

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.*

➤ *Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary (repeat)*

Lenten Liturgy

During Lent, God hears the desires of our hearts and chooses what is best for us.

God draws us into a deeper relationship, offering us compassion, mercy, and insight.

**God hears and responds to our plans when they honour God's purposes for creation.**

While we don't always recognize it, sometimes our dreams can be distorted, harmful and not consistent with God's principles.

**We praise God for when God says "yes" and for when God says "no."**

Let us pray... **All-knowing God, you see and understand all things. You walk with us on the journey to Christian maturity, and we know that you provide us guidance and wisdom. Help us to follow your ways. Make us patient when you correct us, forgive us when we resist your newness, and encourage us when we seek new ways of being. Let our lives conform to the pattern of the life of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen**

➤ *Bless the Lord (taize chant)*

PWS&D Sharing    **Empowering Young Women in India**

The night her husband came home intoxicated and began arguing with her and physically abusing their one-month-old son, Murat knew she needed to get help.

Fearing for their safety, she approached a local group for assistance: a task force that had been established through a PWS&D-supported project in Bihar, India. Murat was appreciative of the task force's quick actions. They intervened right away by contacting local police officers who arrested her husband and brought Murat and her baby to safety.

Since that night, Murat has attended training sessions through the project where she has learned how to handle potential crises and stand up for her rights. While there is still healing that needs to take place, Murat and her son are being supported by her family and community after their difficult ordeal.

Thank you for faithfully responding to Christ's call to serve those in need. Through support of PWS&D, we can help empower women and girls to advocate for their rights.

➤ *Rain down*

† Prayer for Understanding

**O God, we turn to scripture to seek your wisdom and your truth. Send your Holy Spirit to open our minds and hearts to receive your Word for our lives and our times. Equip us to follow Jesus Christ, your Living Word. Amen**

Scripture    **Isaiah 55: 1-9**                      **[OT 685]**

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

**1 Corinthians 10: 1-13**    **[NT 172]**

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play." We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come.

So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

**Psalm 63: 1-8**      **We will sing a paraphrase of this Psalm to the tune: *Resignation***

O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So, I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So, I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name. My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips when I think of you on my bed and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

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

Message

Thirst is the primary image used by the prophet Isaiah and the author of Psalm 63 so beautifully arranged by the Iona Community that we sang this morning. It is a breathtaking and compelling image – especially for people who live in the world of the ancient biblical text. These words are written for and by people who live in parched places – much of the year is spent waiting for water – hoping that there will be enough to last. The illustration calls to mind personal experience in the original audience. I wonder how many of us have known real thirst – a longing that leaves the body weak...

To really grasp the power and significance of the message we need to have an image that summons such physical response from deep within each one of us. Nearly three millennia ago our psalmist reflected on the wonderful ways in which God has dealt with them. It is an enormously rich song of longing for God and for the satisfaction that comes from finding God. God has come to this poet's life and changed them completely – this is not to say that they suddenly became good and pious, perhaps the poet was those things already – but now, somehow, God has truly come to them – has made their life so special that they can hardly stand it – they have concluded that God's love is better even than life.

In fact, the Psalm may have to do with David's escape from Absalom, which was undoubtedly terrifying. And it would have been easy for David to focus attention solely on escape, yet his first thought in the Psalm is not to save his skin, but to worship God.

Likely out in the dry heat of the desert, David recalls not water but worship, the steadfast love of God being better than life. Water was running short, and food was scarce, yet David's soul is satisfied as he concentrates on the Lord who is the source and focus of his praise – who has been David's help and has held him under the shadow of God's wing – who holds David safe.

It would have been one thing if this Psalm was written as David reclined in comfort in the palace courtyard, surrounded by fine wine and good food. But it was most likely written in a time of fear – living rough and constantly alert to enemy forces who would not hesitate to kill. It brings a different perspective, doesn't it? In the midst of danger when it might seem reasonable to

devote all one's energy to self-preservation, David turns to God, and in doing so experiences again the nurturing, empowering assurance of God's presence.

More than two hundred years ago John Newton tried to express the same significance of God as overwhelming presence and comfort when he penned the images of "Amazing grace how sweet the sound..." and clearly the song evokes a strong response from many listeners and singers.

In a sermon seventy-six years ago, Dietrich Bonhoeffer chooses what he describes as the homely example of two people in love – their willingness to sacrifice all their possessions, their family, and friends – even their life – for the other's love. He marvels at the strength of human passion and calls up that image to challenge his congregation in their desire for God.

It has been said that what characterizes Mozart's music is such a sense of longing and yearning, such an unfulfilled desire that cries out through his music. It seems as if Mozart is hearing the very voice of God and is striving with every fiber of his phenomenal genius to express musically what he has heard from God. He is a man who longs for another world, and his music is a result of that yearning.

Several years ago, there was a television commercial about Cystic Fibrosis that sticks in my mind. It showed a young boy struggling for breath. He gradually deflates like balloon with a slow leak – his craving for air induced a physical response in me each time I saw it. Even now as I remember it, I can't help but breathe deeply and thankfully.

