

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

Come, neighbours and strangers,

Prophets and seekers of justice,

Those who need a helping hand,

And those who have something to offer.

Whether your faith is weak or strong,

Come – let us be neighbours in this place,

And let us worship God together.

† Gathering Prayer / The Lord's Prayer / Words of Hope

God of all beginnings, we come today with praise on our lips and in our hearts. We stand in awe of all you have created and blessed with life and meaning. Your love makes a beginning in us, too, O God, in each new life born into the world, in each new friendship formed, in each kindling attraction, in each kind word and act for neighbour or stranger.

We praise you, O God, for your love moving in the world around us, lived out in Jesus and by the Spirit at work in us. All praise and glory belong to you, Source, Saviour, and Spirit of Love, one God, now and always.

Jesus called us to love you above all else, and our neighbour as ourselves. Yet we often fail to act in loving ways. We are distracted by our own needs, forgetful of the needs of others. We let differences divide us and excuse us from reaching out. Forgive us, O God. Create in us new hearts so we can live and love faithfully. We pray together in Jesus' name **...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**

To all who seek – to all who ask, God offers guidance and extends support. To all who journey with Jesus, God grants the company of the Holy Spirit. That is the way with our Creator's love. Praise be to God!

† Prayer for Understanding

Holy God – trustworthy teacher of truth – by your Spirit, reveal your will for us in the reading of your Word. Stir in our hearts and minds – strengthen us to respond in faithfulness. Amen

Scripture

Amos 7: 7-17 [OT 855]

This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the LORD said to me, “Amos, what do you see?”

And I said, “A plumb line.”

Then the Lord said, “See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass them by; the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”

Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, “Amos has conspired against you in the very center of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said, ‘Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.’”

And Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.”

Then Amos answered Amaziah, “I am no prophet, nor a prophet’s son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’ Now therefore hear the word of the LORD. You say, ‘Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac.’ Therefore thus says the LORD: ‘Your wife shall become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be parceled out by line; you yourself shall die in an unclean land, and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.’”

Luke 10: 25-37 [NT 71]

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.

“Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?”

He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”

And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”

He said, “The one who showed him mercy.”

Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

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

Message ***Merciful Alignment***

Do you remember Don? He was a member here at Knox for many years but declining health and his involvement with various street ministries in Victoria have kept him from participating regularly in our fellowship in recent years. Don was always one to read his Bible and reflects on messages he heard preached. He would take pocket-sized Bibles to hand out on the street along with food and blankets – a kind word and a listening ear. Don always seemed to know that a neighbour is the one who shows mercy and he decided to go and do just that. I bet he still does.

I don't know if Don has read the book of the prophet Amos but even if he hasn't read Amos, I know that he has seen the problems that Amos talks about. Amos was addressing the world of his day some eight hundred or so years before the birth of Christ. He was challenging the nation of Israel. Yet everything Amos has to say could so easily be applied to our world today.

Amos lived during an age of social, political, and economic extremes just like we do. Boundless prosperity had become the norm among some sections of society. Yet direst poverty was the norm for those who had failed to make it up the social ladder. Jeroboam II had ruled the northern kingdom of Israel for forty years. Israel had enjoyed the longest period of peace and prosperity since Solomon. The economy was in excellent condition. Trade was vibrant – money was plentiful. Political and commercial success had brought about a lavish lifestyle. The northern kingdom had become a nation of extremes – extraordinary riches and deepest destitution. For Amos it was time to act, time to speak about the visions God had revealed to him – visions of

doom and punishment upon Israel – locusts, fire – and the revelation shared in our scripture reading this morning – the vision of a plumb line.

Do you know what that is – a plumb line? It's a weight suspended from a string used as a vertical reference line **to ensure a structure is centered**. As they always find the vertical axis pointing to the center of gravity, they ensure everything is right, justified and centered. The prophet Amos was given a vision of a plumb line which would become **the symbol of the standard by which God's people would need to live** – a measure from which divine judgment is gauged.

