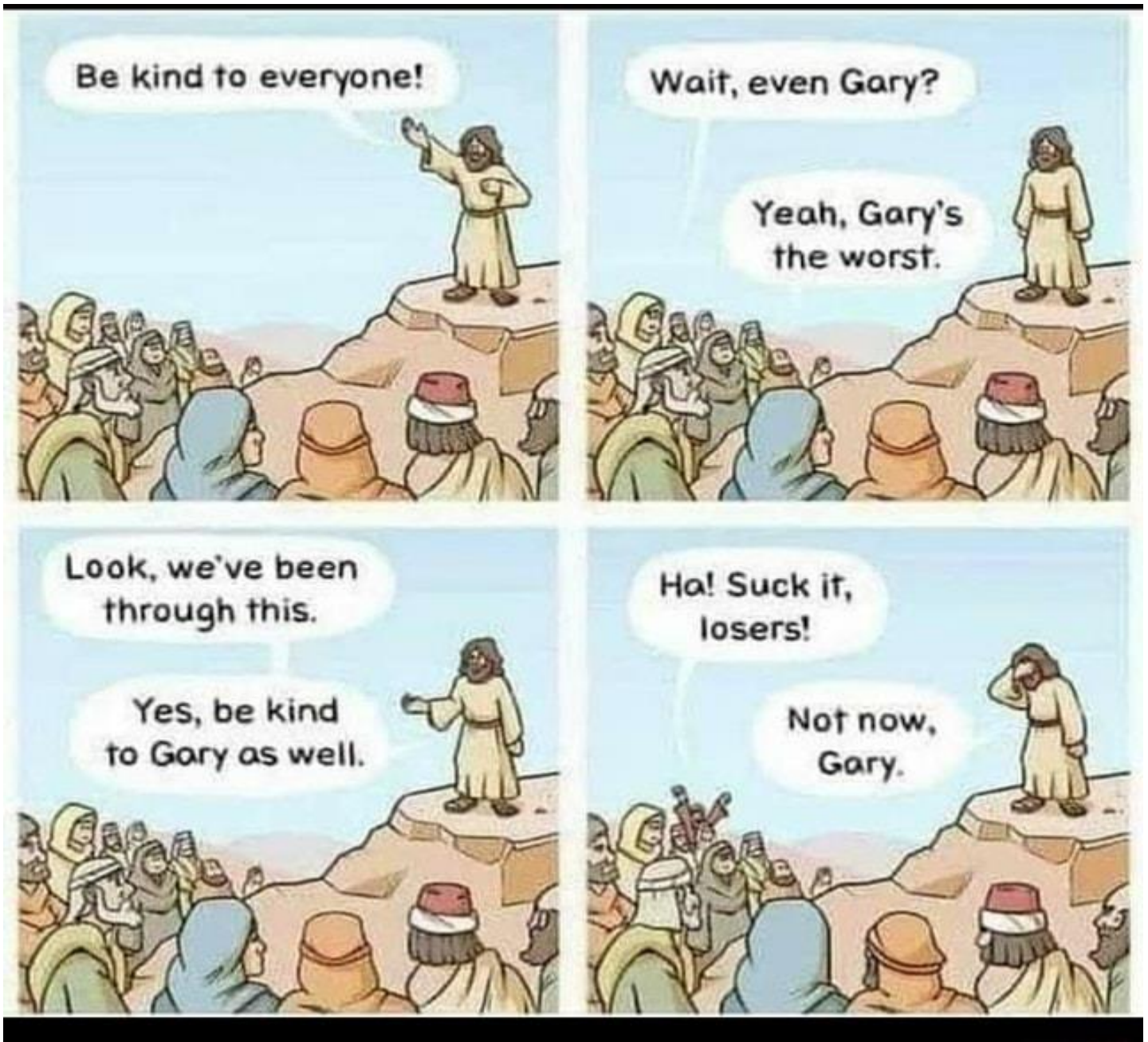
This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message

Do you ever listen to *Quirks and Quarks* on CBC radio? I recently listened to a segment devoted to love – why we love – the science of love. It was fascinating. The guest, evolutionary anthropologist Anna Machin, talked about love in many forms – including romantic and parental love, the love of friends and religious devotion. She has studied the neurobiology of love – how our brains show and respond to love. She asserts that love provides a kind of brain chemical reward for our attachments with one another – even for our attachment to God. It is much more complex that I can synthesize for you this morning so I encourage you to look it up if you can. One of the key things she talked about however is that love is more motivation than emotion and it is as critical to us as food, water and shelter – a basic need that is vital to our individual, societal and evolutionary well being.

I think it is important to have this understanding of love as far more than mere emotion when approaching the text from Luke's gospel this morning. I was reminded of something that was reinforced for Steve and I when we attended Marriage Encounter – *love is a decision*. Whether in romantic or parental love, in friendship or with the divine – love is a decision. And when it comes to loving our enemies as Jesus calls us to do, that is a decision too. However it is a decision we often resist – one we find extraordinarily challenging.

As is our habit at the *Inclusive Christians: Around the Table* gathering on Wednesday evenings, we read and reflected upon this gospel text this week. The push back on what the text asks of us was interesting. Some saying that they would not turn the other cheek because they had been bullied in their childhood. Others questioning the assertion that there is no value in loving those who love you – because there is, isn't there? And judging – we do it all the time when we dispute the actions of others in our society. So, *love our enemies – forgive – be as merciful as God*? Surely the text can't be right – surely Jesus isn't serious about this.



