

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

Long ago God called us to the mountain, to beat swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks.

Long ago God called us to the mountain, to receive the commandments and become a servant community.

Long ago God called us to the mountain, to see what we could become with God's power shining through us.

God is calling us again –

Come, let us meet with God!

➤ **We have come at Christ's own bidding** (Hyfrydol) **187**

† Prayer and Words of Hope

God of grace and God of glory, you reveal your presence to the world in radiant glory and gentle whispers – on mountain tops and lowly plains – in classrooms and hospital beds – in homes and churches – in the silence of nature and the sounds of cities. Yours is the presence that pushes past our fears – the touch that transforms our doubts. We come before you to celebrate your goodness – to focus on your light and offer you all praise, honour and thanksgiving, for you are our God and we are your people.

God of mercy and forgiveness, facing the light of your goodness, we confess all that keeps us from sharing that goodness. We are distracted by the desire to have more than we need. We focus on our own disappointments rather than trust the future you create. We feel discouraged and fail to claim the hope you hold out to us in Christ. Transfigure us by your grace, and shape us into disciples who follow Christ's leading each day. **Amen**

Do not be afraid. God's forgiveness shines into the world. The morning star rises in our hearts and we are made new. Know that you are forgiven and forgive one another in Christ's name.

➤ **You, Lord, are both lamb and shepherd** **356**

† Prayer for Understanding

O God of the high heavens – O Christ of the deep earth – O Spirit of the flowing waters, draw near as we read and contemplate words of scripture today. Fill us with your wisdom and conviction in this time of worship together. Amen

Scripture **Exodus 34: 29-35** [OT 81]

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God.

When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them.

Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai.

When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; but whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

2 Corinthians 3: 12 – 4: 1 [NT 180]

Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.

Luke 9: 28-36 [NT 69]

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" – not knowing what he said.

While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

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

Message

I wondered about changing everything this morning and trying somehow to address the invasion of Ukraine – what some have ominously referred to as the possible beginning of a third world war. It was just too much to resolve in my mind – too overwhelming. So, I opted to stay with an interpretation of this transfiguration experience because for me it is a call to hope. It is my prayer that you will also come to see the transformative light of Jesus as hope, even in this dark time. Let us pray...

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of each heart be acceptable to you O God, our strength, and our hope. Amen

Jesus hauls Peter, James, and John up a mountain to pray. As we watch the trio ascend, we are reminded of an earlier climb when Moses went up Mount Sinai to talk to God. There was glory shining all around in that story, too – lightning, thunder, and clouds. When Moses came down, his face was aflame with God’s brilliance, and he was lugging those big stone tablets. Jesus lights up with that same brilliance. Again, God speaks from the cloud. God issues a commandment in this story too – *listen to him*.

It’s an amazing scene. The disciples are overcome with what the Bible calls “the fear of the Lord.” Then Peter blurts out his desire to set up camp – to capture the experience. He wants to stay. But the glory dissipates as fast as it gathered, and Jesus doesn’t linger. He gets the disciples off their face and onto their feet, and they all trudge back down the mountain, back to “real life.”

I think we feel sorry for poor, impulsive, clueless Peter. His desire to stay – indulging in radiant bewilderment – seems an escapist, self-seeking temptation. Mountaintop epiphanies are not meant to last. Aren’t they more like rest stops – gas for empty tanks – carrots to keep us going through challenging lives? When the disciples must suffer – as they one day surely will – maybe the memory of this glorious moment will warm them and make their agony less awful. But to stay on the mountain and bask in the transformative light of Jesus isn’t the whole point – right?

The disciples have a hard enough time grasping the odd, counter-intuitive sort of leader Jesus is – if they stay up in glory, they might never learn that Jesus came to serve. Down here on the ground, affliction is everywhere. Jesus could not escape his own suffering, but he tried hard to alleviate everyone else’s. And that’s what disciples must also learn to do. We should consider

ourselves blessed if we get an occasional peek at glory, but we can't rest in it any more than the disciples could. We must go down the mountain and shoulder our ministry. Glory is fine, but only after you pay your dues – peas first, then cake!

This is a reasonable interpretation of the text – solid and familiar – and it can be a necessary corrective to those who think the best way to be religious is to gaze at your navel. Visions and voices are all well and good, but only if they don't render you indifferent to the needs of your neighbour. The only problem with this reading is that in our zeal to warn people away from lingering in luminescent splendor, we tend to moralize the Christian life almost to death. We make it a series of "shoulds" and "ought-tos" and suggest that worship or prayer or simple divine enjoyment is all well and good, but none of that has any value in and of itself unless we are also getting our prayerfully clasped hands dirty in the trenches of active mission.