By what do we measure our lives and our community? What tells us that things are aligned, that life is where it needs to be? And how do our plumb lines compare to God's I wonder?

We know that God's plumb line has a lot to do with the poor. It has a lot to do with righteousness – that is living in right relationship with God and neighbor. It has a lot to do with justice.

Keep this curious image of a plumb line as we think about what God does here. God stops – stoops – takes time with Israel to judge, in order that there might be accountability. Most often when we hear the church plead for divine visitation it's for the purpose of blessing. *Lord, come save us, give us, bless us* – that is our prayer. But Amos dares an image of a busy God who, although preoccupied with business elsewhere, takes time for Israel.

The time has come – indeed is long overdue – for God to measure the stature of the people – God promises not to pass them by. At the same time, God sets a plumb line against Israel, using a divine standard to measure the faithfulness and righteousness of God's people. This visit from God is presented as judgment – perhaps being the object of divine attentiveness is not necessarily the good news we want it to be.

In the good news of Luke's message, Jesus is on his busy way to Jerusalem where he has an appointment with Pilate. On his way a lawyer puts a theological question to him about the inheritance of eternal life. The lawyer stands with a question to which he knows the answer – the law says that for eternal life we need to love God with heart and soul and strength and mind. We also need to love our neighbour. In fact, the lawyer assumes that eternal life is his birthright – he just wonders which technique will get him his inheritance in the most efficient way. After all, Jesus is a teacher of religion, and what is religion for if it's not a technique to get whatever it is we desire? We've tried following the letter of the law – what does it mean to love my neighbour?

I used to donate blood on a regular basis though slightly lower than desirable iron levels have prevented it for some time. Still, I've made over one hundred donations and I'm on the list of bone marrow donors, too. I don't know how I came to get started but I have always enjoyed the opportunity to contribute in this small way. I even became a bit of a fanatic for the blood bank and the bone marrow registry, encouraging friends and family to participate, as they were able.

One day I had some interesting questions from one of them: *Are you allowed to check out the person who might receive your bone marrow to decide if they deserve it? Don't you worry about who you might be giving blood to? Aren't you concerned about saving a criminal, a pervert, a loser, with the blood you donate?*

Jesus, who is my neighbour?

What does religion offer earnest seekers-after-eternity like us when we come with questions like that?

Who is my neighbour? Whom do I need to love, to care for, to concern myself with? Am I doing enough for the right people?

Jesus responds with a story of a victimized man in grave need. A priest and a Levite both pass by on the other side. Then comes a despised Samaritan who approaches the victim, assesses, and bandages his wounds, puts him on his own animal and takes him to an inn. Read in the context of today's passage from Amos, this is not only a story of active compassion but also a story of judgment. To those of us among God's chosen children who know full well what is written in the law, it may feel a bit insulting to have a Samaritan shoved in our faces as an example of someone we should emulate.

Many years ago, while shopping with Tristan who was only four at the time, I watched as a woman fell and sliced open her forearm. It happened within a fraction of a second. One moment she was raising her hand in greeting, the next moment blood was dripping down her arm, pooling on the floor. I grabbed the woman's wound, applied pressure, and tried to keep her calm. A staff person called 911. Tristan gaped. The injured woman ranted. She swore and cursed. She was demanding and unpleasant. She was in my arms until the ambulance came and took over her care. I mopped up blood after she left. The staff person got Tristan a drink of water. I wrote my eyewitness account of the event for the store. The woman sued. To this day I'm not sure how it turned out. But I think of the experience each time I read our lesson from Luke today and I wonder...

Jesus, who is my neighbour?

I want an answer, just as the lawyer does, just as I'm pretty sure we all do. *Clarify the expectations Jesus, and we'll comply – perhaps no more than we need to but no less either.* However, Jesus doesn't cooperate. Jesus doesn't say, *she is your neighbour, and they are too, but don't concern yourself with him or with her.* Jesus doesn't write a list of names or a set of criteria. Instead, Jesus tells a story about how to be merciful – how to become a neighbour.

