

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.

➤ *O let the power fall on me*

Call to Worship

These days, when slippery words and shaded truths are commonplace, we gather to proclaim the honest good news of God's love for all.

These days, when global divisions abound and internal stresses take their toll, we gather to share a faith that is the source of healing and serenity.

These days, when the demands for justice and commitment and compassion are great, we gather to strengthen ourselves and one another for the tasks of being a servant people.

Thanks be to God for gathering us as a community of faith. This day we strive to proclaim, to share and to strengthen our faith in Jesus as we worship together.

Gathering Prayer and Words of Hope

O God, our strength and refuge, we come together to worship you and praise your loving kindness. In your presence, we rest from what distracts us, to focus on your truth and goodness. You call us to live in relationship with you. Through the love of Jesus Christ, you repair our lives. Through the power of your Spirit, you engage us to serve you in the world. Receive our prayers and our praise this day – Creator, Christ, and Spirit – revive our hope and our energy, making us ready to answer your call.

O God, our judge and our hope, we confess we often turn away from your truth, ignoring your call to justice. Forgive us when we say one thing in worship but do another in the ways we live. Forgive us when we ignore how others are treated and think only of ourselves. Let your judgment awaken us and your mercy refresh us. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen**

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Believe the good news of the Gospel. In Christ, God has offered us mercy and love. Receive God's forgiveness and share it with each other.

➤ *Over my head*

† Prayer for Understanding

God of all time and place, fill our hearts and minds with stories of your faithful people through the ages. Guide and enlighten us by your Holy Word as we journey in your way. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen

Scripture

Jeremiah 1: 4-10 [OT 698]

Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.”

But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, *I am only a boy*; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you, do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD.”

Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, “Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”

Hebrews 12: 18-29 [NT 227]

You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them. (For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death.”) Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.”) But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven!

At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.”

This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of what is shaken – that is, created things – so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; for indeed our God is a consuming fire.

Luke 13: 10-17 [NT 76]

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment."

When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day."

But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?"

When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

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

Message

Frederick Buechner died this week. Who was he you may ask? Buechner was an American writer, novelist, poet, autobiographer, essayist, preacher, and theologian. He was an ordained Presbyterian minister and the author of thirty-nine published books. His work encompasses different genres, including fiction, autobiography, essays and sermons, and his career spanned more than six decades. Buechner's books have been translated into many languages for publication around the world. I have quoted him on many occasions as have many of my colleagues.

He studied under such renowned theologians as Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, and James Muilenburg. Buechner said: *I wanted to learn about Christ – about the Old Testament, which had been his Bible, and the New Testament, which was the Bible about him; about the history of the church, which had been founded on the faith that through him God had not only revealed his innermost nature and his purpose for the world, but had released into the world a fierce power to draw people into that nature and adapt them to that purpose ... No intellectual pursuit had ever aroused in me such intense curiosity, and much more than my intellect was involved, much more than my curiosity aroused. In the unfamiliar setting of a Presbyterian church, of all places, I had been moved to astonished tears which came from so deep inside me that to this day I have never fathomed them, I wanted to learn more about the source of those tears and the object of that astonishment.*

Buechner's decision to enter the seminary had come as a great surprise to those who knew him. I think he even surprised himself, but clearly the Holy Spirit was at work in his life giving him words to share what he learned and came to know about Christ.

My own experience of Buechner comes from reading and reflecting on his books, especially *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* about which one reviewer said, Frederick Buechner *puts the language of God, the Universe and the human spirit under his wry linguistic microscope.*

He was not a traditional pastor but by any measure he was successful in sharing his faith and the message of the gospel. He made it big in the theological world without a doubt.

The book of Jeremiah is about someone else who makes a big theological impact. It begins by establishing the prophet's authority and credibility in ways appropriate to his context. Sometimes it seems as though this passage means more to preachers than to average churchgoers (whatever an *average churchgoer* might be). There is something about this pre-natal call to ministry – not to mention the lyric image of God's filling the prophet's mouth with the divine Word – that strikes a chord for many who preach. But since the church long ago began to recognize what is referred to as *the priesthood of all believers* – that all important *cloud of witnesses* about which we spoke last week – teaching that we are all indwelt by the Holy Spirit and so we are all authorized as witnesses to the gospel, this is actually a passage for everyone in the church – everyone of us.

