

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

It is good to give thanks to the Lord;

**Let us sing praises to God's holy name!**

We will declare God's steadfast love in the morning,  
**And God's faithfulness night after night.**

Let us make a joyful noise to the Lord!

**For God is good and we know God's blessings.**

Let us worship God with grateful hearts;

**We will give God thanks in our prayers and praise.**

† Gathering Prayer and Words of Hope

Faithful, fruitful God, you created our minds to grow in wisdom. You created our hearts to expand with love. You created our voices to sing your praises forever. We bring you our worship with joyful praise, turning to Jesus for grace and guidance. Fill us to overflowing with your Holy Spirit so that the fruit of the Spirit will bound in our lives. May we worship you in spirit and in truth, and serve you in the example of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

**Faithful, fruitful God, you call us to follow you, whatever the circumstance, yet we confess we prefer to remain where we are. You offer us new beginnings, yet we continue to make the same choices, guided by our own desires. We make excuses for avoiding your challenge to change. Forgive us, O God. Cleanse us with your mercy and energize us to serve you even when the challenge seems great.**

*In Christ, we are made a new creation; the old life is gone, and the new life has come! Know that God loves you and forgives you. Do not be afraid to make a new start!*

➤ *Sing a new song unto the Lord*

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† Prayer for Understanding

**God of wisdom, by your Spirit, open our minds to your truth, our hearts to your gospel, and our hands so that we can do your will, in the name of Jesus, your Living Word. Amen**

Scripture    **Psalm 77: 1-2, 11-20**

I cry aloud to God, aloud, that God may hear me.

**In the day of my trouble I seek the LORD; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted.**

I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD; I will remember your wonders of old.

**I will meditate on all your work, and muse on your mighty deeds.**

Your way, O God, is holy.

**What god is so great as our God? You are the God who works wonders; you have displayed your might among the peoples. With your strong arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.**

When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; the very deep trembled.

**The clouds poured out water; the skies thundered;**

your arrows flashed on every side.

**The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lit up the world;**

the earth trembled and shook.

**Your way was through the sea, your path, through the mighty waters;**

yet your footprints were unseen.

**You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.**

**Galatians 5: 1, 13-25**

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger,

quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

### **Luke 9: 51-62**

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.

When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But he turned and rebuked them.

Then they went on to another village. As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."

And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me."

But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home."

Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

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

### Message    ***Just a Traveller***

Jesus was born on the road, at the Motel 6, out back behind the Petro Can station. Before Jesus could speak, let alone cry, he was travelling on the road to Bethlehem. The Canadian Ukrainian artist William Kurelek painted a series of Canadian nativities, and one was basically a description of that scene.

God's people have been travelling on the road to wherever they were led from the very beginning. Whether to Egypt, Babylon or some new unknown vista, we are all travellers.

Over the last few years most of us have done little travelling- at least not to distant destinations. I've felt pretty thankful when I've managed just to visit my kids in Vancouver.

When I was young, my family did a lot of camping, travelling to places mainly between Alberta and Cape Breton. And as we travelled, we sang together. My mom would take us from the first song to the last, of a big songbook of folk songs. We took pictures and did our best to remember all the details. I remember my first camera, a little box camera. Black and white pictures usually. And from the time our kids were very little we were usually on the road together, usually camping as well, but always discovering new places. And there were pictures, but our cameras were a bit more sophisticated- or at least we thought so. There were so many slides, which I'm trying to digitize so we can look back.

I wonder what Jesus and his disciples would have taken pictures of if they had cameras as they travelled together bound for Jerusalem. Luke however is able to paint a picture in his own fashion to give us a idea of what they encountered.

The gospel reading describes Jesus and his friends travelling toward Jerusalem, but some have been sent ahead to find food and lodging among the Samaritans. Well, good luck with that.

The Samaritans and the Jews viewed each other as heretics. Jesus was not on a journey of judgment, but the conflict still existed. Samaritans did not help pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem aiming to keep the feast of Passover. The Samaritans were clear that the holy place of worship was on Mount Gerazim, not in Jerusalem. Mount Gerazim was believed to be the place where Abraham nearly sacrificed his son.

Despite the animosity Jesus still travelled through this place knowing full well that he probably would not be well received. Click. Pictures of closed doors.

His face it says, was set as flint toward Jerusalem- flint can create fire. It is an image of strong determination.

