

Welcome, Announcements, and Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that the land where we gather for worship belongs to God, as does all of creation. We also know that this is the unceded territory of the Lkwungen and WSÁNEĆ people. As we pray, reflect, and celebrate in this place, we do so as guests lamenting the injustice in our history. We ask that the God of love and justice lead us along the path of reconciliation, bringing accountability and healing. May we be inspired to forge new relationships of respect and solidarity.

➤ *O let the power fall on me*

Call to Worship

Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.

They shall mount up with wings as eagles;

They shall run and not be weary;

They shall walk and not faint.

In the company of all God's saints and pilgrims, come and worship.

We come with prayer and praise to find our strength renewed!

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

Ancient of days – God of our everyday lives – we praise you for your guidance and care in every generation and for the example of those who have gone before us, who taught us your name and brought us to faith. In the great mystery of your love, we know these saints gather with us, to praise and adore you for your wisdom that instructs – your grace that redeems – your Spirit who guides us – and for the comfort and hope we claim in the knowledge that neither death nor life can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Gracious God, you have been faithful to us in every generation. Yet we confess that we are not so faithful to you. We shrink from costly discipleship, and we seek cheap grace. Forgive our fleeting enthusiasms and our shallow commitments. Guide us always with the love and mercy we witness in Jesus Christ our Lord who asks us to pray together, saying... ***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***

Friends, while it is true that we have all sinned, it is a greater truth that we are forgiven through God's love in Jesus Christ. Be at peace with God – with yourself – and with one another.

➤ *I know not why such wondrous grace*

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† Prayer for Understanding

God of faithful surprises, through the ages you have made known your love and power in unexpected ways and places. May we daily perceive the joy and wonder of your abiding presence offering our lives in gratitude. Open us to the wonder of your Word so that we may be changed as we grow in understanding. Amen

Scripture

Psalm 119: 137-144 (with Refrain I) **responsive / displayed**

Open our eyes that we may see the wonders of your law.

You are righteous, O LORD, and your judgments are right.

You have appointed your decrees in righteousness and in all faithfulness.

My zeal consumes me because my foes forget your words.

Your promise is well tried, and your servant loves it.

I am small and despised, yet I do not forget your precepts.

Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and your law is the truth.

Trouble and anguish have come upon me, but your commandments are my delight.

Your decrees are righteous forever; give me understanding that I may live.

Open our eyes that we may see the wonders of your law.

Romans 3: 19-28 [NT 154]

Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For “no human being will be justified in his sight” by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

Luke 19: 1-10 [NT 82]

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.”

So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him.

All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.”

Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.”

Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

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

Message

Who is the “fiercest” believer you know? Think of the very best person you know. Think of somebody you know is the most generous, kind and helping person ever. Get that person into your mind. They are the best and most caring person you have ever known. Now think of the most excellent person you have ever heard of – living or dead. Think of someone who is giving and selfless – someone who is charitable and accepting of others – someone who has, or is, making a real difference in the world. Think of someone with integrity and humility, courage and compassion. Now share who you thought of with someone sitting near you. Maybe you thought of the same person...!

According to many people, Mother Teresa of Calcutta was perhaps the greatest Christian ever. She gave herself totally to the poor of India and captured the hearts of the world like nobody else on earth. The world will always remember the wonderful life of Mother Teresa.

When she was given the Nobel Peace Prize, it was well deserved. She received it, saying, “I am unworthy. I am unworthy to receive this. This award is recognition of the poor of India.” Mother Teresa was arguably the greatest saint of our time.

She founded the Missionaries of Charity and trained young women to serve the poorest of the poor in all parts of the world. She told the sisters, “Let there be no pride. There should be no vanity in this work. For this is not your work but God’s work. These are not your poor but God’s poor.” The center of her life was not to organize programs but to care for individual people. Mother Teresa’s was a life of total poverty – a life of total submission to the will of God. If anyone deserves eternal life, Mother Teresa does. She was one of the very best people, if not the best.

