

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.

➤ *Don't be afraid (repeat)*

Call to Worship [based on Psalm 30]

I praise you, O God, for you heard my cry for help and raising me up from my distress, you healed me.

It is only through your grace, O God, that I have been given a fresh start in life. Let the whole congregation give thanks and sing praises to God;

For the anger of God lasts but a moment, while the favour of God rests on us for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for a night, but joy assuredly comes in the morning.

I formerly gloried in my own achievements but now see them all as your gracious gifts. It took the fear of death to bring me to my senses and see how much I rely on your mercy and grace.

You have transformed my life, O God, from mourning to joy, making my spirit dance and my heart sing your praise forever and ever.

Gathering Prayer and Words of Hope

Mighty and merciful God, we meet to celebrate your greatness. We join with the hosts of heaven to sing your praise and to offer you worship. You are worthy of adoration from every mouth and every tongue should praise you. You created the earth by your power – you save all creation by your mercy – making us new by your grace. We offer you our grateful praise.

Holy God we confess that we have sinned against you and our neighbour. We have taken great benefits with little thanks, and we have been more ready to insist upon our rights than to see the needs of others. Have mercy and forgive us, in Jesus' name we pray. **Amen**

God is faithful and just – as we confess our sin – God forgives – cleanses us from all unrighteousness. Hear Christ's word of grace: Your sins are forgiven!

➤ *As water to the thirsty*

688

† Prayer for Understanding

Holy One, you speak to us in surprising ways, through unexpected prophets. Help us to listen for your voice in our everyday lives and to hear the wisdom that comes to us in scripture this morning. We pray in Christ's name. Amen

Scripture **2 Kings 5: 1-14** [OT 336]

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy.

Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. And the king of Aram said, "Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel."

He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy."

When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me."

But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel."

So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean."

But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?"

He turned and went away in a rage. But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?"

So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

Luke 10: 1-11, 16-20 [NT 71]

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.

He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs

into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.' Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!"

He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

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

Message

The encounter of Elisha and Naaman from the Hebrew Bible is a favourite of mine. It is a story about healing – about wellness and all that entails. I have been engaged with the concept of wellness a fair bit during the past month through the UVic Multifaith Center. We had a visioning day and also held interviews for a Director of Student Wellness. It is encouraging to me that UVic takes seriously the wellness of its students – their intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual health. It is no small thing that spiritual health is on equal footing in this very secular context.

In today's scriptures, we are confronted with Naaman's quest to be made well – with the need for divine healing – physically, emotionally, spiritually, theologically, and nationally. Healing that brings wholeness and connects with God's energy of love – transforming relationships – linking us intimately with the wellspring of divine providence.

I'm not sure there is an official title for this passage, but it could be, "*the healing you need is right in front of you*" or "*no one is so great they can do without God's grace.*" Maybe not the catchiest but still...

Naaman is a key leader in his king's army and enjoys a lavish lifestyle. He drives the latest chariot and has servants to attend his every wish. He is strong, smart, and financially secure – everyone must want to be him, right? – Wrong! Naaman has a serious skin condition – a disease that might cause him some medical problems. However, the real complications are social, religious, and moral – people with such "impurities" are stigmatized as ritually unclean and therefore

excluded from many aspects of community life. Naaman, powerful general noted for his many triumphs cannot command good health.

Naaman is both respected and feared – yet a skin disease has rendered his life miserable. Disease and death are the great equalizers. While wealth will buy you the best hospital rooms and consults with the most talented physicians – the CEO and janitor are on equal footing when they are diagnosed with incurable/terminal or chronic illnesses, or a companion is diagnosed with Alzheimer's. Regardless of social status, we experience fear, frustration, and the daily pain of disease. We discover our impotence in relationship to a negative force greater than ourselves. Without resources of our own, we are driven to seek the resources of a higher power.

Well Naaman had about given up on higher powers when one of the servant's in his household, an Israelite who had been captured in one of Naaman's raids – one of his victims – becomes the agent of good news. She might be expected to hate her captor – instead she has compassion. The slave girl tells her mistress of a prophet in her hometown that can cure Naaman. It is a measure of Naaman's desperation that he acts on the information from this child, a servant, a slave, a foreigner.

The Syrian king uses what he perceives to be his considerable influence to ensure that the king in Israel takes Naaman seriously. An official letter is composed – that's how these things are done – those in power deal with others in power to accomplish what they desire. (But we will discover that this is not the way things work with God.)