I imagine Jesus lining his friends up with Mount Gerazim in the distance. Everyone smile. Click. The photo of them all in the place where they were rejected.

What did Jesus do then? He didn't point fingers or show outrage. He didn't stay to argue or prove they were wrong. His disciples asked if they should call down God's retribution upon these inhospitable Samaritans. He told his friends to let it go. Move on.

Jesus knew conflict even in his own family, and in his home town of Nazareth after he was baptized by his cousin John.

We are tempted to prove that we are right, even insisting that God is on our side. But Jesus will have none of this. He tells us to let it go too. Move on.

We are just travellers. Perhaps you are familiar with the song writer Chris Stapleton. He has a song called Just a Traveller. *'I'm just a traveller on this earth, sure as my heart's behind the pocket of my shirt.'* We are travellers. Things change and we are encouraged to move on.

The Church has known so much conflict and so much change from the very beginning. We are always changing as Jesus leads us on this journey. It has never been smooth sailing. Jesus' friends the fishermen can attest to that, being out in the stormy sea with Jesus. Jesus asks them, 'why are you afraid?' – and then he calms the waters.

There is a story in Acts where we hear about a woman named Lydia that Paul encounters. He has travelled by sea to Philippi in Macedonia, and Lydia is baptized after she hears him preach and speak about Jesus. Lydia was a well-respected woman in the community, a 'dealer of purple,' which was a significant trade. The Christian community became centered within her home.

Click. Another picture: a woman leading a community of faith in her home.

Many women in the first two centuries were leaders in the early church when it was illegal to worship Christ. The church was scattered worshipping in secret. Secret symbols were used to identify one another like passwords. The sign of the fish being one.

And then Constantine made Christianity the official religion in 312 and then there were more changes. The early church had many documents and stories that were shared including what we know as the New Testament. But there were more that were somehow not deemed appropriate. The documents, while called apocryphal still give a wonderful view into the early church.

There were many female leaders.

There is another picture - fresco - a wall painting in Ephesus. On the left there is a window with a young woman named Thecla peering out and watching Paul preach. He has his hand raised in blessing. He is in the centre of the painting and on the right is Thecla's mother. It was only discovered in 1995 and is in a small grotto and hidden place of worship named after Paul and Thecla.

Toward the end of the 2nd century Church leaders - well Church Fathers decided to meet and decide on what documents would be made official - and become what we know as the New Testament, the Canon. By that point the leadership had become clearly patriarchal and women were left on the sidelines despite having been significant leaders until then. One of the documents that they rejected was called "The Acts of Paul and Thecla." It survives in at least five languages, and she is considered a saint in some parts of the church. There are monasteries named after her.

The early Christian fathers deemed it as "too dangerous for Christian maidens to read. It might put ideas into their silly little female heads." It is still out there to read and is even an audible book that takes about 30 minutes to listen to. It is a story of Thecla's journey of sharing the good news of Jesus, the difficulties she encountered and the grace that she imparted. It is very moving.

Thecla is betrothed to someone, but she doesn't want to marry him and wants to follow Paul instead. She cancels the wedding. Her mother is not pleased. This is not how a woman behaves. Paul is arrested as per usual, and Thecla figures out a way to get into the prison to see him so

she can listen to him and ask questions. There is an attempt to burn her at the stake, and another to throw her to lions, but she survives.

Not only that but she moves on to live a celibate life (unheard of and seen as illegal) and dresses as a man to keep safe as she travels to share the good news. She is mentioned in many early church writings and lauded by theologians, but I bet you have never heard of her. There are other early church documents that tell of women cross dressing to procure safe travel and to preach and break the cultural rules.

And God's people keep moving on. We do our best to let it go. The Church has changed in drastic ways over the centuries. I have a picture of John Knox in his academic regalia in my mind, a part of the reformation of the church. Martin Luther and John Calvin - were among others who sought change in the church, and a refocus on what was important. Unfortunately, that was not a smooth journey, pretty bumpy, but the church nevertheless did move on.

The church that we have come to know has changed significantly too. We have long left Christendom behind and we do not live in a Christian society. Our society is informed by a Christian background perhaps, but we are a hodge podge of collective beliefs, traditions and in some ways a magnificent quilt of contrasting cultures. It isn't all bad.

But it is new. It is a radical shift.