Good people, Bible-believing people – people like any one here or watching from home – people of faith – pass by the man in the story Jesus told. The only one who stops is a Samaritan, an

outsider, and when he stops – when he takes time – he becomes judgment for us. The Samaritan becomes the plumb line.

Don, the fellow I mentioned earlier, hasn't been in our church for a long time so perhaps he isn't seen to be faithful by some. He was never really an outsider, but he wasn't one of the elders or a regular either – yet I remember him. I remember his devotion to the neighbour – his compassion – his sense of justice and how he was called to participate in God's love for all. Don becomes in some ways judgment for all of us – becomes a guide for how we measure our commitment to the compassion of Christ's way – a plumb line being held up against us. We know what is written, we know what is expected – and yet our behavior is often a scandal to what we profess.

What does God really demand from us? Amos reminds the people of Israel – reminds us – that what God requires is justice, fair-dealing, honesty, a sharing of earthly resources, a sharing of God's grace. Look at much of today's world and compare it with life in Amos's day, eight centuries before the coming of Christ. What would God's plumb line show today?

We gather in church to be closer to God. But how comfortable are we with proximity to a God who loves enough not to pass by, but lingers as long as necessary among us to judge, to hold us to a higher standard than that by which we measure ourselves? To a God who is not only loving but righteous, and rarely leaves us unscathed? God is no pale image or limp projection of us and our felt needs. God wields a sword against our self-righteous presumption. Against our positive self-image God presents the Samaritan – one who may or may not have our theological commitments and yet embodies the faithfulness and compassion our God desires.

God sets a plumb line in our midst and calls us to account – calls us to realign our lives – to ensure that they are centered on God's vision of justice. May we strive to be the ones who show mercy – the ones through whom God's love comes close. **Amen**

➤ *The love of God comes close* 474

† Offering

God sent us Jesus Christ so that we would know God's great generosity and compassion for us. May the gifts we offer bear witness to the saving power of this extravagant love in our lives.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

God of the Samaritan's kindness, we offer our gifts in hope, trusting that you will bless them to bring such kindness to others in Jesus' name. Give us the courage to be generous to neighbours and strangers for Christ's sake. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers

God of abundant growth, as summer unfolds around us, we give you thanks for warm days, for beauty in gardens, crops growing in the fields, life swimming in oceans, lakes, and rivers. Where the abundance of nature is at risk, we pray that your Spirit will work in and through us to restore the air, water and soil for the good of all creation. **God of every life, hear our prayer.**

God of peace and reconciliation, we thank you for the peace and freedom we enjoy and the many ways our lives are protected in this land. We remember before you those places torn apart by violence and hatred, those people who face discrimination daily, and anyone who feels unsafe this day or any day...

Inspire leaders in every country to lead with wisdom and mercy. Guide them in your ways of peace and justice. **God of every life, hear our prayer.**

God of creativity and community, we thank you for the many ways the Church can serve you in Jesus' name. Thank you for the unique voices that sing your praise and speak your comfort, all the hands that share in acts of service, all the prayers offered quietly for your will to be done. We pray for the Church and its many congregations as we seek to be faithful. Help us work together so that our unity bears witness to the possibilities for unity among diverse peoples everywhere. **God of every life, hear our prayer.**

God of every precious life, our hearts ache for those who are suffering. Hear our prayers as we name before you in the silence of our hearts those in need of your love and healing...

God of hope and love, draw us closer to you every day. Show us what you desire for us and inspire our faithfulness in the example of Jesus. **God of every life, hear our prayer. Amen**

➤ *Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love*

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Blessing

Go from this gathering to meet your neighbour with open hands and an open heart – giving and receiving the goodness of God's love! And may the grace of the risen Christ, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all.

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

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