

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.

PWS&D Video – Practical Compassion

➤ *Don't be afraid (repeat)*

Call to Worship

We come before God with thanks and praise.

We will praise God for unfailing love and faithfulness.

We bow before God in worship.

We will worship God, for the glory of the Lord is great.

We lift up our prayers to God with confidence.

We have faith that God answers our prayers and increases our strength

† Gathering Prayer and Words of Hope

Ever present God, we seek and you offer. We ask and you give. We knock and you open the door. You hear the requests of your people and in your goodness, you answer. In Christ, you offer the gifts of new life and hope to all who seek your blessing. Through your Spirit, you pray within us, even when we cannot find words ourselves. Receive our praise and our prayers this day, O God, and draw us into your holy presence, so that your love will transform us to serve you in the world you love.

Ever faithful God, quickly we forget the gifts we have received from your grace – instead of giving thanks, we ask for more. We complain about what we lack and fail to trust your generosity. We refuse others the forgiveness we seek for ourselves. Forgive us, O God. Transform our hearts and reshape our desires to reflect your goodness in the way we live. **Amen**

Hear the good news: God is generous and merciful, ready to forgive, offering us new life in Christ Jesus. Accept God's gift of forgiveness and share this gift with others.

➤ *O Breath of life, come sweeping through us* 384

† Prayer for Understanding

God of wisdom, as we listen to the Scriptures today, fill our hearts and minds with your living Word, so that our faith in Christ will grow stronger as we build our lives on him. Amen

Scripture **Psalm 138** responsive / displayed

I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise;

I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything.

On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.

All the rulers of the earth shall praise you, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth. They shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD.

For though the LORD is high, God regards the lowly; but perceives the haughty from far away.

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies;

you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me.

O LORD, fulfill your purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

Colossians 2: 6-15 [NT 200]

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority.

In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

Luke 11: 1-13 [NT 72]

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."

He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial."

And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.'

I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

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

Message: ***Teach us to pray***

I have been thinking a great deal about prayer over the past week. It was the topic of a full day lecture offered by theologian and astrophysicist, David Wilkinson – Principal of St John's College, Durham. He reflected on the question, "*When I pray what does God do?*" His talk began with science and how our understanding of the universe and how it works influences our image of God. He explained that our historical focus on Newtonian Physics leads to a mechanistic worldview and can conjure in our minds a Clockwork God who sets the world in motion and then leaves it to its own devices. When Einstein came along with Quantum Physics showing that time is relative (dependent on height and speed) and that space is curved by matter it also opened up room for God to be more interactive with the ongoing creation. Quite a different worldview.

There is no way I can synthesize a lecture on physics and theology in my message this morning – for which you may give abundant thanks – but I can say that his presentation was helpful in appreciating how much our image of God influences how we pray, why we pray and what expectations we may have when we pray.

Our reading for today from Luke's gospel has some tricky points in it and I may not address them all for you, but I do know that there is a history of problematic interpretation of this text. Read the wrong way, the passage can render prayer transactional, inviting us to believe that God is a cosmic gumball machine into which we can insert our prayers like so many shiny quarters.

With that understanding we may be convinced that fervent, persistent prayer heals diseases, prevents car accidents, feeds hungry children in faraway countries, fends off nightmares,

prevents premature death, saves broken relationships, and "stops the bad guys." But then life happens, and we realize that diseases don't necessarily get better, car accidents do happen, we have nightmares, babies starve, young people die, relationships disintegrate, and the bad guys often thrive.

When people ask for these discrepancies to be explained, they are usually offered one of two answers: either you need to pray harder, longer, and with more faith – or God did answer your prayers, with "no".

These I think are heart-breaking, heart-hardening responses because they can lead us to give up on prayer altogether and to give up on God.

So, I am a bit anxious preaching about prayer – there are people much better qualified – far surer – more experienced. To ask what role prayer plays in the face of ongoing tragedy, injustice, and oppression in our world is to raise one of the hardest questions about God – questions I don't know how to answer. Does God intervene directly in human affairs? Does such intervention – or lack of it – depend in any way on our asking? Can prayer "change" God? Do our prayers have tangible effects on other people, even when those people have no idea that we're praying for them?

I know that for some people – for some of you – these are perhaps irrelevant questions because you pray expecting answers and receiving them. My experience with prayer has been less certain – less sure – so I liked David Wilkinson's summary, *"When I pray, God is...*

- *sustaining the structures and laws of the universe*
- *transforming this creation into new creation*
- *transforming the person who prays to collaborate in building the kingdom*
- *could be answering some prayers through working in the uncertainty of the quantum world and in chaotic systems*
- *could work by transcending God's normal ways of working for specific purposes."*

He also offered two quotes that I find helpful: *"...everything we do in the Christian life is easier than prayer"* from Martyn Lloyd Jones – and *"Prayer has always been a bridge between the mundane and the holy"* from Ruth Etchells.

The psalmist says, ***On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.*** That calms me. It helps me to know that prayer is the main way of maintaining my relationship with God – of including others and all creation in that relationship. Prayer can be intensely personal and publicly uplifting. Prayer is the essence of God's Spirit weaving her way around and between and through us, encouraging us to speak, listen, engage, think, and act. Prayer tunes me in to the mind of God and the feelings of God and has nothing to do with me telling God what God must and must not do. Prayer is me calling out to God and knowing that in that relationship I am made whole.

This is what the disciples are asking for when they say, “*Lord, teach us to pray.*” The disciples were not ignorant or inexperienced when it comes to prayer. They were devout Jews who had most likely grown up attending Sabbath services, lifting their hands upward in worship, or lying prone on the ground to make their confessions. They knew how to pray. What they sought was not better technique.