Over the last 50 years our own denomination has journeyed through some changes. In 1966 women were allowed to become ordained. John Knox would not have been impressed. Some of the first women to be ordained were women I knew and was friends with. Over the years I have still encountered comments such as 'we're not ready for a woman yet,' which thankfully now just makes me grin. And still, Jesus beckons us to move on. To keep on travelling.

Our last two General Assemblies have been filled with difficult discussions about inclusion. The road has been rocky and a painful one for many.

I was very moved and thankful to see and read the letter of apology for injustices done to a minister named the Rev. Darryl Macdonald who had been called to St. Andrew's Presbyterian church in Lachine on the Island of Montreal. He was openly gay and had a partner. The congregation unanimously desired to call him - in 1995, nearly 20 years ago. Our church refused his ordination and he moved on to serve Christ in the United Church. So did the congregation that had called him. The congregation joined the United Church and they called him. There were two letters of apology - one to him and one to the congregation.

And as difficult as it can be, moving on often means forgiving.

We still live in the midst of radical shifts and conflict - but it is important to remember the words of the letter to the Galatians that remind us of the fruits of the Spirit. . .

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

There is a road not far from my home that has been filled with incredible potholes. I often need to take that route in my travels, so I just go slow, driving carefully. We often need to go slow on our travels, our pilgrimages. But recently the entire road was re-paved and I was so ridiculously delighted. And it reminded me of travelling with our kids. Whenever there was newly paved road, my son would yell out: New Smooth!

It's New Smooth! And it has continued in the family vernacular as a kind of proclamation.

We may travel difficult roads - whether in the church, in our families or among those we know. We may have doors closed in our faces, know rejection and hurt. Still - Jesus travels with us. And he goes ahead of us, inviting us to move on and to trust him. The route of forgiveness may not seem an easy route, but the vistas are worth it.

*I'm just a traveller on this earth. Sure as my heart's behind the pocket of my shirt.*

It may feel strange, but whether we encounter potholes, animosity, or unexpected changes, we can trust Jesus to help us move on, to let it go. There will be new smooth.

➤ *Lord Jesus you shall be my song* 665

† Offering Invitation

Jesus Christ has called us to follow, to serve and to offer our selves to him. In thanksgiving let us bring the offerings of our lives to God.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

† Offering Prayer

**O God, we know you to be kind and generous, so we bring our gifts in gratitude and joy. Pour out your Spirit on these gifts and on our lives, so that we may bear the fruit of your Spirit in every situation and relationship, through Christ, our Living Lord. Amen**

† Pastoral Prayers and The Lord's Prayer

God of mystery and mercy, God of our past and our future, we come before you today carrying all the hopes and dreams, and the burdens and blessings of our lives. We bring all that is on our hearts and minds to you today, grateful for the goodness, seeking your comfort and strength, listening for your guidance. God of purpose and promise... **Receive our prayers.**

God of life and love, you engage us in the midst of our lives when we need you. We pray today for all those who feel fearful about their future, and for all who wrestle with challenges at work or at home. We remember before you those weighed down by illness or worry, and all who provide care for those in need of support...

Help each one of us face our fears and our challenges supported by your love. God of purpose and promise... **Receive our prayers.**

God of courage and comfort, whenever we wrestle with any burden, your Spirit prays within us with sighs too deep for words. Today we pray for all those whose burdens seem too heavy to bear: For the victims of violence or disaster, and for their friends and families...

For refugees at risk in so many places in the world, remembering especially those who have fled Ukraine and Afghanistan...

We pray those caught in despair and poverty in our own community and in the forgotten corners of your world...

Renew the strength of all those challenged by realities beyond their control and equip our leaders to support those in the deepest need. God of purpose and promise...

**Receive our prayers.**

God of the world and all its peoples, we pray for our country and our leaders as we prepare to mark Canada Day. Equip Canada to be a force for justice and well-being in your world. Give our leaders wisdom and integrity to make decisions that provide for a good future for all who call this nation home. Open our eyes and our hearts to the opportunities we have to serve you in serving one another. Make us alert to cries for justice in our midst and guide us in repairing relationships strained by differences between us. God of purpose and promise...

**Receive our prayers.**

Receive all our prayers, spoken and unspoken, as together we pray the words Jesus taught us *...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*

➤ *One more step along the world I go*

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### Blessing

Go out into the world in peace. Be of good courage. Hold fast to that which is good. Return to no one evil for evil. Strengthen the faint hearted. Support the weak. Help the afflicted. Honour all people. Love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen

➤ *Sing amen*

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