Naaman sets off on his journey with attitude. He brings a tremendous gift from his king to influence the prophet to heal him – miraculous cures are expensive, and it isn't as though everyone in Israel has welcome mats out for Syrian generals!

When Naaman and his entourage arrive and present their letter to the king in Israel, they are exhausted – road weary and dirty – longing for a clean bed, some food, some drink. They wait in the lobby while the king of Israel reads the letter and becomes increasingly distressed by its contents. He perceives a plot. The Syrians encamped at his door have come with an impossible request – he is not God after all! The king is sure that his failure to help will mean more violence and war. As he agonizes in the royal rooms the king receives a message that gets him off the hook – the prophet, Elisha, sends word that Naaman may come to him.

The king sends Naaman and company packing down the road to the prophet Elisha who barely acknowledges the mighty Syrian commander. He sends out a lowly servant to instruct Naaman that he is to go jump – into the River Jordan that is – not once but seven times!

No doubt Naaman expected a sophisticated treatment, talisman or ritual, or perhaps counsel to go to healing spa. All he receives is the simple message to jump in the river. Naaman is underwhelmed, to say the least, and initially can't see any reason to follow the healer's advice. The prophet doesn't greet him – doesn't invoke the name of his deity – or pronounce his healing with pomp and circumstance.

Naaman thinks this is all a bit humiliating. Wash in the river? That's it? Doesn't this prophet fellow know that there are cleaner, sweeter rivers in Damascus? He goes off in a snit muttering, then storming and ranting in the street – the cure should be more befitting his station – more dramatic and difficult. Naaman is about to walk away from the whole thing, until one of his servants stops him in his tracks...

“If the cure had been difficult, you would have done it. If the prophet had told you to climb the highest mountain seven days in a row and say your prayers, or roll a pebble on your hands and knees all the way back to Damascus, you would probably have done it, right? So why not this simple washing thing? Why not take a chance on something simple and close by? What have you got to lose – your pride? Your life?”

Reluctantly, Naaman follows the prophet's counsel, and his is immediately cured of leprosy – he is made well – healed. The simplest, most direct remedy restores him.

The healing we need may be right in front of us! We just need to be open to what is all around us. We need to open to the resources God is already providing for us.

There are times we make the healing process more difficult than it is. The details cloud our thinking and perceived complexity paralyzes us when just one change can be the thing that makes all the difference. While illness arises from many factors, a commitment to taking the first steps toward wholeness may be the tipping point from death to life and debilitation to activity. This is true for physical well-being – for our intellectual, spiritual and emotional well-being – and even more so for our communal well-being.

Sometimes the answer is right in front of you, but you want a better one. There are simple practices that lead to healing of body, mind, and spirit – exercise, intellectual activity, diet, stress-reduction – not to mention social and political issues. Sometimes there are simple solutions to our overall wellness that we resist. My brother Mike was asked recently what his advice was for losing weight. He said, “Cut out the booze and do something active every day.” Obvious and simple but not exactly easy.

This is even true in big issues that affect the common good – societal wellness. While not solving everything, for example the tragedies of gun violence that abounds – even this week in our own city – call forth clear and simple decisions. They call for a recognition that weapons idolatry – gun lust – is dangerous and must be transformed. Weapons of violence can be beaten into plowshares – banned and globally confiscated. They call for a greater understanding of how the increasing income gap in our communities is threatening us all. Instead of only giving thanks for our own good fortune we can act in solidarity with those who are suffering.

We must bring the same prophetic spirit in responding to the imprudent actions of the US Supreme Court, and its determination to return women to second class status. We must picket and pray because this is not just a problem south of the border but a real fear for all women. We can challenge religious extremists and law makers who make disingenuous claims that oppress women and ultimately harm children.

What first step can you personally take to claim God's abundant life? What can we do to protect those who are under attack from conservative Christians – women, LGBTQ+, persons of color – not to mention the concerns regarding the planet? What community action can make our town more just in its care for marginalized communities and reduce the gap between wealth and poverty? These are complex issues, but some things are obvious, simple, and effective on the path to healing, wellness and abundance. The least we can do is to make simple changes in lifestyle and political involvement as a prelude to more decisive action. We can resist hate so that our public policy reflects the grace that comes to Naaman – the grace that is there for each one of us.