Our repeated messages about coming down the mountain – getting back to work, doing our duty, loving God by loving our neighbors – measuring the size and strength of that love by our holy productivity – seem to assume that if we didn't constantly exhort ourselves and others to do things, we would slide into a fog of contemplative rapture – never to be seen or heard from again. Certainly, I can fall into this trap – I believe we are called to action – to mission – to work, but never mistake that enthusiasm for **doing in the name of Jesus** as a substitute for **being in the presence of Jesus** – for walking the road knowing God is present with us. It is easier to act than to pray – more straightforward to pretend we have all the answers rather than standing still and being confounded in awestruck wonder.

The one sacred life we have been given is a gift from a generous God. What a shame if we forget this and mistakenly live by a gospel that turns out to be, in the end, just another taskmaster – just another voice among the many voices that constantly remind us of all that we have not done to meet expectations – not enough to merit approval and reward. What a shame if we take texts like this one and turn them into so much finger-wagging.

It is plain from the text that Jesus didn't want his friends to put up those three tents. Peter was befuddled by the strange experience and *did not know what he said* when he blurted out, "*It is good for us to be here.*" Yes, Jesus took them right back down the mountain and they plunged into the hard work of healing and teaching. There's no question that engagement with the world is an essential component of discipleship – that the suffering it brings requires courage, determination, and perseverance. But we should also want to know why Jesus would show his friends the unutterable glory of God radiating through him and not mean for them to enjoy it. And why should we label Peter obtuse and ridiculous because he wants to make such beauty and such glory – the very pleasure of God – last and last and last?

According to our catechism – our basic instruction regarding Christian faith – our main purpose – our reason for being – is to glorify God and worship God's divine presence forever. It is good for us to be in a place of transformation – to experience face-changing dazzle and to listen to the voice of God vibrating through the clouds – to get away from the humdrum and spend time on the heavenly.

What the disciples received that day on the mountain was not a litre of emergency gas or a quick breather for the work crew. It was a gift of mercy, pleasure, and love. They were given a glimpse of the richest and most fundamental truth about our lives, and they were meant to react to it precisely in the way they did – with awe. Just because it wasn't time for them to enjoy it permanently doesn't mean that they were wrong to **want it** permanently, or that by wanting it so much they somehow missed the meaning of the event.

Peter saw that the glory of God's mercy and deep pleasure rested uniquely upon Jesus. This story is an epiphany – meant to reveal something of the character of God. Its main point is clarifying the identity of Jesus, and it does so in part through the awe-struck wonder this revelation causes in the disciples. But Peter must also have sensed that this transfiguring light was in some way about him too – about all of us – for all of us. The merciful pleasure God takes in Jesus – the joy of God's goodness that glows like a million suns – is Peter's origin and destiny too. It is the origin and destiny of the whole creation. We were all **made in joy** and **intended for joy**.

Too often we get stuck thinking that the only permanent thing we are made for is duty – yet we are made for delight. Too frequently we hear that people are made only for purpose and production – but we are made for pleasure. Too many people think that the church is called and gathered only for relentless hard labor in the vineyard of Christ – however we are called and gathered for praise, thanksgiving, and freedom – for visions, worship, and dreams.

In moments when God's glory breaks through our flat world of fact and rationality – when God's mercy transports us to the real world – the one Jesus called the kingdom, full of justice and reconciliation, forbearance and peace – when the dazzle of God's love squeezes through the fissures in our denial and defenses and explodes into our lives – in those moments we are drawn inescapably to God like people who have been living sun-starved for years in caves and we too want to pitch tents on the mountain. We too want to camp out – to stay and stay.

We know those moments. The flood of confusion the first time someone loves you. The time you were forgiven when you should never have been forgiven. The day you got through all 24 hours without a drink. The instant you met your child for the first time. The moment you really heard the poet's question, *"What will I do with my one precious life?"* The time you turned on the news and found out that that the wall was down, and the tyrants were dead, and people were crossing borders, singing. Or the morning you changed direction in your walk and saw clouds part – the gold and pink and blue nearly blinding in its beauty – and you stopped because it took your breath away. Even amid the hardest grief, it comes to us – this glory. We know the moments – moments when we have all wanted to pitch a tent – to stay and stay and stay.

