

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.

➤ *Don't be afraid (repeat)*

Call to Worship

Let the peoples praise you, O God;

let all the peoples praise you!

Let the earth rejoice and be glad,

let the heavens declare your righteousness!

May all people see your glory, O God;

may your ways be known throughout the earth.

Let us worship the God who loves us;

we come to worship with open hearts, to raise our voices with thanks and praise.

† Gathering Prayer and Words of Hope

Gracious God, we praise you for blessing us. You have not only blessed our lives with Jesus, but you continue to pour blessings upon us and within us through the Holy Spirit. The gracious gift of your Spirit continues to teach and guide us. Today we rejoice over Jesus' gift of peace - his peace which is beyond our human understanding. We receive this gift with thanksgiving and pray that our lives may reflect divine peace and love.

Merciful God, out of love for us, you promise to knit together the wounded parts of our lives with your peace. When our anxieties and fears are stronger than our belief in your promises, forgive us.

Through the gift of your Spirit, O God, you give us the means to serve as Jesus served, to love as Jesus loved, to live as Jesus lived. Help us to let go of all that hinders our acceptance of your peace, your love and your very life through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. This we pray in the name of Jesus, the Christ. **Amen**

God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. The good news is that in Jesus Christ we are forgiven – we receive his peace – a peace such as the world cannot give. Thanks be to God!

➤ *Many and great, O God, are your works*

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† Prayers for Healing and Reconciliation

see attachment

† Prayer for Understanding

Extravagant God pour out your love and mercy on us. Hear our prayers – open our eyes to see new things. Open our minds to think fresh thoughts. Open our spirits to follow your Spirit as we are led by scripture today. Amen

Scripture

Acts 16: 9-15 [NT 136]

During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days.

On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

Revelation 21: 10, 22 – 22: 5 [NT 259]

And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

John 14: 23-29 [NT 109]

Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me. I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe.”

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

Message

At the beginning of Acts, when Paul is first introduced, he is described as a persecutor of Christians – committed to stamping out the new way. Paul was an enemy of the Christian movement – resistant to God’s newness, clinging to old, settled patterns of certitude and authority.

In the account from chapter nine we see how God interrupts Paul’s journey to Damascus with a blinding flash of light. The change in Paul because of the encounter is striking. Paul was a man brought to his knees and sent in a new direction by the power of the Holy Spirit. The one who was an enemy became God’s instrument. Paul’s response to his encounter was a clear sense of commission to bring the gospel to the wider world. Today we see that same man sent in a new direction yet again. Paul dreams as he tosses and turns in sleep – a dream that will continue his work of recovery and restitution – sharing the gospel – founding and nurturing churches.

Paul experiences his vision on the western edge of Asia in the port city of Troas. Across the Aegean Sea is another world – Europe. In his dream he is called to cross these gold-flecked waters to a new mission field – to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ and help those he encounters.

Paul is sent a new way – unencumbered and ready for whatever is given by God. His vision leads to proclamation of the good news – news that challenges old patterns and invites everyone to new life. In Jesus of Nazareth, the world becomes open to God’s generosity – Paul’s listeners are invited to abundant life based on God’s unending mercy. We hear that same invitation.

Paul receives his vision – his call – and sets sail immediately – his ministry in Europe, prompted by the Holy Spirit, continues to push him across boundaries in the name of the risen Lord. Paul continues with the passion of Christ within him to be as radical as ever, taking the message to whomever, whenever and wherever God calls – to Gentiles, to rich and poor, to Europe, to women, to men.

Paul – the proud man who knew all the boundaries and guarded them jealously – is now engaged in a ministry of healing and reconciliation as God’s messenger among the Gentiles. He has come to recognize as sisters and brothers those he previously shunned – oppressed – persecuted. God has chosen Paul to do God’s work.

We hear this story as the church today and marvel at the power of God to transform the enemy into a friend. We need to be ready to be continually surprised by God’s transformation of our enemies into our friends. Who knows what God has in store when our heart is opened?