Naaman does not merit grace any more than the next person, but it comes to him anyway. God's grace is a gift that heals and sustains our wellbeing. It does not belong to us, and it cannot be safely predicted. No matter what we do to box God into our narrow idea of who God is – no matter how often we claim to know who is or is not acceptable in the eyes of God – the box is never strong enough to hold in the amazing grace of the divine! Embrace God's gift of grace and give thanks. **Amen**

➤ *Love us into fulness*

† Offering Invitation

The Apostle Paul urges us not to grow weary in doing what is right. Through our gifts to God, we participate in God's goodness at work in the world. So take heart. Whatever you give, give with confidence that God will use our gifts for the good purposes of the Gospel.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

† Offering Prayer

Generous God, you have blessed our lives with gifts, both visible and invisible. We offer our gifts in gratitude – for the common good. Bless all that we give to make a difference in the lives of others, for the sake of Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Vine and Branches¹ - an affirmation of faith

We believe in God, the Root of all living, Creator of all things.

We live in Christ Jesus, God's Son, who loved all people and who makes us one in his love. He suffered, died and was raised to new life. In his death and resurrection, we are also raised to life that is transformed. Christ is our Vine, and we are his branches; and without him we cannot live.

We live by the Holy Spirit, flowing through us so that we may bear fruit for God, the fruit of love. In the Spirit we are one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world.

We trust in the one holy church, the communing of saints, the forgiveness of sin, the mystery of resurrection, and the grace of eternal life.

¹ Methodist – General Board of Discipleship

Gathering at the Lord's Table

For those who need, the bread waits. For those who long, the wine lingers. For those seeking transformation, the table beckons. All are invited... not because we have faith, but because we trust – not because we understand, but because we long – not because we know, but because we are loved – not because we are well, but because we know our need. The table waits, and heaven's host calls. Our place is here. Come now to the table of our Lord.

➤ *All who hunger, gather gladly*

534

God be with you. **And also, with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to God.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is good to give God thanks and praise...**

Gracious God, we praise your holy name, giving thanks with our lips and our lives...For the power and mystery of your Word by which you created us and called us to yourself, we give you thanks. For the power and mystery of your Word by which you took flesh and lived among us through your Son, Jesus Christ, we give you thanks. ...Therefore, with all your faithful people from every time and place we join 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!

Faithful God, we offer you our praise and thanks as we return to you these holy gifts of bread and wine...Remembering that on the night of his arrest Jesus sat down to eat with friends. During the meal, he took the 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."***

We ponder, O God, the mystery of his promise that in this meal we are joined to him and to one another as a holy people. We offer you our praise and thanks for Jesus, who took flesh and lived among us, was baptized for our sins, taught us your way of truth, loved us in our lovelessness and died that we may have life. ...We celebrate with great joy the resurrection of Jesus, his presence with us in this feast, and his promise of a new creation as we affirm 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!

God of grace and power, you invite us to share in mysteries that are beyond our understanding... ..in simple trust we seek the transforming power of your Spirit us and upon this bread and wine. By the miracle of your grace may they be for us your body – vibrant with your life, renewing and making us

whole. And 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 breathed on the first disciples is present for us in this bread.

The one whose Spirit stirred the Church at Pentecost revives 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

Thank you, most wonderful God, for all good gifts around and within us. Thank you for those mercies which nurture and heal us: for life, health, food, drink, warm clothes and comfortable houses – for family, friends, good neighbours and all who pray for us. Thank you, generous God for curiosity, laughter, playfulness, and the ability to learn – for truth, courage, beauty, mercy and forgiveness – for hospitals, libraries, theatres, parks and places of worship. Thank you for our Christian heritage: the Bible, the sacraments, and our community of faith – for the prophets and martyrs, evangelists and scholars, saints and sinners. We give you thanks, O God, for Jesus our Saviour and guide, by whose grace we have our very being.

We thank you, O Lord and ask your blessing as we seek to serve you willingly and cheerfully, affirming your command and desire that we love one another in Jesus' name. During this time of silence we name in our hearts those for whom we crave your healing touch...

Eternal God be to each one inner warmth and light. Bless all those kindly hands that reach out to others this day. We bring our prayers in the name of Jesus who encourages us to sing in prayer...

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

Blessing

Go into the world secure in the knowledge of God's mercy – filled with the joy and peace of Jesus – energized by the passion of the Holy Spirit. And may the grace of the risen Christ, the wisdom of God and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all. Amen

➤ ***May the God of hope go with us every day 726***