What draws that profound need, eagerness, and appetite out of you. What do you crave? What do you pine for? What makes your heart ache?

That is the thing that the psalmist is striving to express – that passion – reminding us that crying out to God is not simply a confession of faith – it isn't only a declaration of discipleship. Rather, it is a call from the depths of our being – where deep calls to deep – a call that captures in its intensity all the tangled webs of our sadness, sickness, and yearning. We instinctively recognize that the source of our life and the fulfillment of our needs come from God. O God, you are my God – we can trust God – we know God exists and is personally interested and invested in our lives.

We sense a physical need for God – what is vaguely referred to in our modern times as *spiritual longing*. For some it is an aimless casting about for something that will satisfy – something that will soothe the pain – calm the chaos. For some it is endless eating and never feeling full – careless consumption that drains resources and fails to nourish – a hopeless hunger of spiritual famine that fills our society.

Isaiah hears God's voice saying, *"Hey there, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters... eat what is good, and delight in rich food... come to me and listen so that you may live."*

And if we can, we respond with the psalmist, *"I am looking for you intently Lord. I am here to worship – to say that you are my God – to remember how wonderful you are to me. I am on the journey of spiritual life that has you, my Creator as its focus. I am listening to the longing for you that is in me"*

*God – I’m not waiting until I have time or until I can control things – I’m not waiting until I am safe, and all is well with the world – I’m praising you now, talking to you now, trusting you now.”*

This experience of fervent desire for God – the thirsting that we recognize in ourselves – this is the point of repentance – the time of turning and realigning ourselves with God.

Repentance is a major theme in this season of Lent, and it is often misunderstood because the call to repentance can seem like a command to feel bad. Biblically speaking, though, repentance is much more profound than simply feeling remorse or groveling before God. Repentance entails an attitude of honesty – truthfulness that willingly acknowledges the painful realities about our lives – not simply specific misdeeds, but our overall misalignment with God’s purposes. It admits our need for God’s corrective love to bring us back into harmony with the reign of grace and justice. Repentance, therefore, is never simply a private, personal activity. It is also a communal activity, intended to heighten our awareness of the pervasiveness of sin and the ease with which we forget God’s purposes – trying to chart our own course.

When we repent, we are not looking at particular things we have done or not done, we are looking at the direction of our life, both individually and collectively as a society – the path we are on, and it is born of our longing – our thirst for God. We seek the Lord – call out to God – knowing that God has promised everlasting love and abundant grace. We turn to God realizing that God does not think as we do – does not do things the way that we do. God desires much more for us than we can imagine. As our soul thirsts we are drawn to God – we turn from our own course to the way that God would have us go – holding on to our Creator for dear life!

➤ *All the way my Saviour leads me* 699

#### † Offering

God has given us life and breath and created a world of beauty and order. In Christ we know God’s generous mercy. Our gifts are tokens of gratitude for all that we have received in Christ and in creation. May our gifts speak for our thankful hearts this day.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

**Loving God, accept these our gifts, we pray. Bless them and use them to inspire peace in places of unrest, love in places of resentment, joy in places of fear, and hope in places of loss, all for the sake of Jesus Christ, our friend and Saviour. Amen**

#### † Pastoral Prayers and the Lord’s Prayer

God of Hope, when the world is confusing and frustrating, you bring light and hope. We give you thanks for lessons learned, for changes of heart, for fresh discoveries made, and new paths followed. We pray this day for those who are confused or afraid for those who feel anger or despair.

***O God, give us hope in our time. Turn our hearts to you.***

God of Peace, there is so much conflict, hostility, and antagonism around us and within us. Personal relationships are often tense – the world community at odds. We pray for understanding to prevail in relationships at home and at work, in our community and our country. And we pray for diplomacy to end conflict and threat among nations – especially holding before you the Ukraine and its people

***O God, give us peace in these times. Turn our hearts to you.***

God of Joy, we give you thanks for moments of joy and celebration in our lives, for small pleasures given and received through times of isolation. We remember those who feel left out or bitter, those who are anxious or in distress. We pray for those who face loss and hardship in these uncertain times, and all who know sorrow and suffering, naming before you those on our hearts today...

***O God, give us joy in our time. Turn our hearts to you.***

God of community and compassion, we thank you for your steadfast presence in the face of all that brings uncertainty and worry. Bless our congregation and other communities of faith that may be struggling – inspire us all to consider renewed ministry and mission after months of restricted gatherings. Reawaken our love for one another and our desire to worship and serve together in Jesus' name. Sustain leaders who feel exhausted by the challenges they've faced and renew our stewardship with gratitude for your love.

***O God, give us strength in our service. Turn our hearts to you.***

God of grace, receive these prayers and the unspoken prayers of our hearts. Deepen our trust in you for the days ahead, for we offer ourselves as Jesus' friends and followers in the words he taught ...***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***

➤ ***Amazing grace***

***670***

### Blessing

In the days ahead, trust God to watch between us, to dwell within us, to move among us as an empowering Spirit of love and truth. And may the abundant grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the amazing love of God and the generous community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all.

➤ ***Go now in peace (round)***

***622***