

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.

Celebrations / Joys and Concerns

God's blessing on you. God's blessing on you.

God's blessing, dear friends. God's blessing on you.

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

Lenten Liturgy

During Lent, we remember that God is revealed in surprising ways and at unexpected times.

All things are under the sovereign care of God's goodness.

None of us ever imagines that God goes to such lengths to show us the height, depth and breadth of God's love.

Christ was even willing to give up his life for us.

Let us pray... **Surprising God, you constantly come to us in ways that surprise us and redeem all things. Help us to recognize your guiding and comforting presence as we seek to follow you in our journey to understand the meaning of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen**

➤ *Bless the Lord (taize chant)*

PWS&D Sharing **The Difference Food Security Makes**

Before becoming a member of PWS&D's agroforestry program in Haiti, mother of four, Elimène Joseph, struggled to make ends meet.

"I wanted to start up my own business but couldn't because I didn't have enough money. At times, I didn't even have the money I needed to go down to the market and buy a little food for me and the kids to eat," she shared.

PWS&D's agroforestry program is helping farmers by providing seeds for black bean, pigeon pea and corn crops, which are more resilient to a changing climate. Farmers learn sustainable field management and band together in savings groups to make their earnings go even further.

Through the program, Elimène also learned how to pool her resources together with other women. With help from her savings group, Elimène started a business creating chairs and brooms out of palm branches. Then, with her profits, she began buying and selling avocados.

Now Elimène can afford the school uniforms and textbooks her children need to be able to continue their educations.

Thank you for responding so faithfully to equip farmers with the resources they need to combat hunger and care for their families.

➤ *Woman in the night*

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† Prayer for Understanding

Extravagant God pour out your love and mercy on us this day. Hear our prayers – open our hearts and minds to know the joy of your presence revealed in scripture today. Prepare us by the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen

Scripture

Isaiah 43: 16-21 [OT 672]

Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: *Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.*

Psalm 126 responsive / displayed

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy;

then it was said among the nations, “The Lord has done great things for them.”

The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb.

May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

Philippians 3: 4b-14 [NT 198]

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ.

More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

John 12: 1-8 [NT 106]

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.)

Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

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

Message

*Where there is no extravagance there is no love,
and where there is no love there is no understanding.*

This quote from Oscar Wilde relates to our gospel text for today and connects last week's *Parable of an Extravagant God* with today's story about Mary's extravagance in pouring out priceless perfume. Both stories deal with scarcity and abundance – the twin themes of Lent.

On this fifth Sunday of Lent, as we draw closer to Jesus's final week, and prepare to contemplate his suffering, we're invited into a story of the senses. A story of love enacted in fragrance. I wonder what that amazing offering smelled like, don't you?

All four Gospels tell it — the story of a woman who kneels at Jesus’s feet, breaks an alabaster jar filled with priceless perfume, and dares to love Jesus in the flesh. Hands to feet. Hair to skin. Soaked fingers to soaked toes. Each writer frames the event differently, to suit his own thematic and theological concerns, but the story at its core remains one of the most sensual, tender, and provocative in the New Testament.

In John’s version, the woman is Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and the newly resurrected Lazarus. The two sisters host a dinner party for Jesus, and it’s during the festivities that Mary breaks open her jar, anoints Jesus with nard (a scented oil worth a year’s wages) and wipes his feet with her hair. As the musky fragrance of the oil fills the house, Judas — the disciple who *keeps the common purse*, rebukes Mary for her scandalous generosity but Jesus silences him: *“Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”*

Mary’s is a layered story that raises thorny questions about poverty, piety, and stewardship. But it’s also a powerful story of a woman who dares to love extravagantly — even in the face of ridicule and censure — and receives the blessing of Jesus.