It turns out that we cannot stay – the traditional interpretation of our story is correct about that. But the reason we cannot stay is not because it isn't good for us to be on the summit and desire such glory. It is the supreme good. To want that glory is to desire God. It is also true that while we await the final, full breakthrough of divine pleasure upon the world, we have much work to do. But this work is not the busyness and effort – the demand and expectation – the

dread and drudgery – or the purpose and plan that some have taught is pleasing to God. The work of people of faith is more wonder than competence – more surrender than skill – more beauty and imagination than plans and programs – more gratitude and praise than effort and exhaustion – more encounter than task.

The call to discipleship is not to save the world: that is God’s job. We are called to participate in God’s salvation because we know that God travels the road with us. We are called to witness in word, deed, and in awed silence to God’s activity among us. We are called to become increasingly alert to the places where transformation has already secretly begun and to point them out – to tell the truth about what we see to those who cannot see or do not believe what they see – to all who languish in cynicism, sorrow, and despair. The mission of the church is to testify by overt gesture and by secret resistance – in private and in public – that grace is even now sparking in the stubble – glory is already lighting up the mountain.

We are called to see beyond common sense and ordinary sight. To see the world’s suffering unflinchingly – exactly as it is – and to see God already working right there a resurrection that will come someday – to spot the tracers of love in the bloodstained sky and to announce them like watchers on the wall at daybreak. We are called to hear the stories read and interpreted – to listen to Jesus – to see and be transformed by divine glory – and by our fearless announcement bring hope to everyone who swears all hope is lost. **Amen**

➤ *Where cross the crowded ways of life* 760

† Offering

God has been revealed in glory for the healing of the world. We have glimpsed that healing in the hope we share in Christ, even in these challenging times. Let us present our gifts to God so that this healing and hope will continue to spread in the world God loves.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

We give our gifts so that others may know your love, O God. Help us always to be aware of the oppressed and share with those in need. With them, we are all recipients of your wonderful love, for which we give humble thanks! Amen

➤ *Dona Nobis Pacem*

† Pastoral Prayers and the Lord’s Prayer

Revealing God, you bless us with your presence and wisdom, and we marvel at the wonders of your love. You created a beautiful world that reveals your majesty. You sent Jesus to show us how to live with compassion. Your Holy Spirit guides us on our way. Thank you for opening our eyes to your presence each day. Help us to recognize you not only in mountaintop experiences, but also in everyday tasks and in times of great challenge.

Loving God, much in this world needs the transformation only you can provide. Where there is violence, bring calm – where there is poverty, send sustenance – where there is confusion, bring wisdom – where there is chaos, create order – where minds and hearts are troubled, bring comfort – where pain is crippling, grant release. Move the hearts of the rich to share with those in need and call the powerful to act with justice for those at risk. Give us all the will to work for the wellbeing of the earth and to live with respect for the fragile balances within your creation. Hear us in this time of silence as we raise to you the names and situations on our hearts today...

Hear the cries of all who suffer and bring each one hope of new life with you. O God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Eternal God, we pray for your church around the world and for our congregation. Give your people the energy to shine wherever there is persecution, despair or discouragement. Bless each congregation with wisdom and vision, as we face the changes in the world caused by the pandemic. Gather us as a community and inspire us with greater delight in your mystery – greater joy in seeking your presence.

God of mercy and love, we join with the whole church in praying with our partners in Ukraine as they and all around them are faced with war, danger and uncertainty. We pray for safety and peace – comfort for those now in mourning – and humanitarian aid for all in need. We trust in your purposes of peace for all people. Guide the nations of the world into ways of peace, justice and truth, and establish among them a spirit of unity and cooperation. We pray for peace in Ukraine and for the people there. We remember before you those who face danger in the defence of peace and order. Watch over those whose lives are at risk, comfort those who are anxious for themselves or loved ones. Soften the passions in the hearts and minds of people that keep alive a spirit of division and war, and in your grace, restore peace within and between us.

We ask all these things through Christ Jesus, who revealed your will to us through your revolutionary love and taught us to pray together with confidence **...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**

➤ **Be thou my vision**

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Blessing

God's way may seem easier from mountain heights – there, at a distance from others, we feel forgiven – loved – reassured. We long to remain at a safe distance – but God sends us out with divine blessing – a divine mission. May God be our vision – helping us truly see! And may the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the nurturing community of the Spirit embrace us all. Amen

➤ **Go now in peace (round)**

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