To a certain extent everyone can identify with the reticence that we see again and again in scripture when it comes to being a herald of God's Word: for Isaiah it was a claim of unclean lips – for Moses it was a claim of stuttering. For Jeremiah it was a claim of being but an inexperienced youth, too young to be taken seriously or to be given such a large task. The claims I hear most often are either that people are too busy – too tired – too old – too fearful.

Jeremiah recognizes that the Lord knows him – has set him apart and appointed him – but he is hesitant and insecure about his ability to do the task expected. Perhaps you similarly would say, *“Not me God. I'm not the person you need. I'm not right for the job – I don't want it. Really God, I wouldn't know how to do it anyway.”* Again, and again the people God taps for witness in the Bible and in the world today express doubts as to their ability to do it. And again, and again God tells them that such claims are beside the point – God does not typically tell these people that they have been chosen on account of their stellar natural abilities to preach, teach, or prophesy.

It is as though one biblical figure after the next says, *“I'm not qualified,”* to which God then replies, *“Who ever said you were!? I am well aware of your inability to do this work. It all depends on me in the first place and if I give you what you need, then you are going to be clean out of excuses for not doing what I myself am empowering you to do. The power is mine, the message is mine, and the instructions you receive all along the way will be mine. So let's stop talking about you and start focusing on me and then we'll go from there!”*

Jeremiah experiences concerns and fears that plague all those who speak out in God's name. He is afraid that his message will not be heard – will be irrelevant, lacking inspiration, that it will fail to reach the people because of his youth. He is equally afraid that his message will be heard – will be too radical, lacking in wisdom and caution, that it will unsettle people because of his passionate inexperience. God says, *“Do not be afraid... I am with you.”* (But perhaps we should

hear a whisper in the background reminding Jeremiah that it is not his message – not his words – not his gifts, but God’s!)

Jeremiah lives in turbulent times. It is not surprising that Jeremiah is reluctant to be God’s prophet amidst the political, social, and religious upheaval all around. His task is to proclaim divine truth – truth in the present circumstance – showing forth reality in the truth of God’s light – truth that political and religious leaders are not always happy to hear – truth that may be ignored and dismissed – truth that may unsettle and disturb. God’s truth.

We live in turbulent times just as did Jeremiah. We are caught in the struggles of political, social, and religious upheaval. We are surrounded by conflict throughout our world and constant bickering with our closest neighbour. We experience the turmoil of economic affairs made even more challenging by natural disasters and deadly pandemics. We live with the same fears of being ignored and discounted – or being heard and responded to.

Just as we are all called to be disciples of Christ, we are all called to serve as prophets of the Lord. We are all called to proclaim the gospel in a broken world. We are all usually as anxious about that call as Jeremiah was, but God says to us, “*Do not be afraid.*” God promises that divine truth is ultimately good and hope-filled and life-giving. When God calls us to speak, God fills each of our mouths with this divine Word – with divine truth.

Like Jeremiah we often protest our limited capacity to speak out – we express our fear of what we have been called to do, but God is not limited by our limitations and God’s comfort is that we don’t need to fear. We may well hesitate and resist, as Jeremiah did, yet hopefully we will stumble on in the confidence that God is with us. God gives encouragement to Jeremiah and promises to be with him for the tasks ahead. God lived our limitations and experienced our fears in Jesus Christ, offering us the grace to know that God is with us always to deliver us and to help us fulfill the potential we may not even know is in us.

One day a fellow ministry candidate shared a personal experience of God within a small group I was part of. Dan talked about his student ministry in a small Ontario town. He had been there for a while and was having a particularly busy week. He seemed to have several activities on his plate, many people to visit, phone calls to respond to, administrative details to tie up. Suddenly it was late on Saturday afternoon and he had yet to begin his sermon for Sunday. He plugged away and got something written before worship the following morning, but he wasn’t happy with it. And he wasn’t happy with himself for leaving things so late. He was tired and stressed and not at all confident that he had anything meaningful to say in his sermon that Sunday morning. He was afraid that there was nothing for anyone to listen to and afraid that if someone did listen, the message wouldn’t be what they wanted or needed to hear.