You may remember that just a short time ago Jesus was out preaching and teaching when he got word that Lazarus, his dear friend, was ill — that Lazarus had died. There is some controversy about Jesus’ delay in going to Lazarus and how upset Martha was about it. Everyone was weeping inconsolably — Mary among them — and Jesus also wept. Then Jesus went to the tomb and cried, *“Lazarus, come out.”* And Lazarus came stumbling out, trailing his shroud behind him like a used cocoon — smelly, but alive.

Now Jesus has come back to Bethany with a posse hot on his trail. By raising Lazarus from the dead, he has graduated from the category of “manageable nuisance” to “serious threat.” This miracle has caused a stir and cinched the case against him as far as the religious authorities are concerned. If they let Jesus keep doing this kind of thing, there’ll be no stopping him. Now he is a real threat.

News of the incident has sent his followers over the top as well. There is not a chance Pilate is going to ignore them during the Passover festival. It is time for Jesus to disappear before he leads hundreds to their deaths. So, Jesus’ days are numbered, and he knows it. When he arrives at his friends’ house in Bethany for a celebratory feast in honour of the fact that Lazarus has been returned from the dead, everyone can see the scarcity of days on his face.

This was a party — a fiesta — a banquet not unlike the one we attended last week when the lost son returned to his prodigal father. Turkey dinner with all the trimmings — roast beef with Yorkshire pudding — a keg party with fireworks. Martha cooks up a storm and sets a beautiful table — no expense spared. Lazarus and Jesus recline comfortably at the table as supper is served.

Mary, meanwhile, has slipped away, gone to find something in her room. No one notices her absence until she comes back holding a clay jar in her hands. Into the midst of the joyous celebration Mary comes with a flask of perfume – expensive stuff – worth thirty or forty thousand dollars. She kneels at Jesus’ feet and breaks the jar’s neck.

Now the stench of death that surrounded Lazarus only a short time ago is thoroughly undone by the scent of love poured out. In this poignant moment Mary anoints Jesus as the one in whom death becomes life. In Jesus Christ, death becomes life.

Mary loosens her hair in a room full of men – pours perfume on Jesus’ feet – then wipes them with her hair. Very strange. She exposes her hair – touches a man in public – anoints his feet rather than his head. All quite odd indeed.

Most of us are so moved by the scene that we may overlook its eccentricities. The point is that she loved him, right? But it is such a public demonstration – such an odd pantomime in front of those gathered – excessive – extravagant.

Where did she get the bottle of expensive nard anyway – I’d like to know? Is it from her dowry – or left from Lazarus’ funeral – or did she visit the market earlier in the day? Who keeps something so valuable – so special – sitting in a drawer waiting to be wasted like this?

Mary pours out her gratitude – her grief – her love – when she pours the perfume on Jesus’ feet. She has a different approach to the numbering of Jesus’ days – a different approach to scarcity. She lavishes him with an absurdly abundant gift just as the father was lavish in welcoming his sons last week – a generous gesture – sensuous and rich and effusive.

And as the house fills with fragrance, the music stops, the dancers freeze, and a hush falls over the room – everyone stares in shocked disbelief. And in the pregnant pause of the moment only Judas says what everyone else is thinking, *“My God, woman, what are you doing? You could have sold that and given the money to the poor.”*

But Jesus’ says, *“Leave her alone. Leave me alone. Just this once, let her look after me, because my time is running out. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”*

We tend to misinterpret Jesus’ words here, perhaps thinking that he believes poverty and injustice are a normal and inevitable part of life. Actually, these words allude to Deuteronomy 15: 11: *“Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, ‘Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land.’”* Indeed, the whole of Deuteronomy chapter 15 is about the obligation of God's people to forgive debts, and act with justice and generosity towards the poor.

When Jesus reminds them that they always have the poor with them, he is reminding them – reminding us – of our commission to serve the needs of the most vulnerable – and that as we serve them, we are personally and directly serving Christ.

When Mary stood before Jesus with that pound of pure nard in her hand, it could have gone either way. She could have anointed his head, and everyone would have proclaimed him king. Instead, she dropped to her knees and poured the perfume on his feet, which could mean only one thing. The only man who gets his feet anointed is a dead man.