So what was it? What did they observe in Jesus when he prayed? Maybe intimacy – belonging – trust – peace. Maybe they were longing for a closeness that was transformative and nourishing. Or fresh vision, renewed perspective, greater strength, and deeper empathy. Perhaps they, like me, yearned for a relationship with the divine that *increased their strength of soul.*

“*Lord, teach us to pray.*” Teach us to attain what you have attained. Teach us to be with God as you are with God. To commune as you commune. Teach us to unlearn those false beliefs and false promises that keep us from praying as you do. We confess that we are impatient, self-absorbed, and transactional creatures, greedy for quick answers and even quicker gains. Unmake all of that. Help us to start afresh. Teach us to pray.

It remains a request people make to this day, still finding it challenging to find the right words, and silences, in their prayer life. Prayer need not cover every topic under the sun, but may include thanksgiving, confession and intercession. Which is why the Lord's Prayer is so wonderfully refreshing and is why it's often the one prayer we all commit to memory. It is a deeply accessible prayer that lifts us to God in praise, in awareness of our needs, and in acceptance of the way in which our loving God meets our needs. The Lord's Prayer can be a guide to prayer that puts those who pray in touch with God's incredible generosity and continuous presence.

And once he has given this model prayer, Jesus continues – telling the disciples – telling us to *ask, seek, knock.* Giving us permission to call upon God – to name our longings – to acknowledge the desires which drive and haunt us. Encouraging us to state without reservation or embarrassment that all is not okay – that we are not yet full – that God's kingdom has not yet come – and that even though it's midnight and we know our door-pounding at our friend's front step is mightily inconvenient to the surrounding universe, we don't care and we're going to keep pounding because we still need bread right now.

There is nothing dainty or delicate about this teaching from Jesus. His invitation is powerful, assertive, even pushy. It is holy yearning insisting to a God who can more than handle our ferocity. It is imperative. And when we pray God promises to respond with the Holy Spirit. That is the only promise Jesus makes in this gospel passage. The answer to our prayers is God's incredible generosity and continuous presence.

When we pray – when we persist in prayer – when we name our longings in prayer without fear or compromise, God will never fail to give us God’s own, abundant, indwelling and overflowing self as the answer we actually need. That is what God does when I pray – God shows up offering God’s loving, consoling, healing, transforming, and empowering Spirit. Always.

Do we consider God’s Spirit a sufficient response to our prayers? If God’s guaranteed answer to our petitions is God’s own self, can we live with that?

Sometimes I can, and sometimes I can’t. The truth is, it’s hard to persist in prayer and not receive the answers I’m hoping for. It’s hard to accept the Holy Spirit as God’s perfect gift when I’d rather receive healing for people I know who are suffering, or an end to racism, or food security for those facing famine, or commonsense gun control, or some reliable hope in the face of global climate change. My love for God is not always what I would like it to be – often I want stuff from God much more than I want God. I want God to sweep in and fix everything much more than I want God’s Spirit to fill and accompany me so that I can do my part to heal the world.

So, we pray. We pray because Jesus wants us to. We pray because it’s what God’s children do. We pray because we yearn, and our yearning is precious to God. And we pray because what we need most – whether we recognize it or not – is God’s own Spirit pouring God’s self into us. With words, without words, through laughter, through tears, in hope, and in despair, our prayers usher in God’s Spirit, and remind us that we are not alone in this broken, aching world. Thanks be to God.

➤ *Seek ye first* 625

† Offering

God responds to our needs and requests with great generosity. Such is God’s great love. Let us share God’s love with others through the offering we present this day.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

Generous God, we offer you our gifts, thankful that your love is overflowing. Bless these offerings so that your love will flow through them to meet the needs of those who cry out to you and to us. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers and The Lord’s Prayer

Loving God, we come before you in prayer, trusting that your power works in the world in ways we cannot imagine. We thank you for calling goodness forward, for supporting love and creating justice even in situations which seem hopeless to us. Draw on our prayers this day as signs of your Spirit at work in our lives. Lord, listen to your children praying...

➤ *Lord, listen to your children praying* 449

God of the world and all its peoples, we pray today for those who lift up their voices in troubled nations... in Ukraine, Syria, Palestine, Ethiopia and Tigray, and Myanmar Call the powerful to account, O God, and inspire leaders with the courage to listen to voices that cry out in pain and desperation.

God of our everyday lives, we pray today for all those whose everyday lives have been disrupted by forces beyond their control...

those struggling with the effects of Covid 19 and other illnesses

those burdened by the rising costs of daily needs

those facing effects of climate change on their communities

Inspire governments to combine compassion and good planning to respond to those who face such upheaval.

God of the courageous and compassionate, we pray for those who live out their commitment to the well-being of others day by day, in health care, education, social work, public service and environmental concern. Support them in times of stress and inspire them to speak out when they see needs being neglected.

God of our homes and families, we pray for our friends and neighbours near and far, for all who travel and for those who find themselves strangers in new communities. Draw near to each one in deep need, especially those on our hearts this day...

Lord, listen to your children praying...

➤ *Lord, listen to your children praying* 449

Equip us to support those lives that intertwine with ours, for we are your people, embraced by your love, which we claim together in the words Jesus' taught... ***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***

➤ *What a friend we have in Jesus* 746

Blessing

Jesus said: "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

The busy world awaits our compassion.

May the help of the saving Christ, the wisdom of the Living God, and the support of the Holy Spirit, will be with us now and always. Amen

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