When *The Presbyterian Church in Canada* began the long road of healing and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in Canada as part of national efforts undertaken through the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, we did not know what God had in store or how we might be called to change and grow. We did not know how long and fraught and important the road would be.

On May 27, 2021, ground-penetrating radar located 215 unmarked graves on the grounds of the former Kamloops Residential School. Over the past year, many more unidentified burials sites have been found at the sites of other former residential schools. The devastating pain and loss of these announcements are shared by all who lost family, friends, or community members to Residential Schools.

Let us take time now in a moment of silence to honour the lives of children who were forced to attend the schools, and those who died because of the schools...

The Presbyterian Church in Canada operated eleven Residential Schools at twelve sites. The harm they did to generations of students and their families did not end when they closed. Their legacy of trauma continues today. This trauma is not limited to Survivors but is also borne by members of their families and communities, over generations. As a church, we are deeply sorry for the harm we have caused. We know we cannot undo these harms, and that words must be accompanied by meaningful action. In humility and lament, with God’s guidance, we continue to seek healing, working for reconciliation in ways that uphold the dignity and rights of Indigenous peoples.

We know that healing begins with acknowledging the harm we have done and making apology for that. We know that healing is supported and strengthened as we become better educated and aware of a history we have ignored, glossed over, and denied. We know that healing can lead to reconciliation and that the *Calls to Action* outlined by the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* can continue to guide us in this transformation. We know we need to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit in this process just as Paul needed to be open to the Spirit as he was transformed from an oppressor of Gentiles to one who worshipped and ate with them.

This morning Paul comes to the gate by the river – a spot known as a place of prayer. It is a quiet Sabbath day when routines are suspended – people are open and available to visitors. The women have gathered at the river. Here, with Paul, we meet Lydia...

Lydia is a worshiper of God – from the city of Thyatira – a dealer in purple cloth. A worshiper of God – a “God-fearer” as they were also called – a Gentile who believed in the Jewish God. Thyatira was a small city known for its commerce – an area noted for abundant crops and the manufacture of purple dye – a prosperous place. Purple cloth was expensive and valuable as a sign of nobility or royalty, so it is likely Lydia was a successful businesswoman.

In general terms, Lydia is not unlike many people we might meet any day of the week in Victoria – lounging at the beach, strolling at the Inner Harbour, cruising along a bike path, paddling in the Gorge, gathered at a park – people who live in an affluent community – many of whom are involved in thriving businesses. People who may believe in God – even worship God, often without always clearly articulating their faith.

On that Sabbath morning something special happened in Paul’s encounter with Lydia –*the Lord opened her heart...* just as we know that Paul’s heart had only recently been opened – transformed. Paul was sent by a vision to continue healing relationships with Gentile believers and to reconcile with them in faith. His task was to proclaim the message with all the warmth and freshness and passion of Christ knowing that it is the Holy Spirit who brings it to flower and fruit. His ministry leads Lydia to open her heart as she listens eagerly to the news Paul brings – the good news of Jesus Christ. This is God’s amazing work into which Paul is invited – into which we also are invited. How are we participating in healing relationships with those we once harmed – in reconciling with past enemies – in sharing the gospel in healthy and helpful ways?

When the good news is shared with her that day by the river, Lydia listens – believes and responds. She is baptized and embraces new life. Not only does she believe but her whole household with her. Think of the influence she has on her family, servants, employees, and friends. As soon as Lydia believes, she goes to work for Christ – continues the healing process. She shares her faith with her entire household. She opens her home to God’s people and remains of service to others. Lydia’s home becomes a place of refuge.

Lydia responds to the good news with hospitality – a most crucial gift and practice in the early church – a gift and practice that continues to be central to who we are as a community of faith – as Christians. Lydia becomes a willing servant. She invites Paul and his companions to stay at her home. Paul’s willingness to receive the hospitality she offers solidifies their relationship – strengthens their bond and puts them on a level playing field so that healing can continue.