It looks like maybe he is because in this continuation of the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus overturns prudential decision-making. Followers of Jesus are to live by another standard – generosity, forgiveness, economic fairness, reconciliation, love of enemies and strangers, prizing the well-being of others as much as one’s own well-being. Followers of Jesus are to imitate the God, incarnate in their Saviour: an all-inclusive, forgiving, welcoming, justice making, relational God. God doesn’t separate the world into good and bad, in and out, saved and unsaved, rather all creation is embraced by God’s loving heart. God’s power in the world is relational and loving, not coercive and violent.

At least, that’s my vision of the divine.

Good theology involves the interplay of vision, promise, and practice. Our vision of reality, our theological perspective – our vision of God’s presence in the world and our lives – shapes our hopes and inspires our practical behavior. Living by that vision inspires us to trust that we will be what we see, if we see the light, we will be the light. How we view the world shapes our values and attitudes toward those with whom we are in conflict and our political perspective as well as in the interactions of everyday life. Our images of God – as loving or as dictatorial – will be reflected in our political involvement and attitudes toward “otherness.” I suppose it may also be the case that our images of God mimic our values – a loving God reflects loving values, a pluralistic God reflects affirmation of diversity whereas a violent binary God reflects the politics of power and exclusion. If God is trustworthy, moving providentially in our lives and the world, we can move beyond self-interest, polarization, and grudge-holding to reconciling activities.

We also see it in the Psalm for today – trusting God liberates us from fear and anger. Knowing that God is with us inspires us to align our ethics and behavior with God’s way, rather than self-interest or vindictiveness. So we seek to discern God’s way and then living in accordance with it. Knowing that we are in God’s hands, we neither need to fear nor conform to the values of our world. Aligning with God’s way provides the greatest joy and is the pathway to true success in life therefore we can trust that all will be well. The psalmist tells us three times in these verses: *do not fret* – do not fret over what it is beyond you to change because in the long run it will only lead to evil.

Ah – I really needed to hear that. You see I have been in danger lately of being filled with disappointment, despair, anger, even hate. I have been judging and condemning those I see as undermining our community and our country. I have been unloving. I have been fretting. And what the psalmist says is true – it is filling me with a kind of evil – a sick feeling that overwhelms and causes me to lose heart. And that is not just bad for my health, it’s bad theology!

I believe our texts today invite us to become large-spirited persons and congregations, who in the scrum of life, build relationships rather than walls and go the second mile to reach out to adversaries and join God in healing the world. Today’s readings describe the moral wisdom of God. God’s divine presence is motivated by love, healing, abundance, and reconciliation, and this image of divine wisdom serves as the guide and model for our relationships, ethics, and politics.



If this is my image of God – divine wisdom motivated by love, healing, abundance and reconciliation – then I am called to become like that too. And this really challenges me – I want to push back and say – that can't be what you mean Jesus – but I think it is. We are – I am – called to do more and be more than average – more than the minimum – more than what “sinners” do. We are – I am to be generous with my decision to love – generous in giving – generous in doing good beyond the minimum expectations of this world – beyond what I might expect to receive in return. Judgement and condemnation will fill me with a poison that is debilitating and ultimately self-defeating but loving and doing good will bless me and encourage me. In fact, according to neurobiology, evoking a loving motivation will change my brain chemistry, rewarding my decision to love as God loves – to be merciful as God is merciful.

But Jesus says to those who are still listening, love your enemies, do good, bless others, be generous in material ways and generous in forgiveness. Be merciful. Stop judging – it's bringing you nothing but heartache. Your criticism has the effect of condemning yourself to unhappiness. Whatever you put out into the world is what you are going to get back so why not decide to love?

➤ ***O for a world where everyone*** **730**

† Offering

God is the source of all goodness. Through our offering, we express our thanks for every good thing we enjoy, and we share good things with those in need. Be generous, as God is generous, so that the world may know that God is good.

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

God of generous love, we bring our gifts with grateful hearts, for we have received so much through your kindness. Bless our gifts and use them to touch lives in situations we cannot even imagine with your love. Make us a blessing in our community for the sake of Christ, our Friend and Saviour. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

God of all life, you created us and set us in relationship with each other – in families and neighbourhoods – in communities and countries – in cultures and nations. Today we give you thanks for all the gifts of home life and community celebration which bring meaning and encouragement to our lives. Thank you for the blessings we know through the contributions of those who have gone before us. Help us offer what we can to sustain the wellbeing of our community and country, so that all who make it their home will find security and dignity.

God of the whole human family, hear our prayers for your world.

God of our faith and our future, there are so many pressures we face today, so many problems without simple solutions. Draw near to anyone who is struggling in economic difficulty, and all those burdened by challenges to their health and happiness. Guide us all through the changing face of the pandemic, and support all those who are finding the stress overwhelming. Ease any conflict in homes and workplaces and inspire solutions that express mutual respect and deeper understanding. Help us share with others the hope we find in your presence.

God of the whole human family, hear our prayers for your world.

God of mercy and forgiveness, you call us to live together in peace and unity. We pray for our neighbourhoods and the nations of this world. Where people are divided and bitterness turns into resentment, show us how to work for reconciliation. Where violence and fear turn neighbour against neighbour, or nation against nation, equip leaders to work for justice that will bring peace. Help us build a world where children enjoy a future filled with good health and happiness.

God of the whole human family, hear our prayers for your world.

God, our hope and our help, send your Spirit to equip our congregation with skill and resilience to weather the challenges the pandemic has brought for our life together. Strengthen friendships, new and old, and make us a source of encouragement and connection to each other. Help each one find a place and a purpose in our mission and ministry for it is as your children that 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, forever. Amen***

➤ ***Spirit of God, descend upon my heart*** **382**

Blessing

Let us go into the broken world remembering what God requires of us – with kindness, justice and humility do to others as you would have them do to you. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all.

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