The whole scene is so over the top that through it we realize there will be nothing restrained or economical about Jesus' death – just as there has been nothing economical about his life. In him, the extravagance of God's love is made flesh. In him, the excessiveness of God's mercy comes alive to us.

This bottle will not be held back to be saved and admired. This precious substance will not be hoarded. It will be opened, offered, and used – at great price. It will be raised up and poured out for the life of the world – emptied to the last drop. Jesus gives his all.

Jesus smiles, lifts Mary up and thanks her for her generosity and her love. Only Jesus seems to know that in this world – without the ultimate sacrifice for sin – even the finest evening is shot-through with death. Like it or not we are all on a collision course with death.

When we smell the aroma of Mary's perfume rising up off the biblical page, we know it has something to do with death but by faith and through grace, we also sense that there is a definite sweetness to this aroma – scarcity and excess entwined – fragrance that moves right through death to eternal life.

When it comes to dealing with the paradoxical themes of Lent – scarcity and abundance – this story reminds us that *where there is no extravagance there is no love...*

➤ *We lay our broken world in sorrow at your feet* 202

† Offering Invitation

At the dinner party for Jesus in Bethany, Mary anointed Christ with expensive perfume, pouring out her love and devotion. Jesus accepted Mary's gift gladly and graciously. Trust that Christ will never reject our gifts, offered with love and devotion, so let us present our offering with glad and generous hearts.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

† Offering Prayer

Gracious God, even as Mary poured out her love for Jesus, he was preparing to pour out his life on the cross for her and for us all. We are grateful for such love, given and received, then given again. Accept the gifts we bring and anoint them with your Spirit so that they will flow into the world, refreshing others with your mercy and love. Amen

A Creed

We are not alone, we live in God's world.

*We believe in God: who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus – the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others by the Spirit.*

We trust in God.

*We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence, to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.*

In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us.

We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

Gathering at the Lord's Table

We have heard about God, who loved confusion into order and gave each creature a divine image, making the world.

We have heard about Jesus, a poor man whose banquet feeds the world, a healer whose wounds give life, a teacher whose wisdom traces love's order in the world, finding the divine in each of us.

We have heard how Jesus died, and how, for those who loved him, he rose again.

We have heard about the Holy Spirit, who breaks the bonds of race and class, of gender and creed, to show God's love for everyone.

And we have heard that love makes all things new. We come to this table asking for the bread of such blessings.

We bring bread and wine, prayers and our own yearning, that the miraculous may begin in us today.

➤ *Broken for me*

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God be with you.

Lift up your hearts.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

And also, with you.

We lift them to God.

It is good 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 out of darkness 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!

Hear us, O Lord, and breathe your Spirit upon us and upon this bread and wine. May they be for us your body – vibrant with your life, renewing and making us whole. As the bread and wine which we now eat and drink are changed into us, may we be changed again into you – bone of your bone – flesh of your flesh, loving and caring in the world.

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 has suffered for our injustices is now present** to us in this bread.

The one **whose body was hung on a cross is now offered** to us 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 after Communion

Lord God, as we rise from your table we listen for your voice in the silence of our hearts and offer our prayers to you...

We think of those people in our lives who have loved us with a generous love. We think of those who, like Mary, have not counted the cost of what they have given – of those who given all of themselves as Christ gave himself for the world and we thank you for them. We ask you to bless them – we pray that you will make us like them...

As we go into this week, O God, help us to have a focus – a purpose that is beyond that of just getting by – beyond that of just trying to make it through another week. Show us we pray what you would have us do – reveal to us our own personal and unique ministry and help us to do it graciously... We join our voices to sing in prayer...

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

Blessing

In the days ahead attempt to love others, and should Christ call you, then even dare to go tenderly but firmly where angels fear to tread. Try loving yourself more, even as God has loved you. By God's grace, you are much more than you think you are. 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)* **622**