He focused as best he could and led worship for the regular summer faithful as well as those visitors in attendance. As people left after worship, he stood at the door to greet them – less afraid, but still anxious. Everyone seemed polite and cheerful until one young woman that he hadn’t seen before stopped to shake his hand.

“I got a lot out of your message this morning,” she said. And he nodded politely, saying thanks, hoping that the crowd would soon thin out so he could go home and get some much-needed sleep. But she didn’t let go of his hand. He looked up and she met his eyes.

“Your message really spoke to me,” she said. Dan muttered some reply. The woman still hung on to Dan’s hand, oblivious to the impatient noises of those behind her.

“You don’t understand,” she insisted. “I felt like you were speaking directly to me. Your sermon was exactly what I needed to hear. Thank you so much.”

Dan shared his experience, not to encourage us to leave sermon writing to the last minute, not to be irresponsible or to trivialize what it means to proclaim divine truth – but to remind us that we are not alone in that work – that we are not alone in our fears and our business and our struggles. We are not alone in our lives. God puts words into our mouths. God will tell us what we need to do and say – God will send us where we need to go – God is with us wherever we are.

You, like Dan, may not always feel up to whatever God has called you to do. You may not be as prepared for worship or prayer or responding to questions or doing your job or sharing your faith or looking after one another as you would like to be. You may be tempted to say, *“I cannot do this”* – whatever *this* is. *“The odds are too long. The task is too big. I’ll leave it to others. I am too small to make a difference for Christ.”* When you are tempted in this way remember Frederick Buechner and how the Holy Spirit worked in him to create works of fiction and non-fiction that influenced so many over such a long career. Remember Jeremiah and God’s words of challenge and comfort.

These first verses in Jeremiah remind us that for true heralds of God’s Word, for anyone who truly wishes to speak God’s truth to a world in desperate need of that truth, it’s not about making it big or making a name for yourself. It’s about remembering that God is making it happen – no matter the gifts or impediments we perceive – no matter our strength or weakness – no matter our youth or age. It’s about moving out of the way so that God may be all in all. Remember that God comes to each of us saying, *“Who ever said it was about you?”* Be still and know that God is God. **Amen**

➤ **Lord, speak to me** **767**

† Offering Invitation

With gratitude for the healing and hope that Jesus offers, let us present our offering to God. May our gifts help to share that healing and hope throughout God’s world in Christ’s name.

➤ **Praise God from whom all blessings flow** **306**

† Offering Prayer

O God, we place our hope and trust in your loving kindness. Because we want to praise you with more than words, we offer our gifts to support Christ’s mission in the world. Bless these gifts and our lives, so that all the world will know your loving kindness. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers and The Lord's Prayer

Loving God, gather us into your presence as we pray. Silence our hearts and minds in these moments so that we may listen for the movement of your Holy Spirit who prays within us through our sighs too deep for words. **And so we sing...**

➤ ***Be still and know that I am God (verse 1)*** **64**

O God, we lay before you our thanks and our concerns as we remember those who have come to our attention through conversations or chance encounters this week. We offer gratitude for moments of joy and goodness, and remembered pleasures stirred by your Spirit. **And so we sing...**

➤ ***Be still and know that I am God (verse 1)*** **64**

We remember all those whose situations are very close to our hearts today – those facing stress or sorrow – those challenged by pain or illness – those making a new beginning or searching for a new path.

We remember the things in the news lately that concern us deeply – the stress on the environment and worries about the earth's future – the pressures on those who have lost jobs or cannot find work – the pain of those who meet discrimination or hatred in daily life – tensions among nations who threaten each other. **And so we sing...**

➤ ***Be still and know that I am God (verse 1)*** **64**

And we remember one another, and needs known and unknown in this community. Bless us – show us the paths of ministry you are opening before us. We believe you hear our prayers and will be faithful to answer according to your will, so together we offer the prayer Jesus gave 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***

➤ ***As water to the thirsty*** **688**

Blessing

Go in peace – love and care for one another in the name of Christ Jesus. May the Lord of fire bless and keep you – may the Lord of energy shine upon you and be gracious to you – may the Lord of love lift you up – offering an abundant and rewarding life. Go in peace to love and serve a broken world.

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