Lydia tends to the needs of the visitors. Later in Paul’s mission, he returns to Lydia’s home where he meets with believers. Lydia apparently becomes an active member of the church at Philippi, one of the most flourishing Christian communities that Paul ever founded – a community to which he later writes one of his happiest letters.

When Lydia gathered at the river on that quiet Sabbath to worship and pray, I wonder if she had any idea – any hope – of what God had in store for her. When we gather for worship, do we come ready to listen to what the scripture will reveal? Are we eagerly anticipating the power of the Holy Spirit at work? Are you excited about the possibility of the Lord opening your heart?

When it happens how will we react? This text tells us that healing begins by opening to the gifts of the Spirit in our midst and being willing to come alongside those whom we once feared or disparaged. It encourages us to offer and receive hospitality – love in action – as part of the process of reconciliation.

Lydia's conversion – like Paul's – is not about passing from sin or immorality to uprightness, but from ignorance to comprehension. As she listens – as God opens her to knowledge of the divine – as she understands in the depth of her being, she comes to faith. And this is the work of God – our God who crosses boundaries – who knows no limits. Our God is an extravagant, generous God who calls us to extravagance – to renewal and restoration.

I pray that God will open each heart this morning. That we will participate in acts of healing and reconciliation as we are able – celebrating with hope the journey that indigenous, settler and newcomer Canadians are on together. I pray that you and I respond to the abundant grace of God with unrestrained warmth and welcome. **Amen**

➤ *Spirit of the living God*

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† Offering

God has created a world of great diversity, full of wonder and potential. Let us honour God's gifts to us in Christ and in each other as we present our offering in support of God's purposes in the world.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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Generous God, we thank you for your gift of new life in Christ Jesus. Receive our gifts this day and bless each gift and each giver. Use each one to witness to your purposes through our congregation and throughout the world you love, in Jesus' name. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers and The Lord's Prayer

Loving God, the earth and all its peoples belong to you. As we come before you in prayer, we are painfully aware that the earth itself is at risk, from the ways your people live on it, and the conflicts we provoke among each other. We seek your healing and hope this day, for the earth and all its creatures, and for your people of every nation.

God of healing and hope, we pray for peace with justice to emerge in war torn lands, and in every place of conflict where power struggles put innocents at risk. We remember people and places on our hearts today...

Send your Spirit of wisdom and compassion to break open the hearts of leaders to work with each other to protect the innocent and restore order for the wellbeing of all. May your ways of truth and justice prevail.

God of healing and hope, we pray for Presbyterian World Service and Development, its partners,

and all groups offering aid and renewal in places where disaster and conflict have left people at risk. Support those who have lost homes, families and livelihoods to find courage to go on and open hearts of those in safety to share with those in need.

God of healing and hope, we know that this land we call home faces conflict and pain, and that communities are divided by deep disagreements. We pray for healing and understanding to deepen between Indigenous people and those who settled this land with no thought for those who already called it home. Protect those who face racist attitudes and actions in daily life, restoring dignity and hope to those who have suffered injustice in a system that benefitted others. Open our eyes to the creativity and courage in communities that feel unfamiliar to us – open our hearts to build new relationships with each other so we grow closer as neighbours and friends.

God of healing and hope, we pray for the renewal of your creation and for the protection of species at risk. By your Spirit, teach us to change our ways when they are harmful to the earth, and inspire our ingenuity to find solutions to problems that seem vast.

God of healing and hope, we pray for those who know sickness or pain – for all who live in grief, loneliness or anxiety, and all who find these uncertain times overwhelming in any way. We remember before you those for whom we have special concern...

By your Spirit, surround each one with strength and love – equip us to offer support for those whose lives are woven into ours.

God of healing and hope, Jesus walks with us day by day to see us through every challenge and so we claim the healing and hope he offers as we pray together...***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***

➤ ***There is a balm in Gilead***

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Blessing

Take into the world – not an easy peace – not an insignificant peace – not a half-hearted peace – but the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ which you have received. And may the help of the Risen Christ, the wisdom of God, and the support of the Holy Spirit embrace us all. Amen

➤ ***Sing amen***

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