As we approach the message from Paul's letter today, this Reformation Sunday, keep the amazing people you recalled in your thoughts. We are reminded that all people, [including the person you thought of, including Mother Teresa] *...all people have sinned and all people fall short of the glory of God. No one will be justified before God by their good works. Instead, all people are saved by grace, by mercy, by forgiveness, that we would have faith in Christ whose sacrifice cleanses us from all sin. Therefore no one can boast. No one can brag about one's good works. No one can brag about one's faith. The only thing that we can boast about is the goodness and mercy and grace of God. If you want to boast, boast of Jesus Christ.*

Even Mother Teresa is a person who is saved by grace and not by her good works. She too is saved by grace – she did not earn her salvation. She too does not deserve eternal life as a reward for her tremendous lifelong work in the ghettos.

Of all the Christians in the world, Mother Teresa must have the longest list of good works behind her name. She must have the largest number of good deeds – be a near perfect student of Christ and yet she too was **given** eternal life and salvation. She didn't earn it. She didn't deserve it. Mother Teresa does not deserve eternal life – even if you think to yourself, “Mother Teresa has loved the dying people in Calcutta so much – surely, Mother Teresa deserves eternal life.”

But the Bible is clear: all people have sinned. All people have fallen short of the glory of God. No one is saved by their good works before Almighty God. We are saved by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ, for works of love. Salvation is a gift for people who do not earn it – who do not deserve it – and are surprised and humbled when the gift of salvation is given.

Knowing that Mother Teresa is saved by grace and not by her good works, frees us from having to be saved by our good works – if Mother Teresa can't make it into heaven by her good works, then neither can we. If Mother Teresa cannot be saved by her good works – and if the awesome person you recalled earlier cannot be saved by their good works, then how can you be saved by your good works? If Mother Teresa can't be, and if this wonderful person you named in your heart can't be, neither can you and neither can I.

Our God is a gracious God, freely giving salvation and eternal life to people who don't deserve it, to people who simply say, “Thank you Lord. Thank you for your gift.”

This salvation, this gift, is that **God in Christ** makes us righteous – God restores us to the relationship that God created us to have. Remember that sin is unrighteous activity – that which ruptures our relationship with God. We have all done things that bruise and break our relationship with the divine and we will all likely do so again, yet being made righteous means that the effects of sin are nullified as we enter into restored relationship with God.

Righteousness is a positive relationship to God that grows out of God's power to restore us through Jesus Christ. Christ is the key because it is through him that God breaks the power of sin and sets aside its corruption. This happens through trust in Christ. Our relationship to God – torn apart by sin, is rectified – mended – and our lives are transformed as we take God as Lord. We put our trust in God – not in some idol or in our own ability to fulfill a moral code to make ourselves acceptable to God.

God justifies the one who has faith in Jesus. And that faith presupposes relationship with God. God is present for us – we trust God. In the act of trusting we go beyond what we can see and know for sure. Trust involves decision and risk. And the decision is not just once and for all – it has to be renewed regularly, if it is to be authentic.

Faith is an ongoing thing, a process. We can never say that we have it as if it were a possession! We affirm that faith is a gift which means that the faith response is a consequence of God's grace. But this is not a gift we receive once and then keep for all time. We continue receiving it like the manna of the wilderness or the *daily bread* of the Lord's Prayer.

When the Protestant Reformers took up the motto, *justification by faith*, they did not mean that we are considered righteous by God because we give assent to theological truths or accept the teachings of the tradition on the church's authority or cultivate a positive outlook – all such things the Reformers would have named *works righteousness*! What they meant was that we are acceptable to God because we trust God. It is as simple and as profound as that.

The heart of the Reformation and the heart of the gospel is grace. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is a deep trust of the heart – created by God. We are saved by grace through faith that God gives to us.

Faith is that deep trust in God. It is down in the pit of our stomachs – imbedded in our hearts – where bit by bit God shapes us in such a way that we have finally let go – to believe and to trust.

We can't even boast about our faith. There is no room for boasting when it comes to trust. We can't boast about our salvation because it is all a gift from God. God created the faith that rests deep within.

We are put right with God – brought into positive relationship – by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. When we know God's presence in our lives, what was broken is mended and we are transformed. ...*we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.* It is God who creates wholeness. Thanks be to God! **Amen**

† Offering Invitation

When we gather as God's Church, we celebrate the gifts of so many others, for so many centuries, offered in Jesus' name. Now is our opportunity to join our gifts to theirs, so that God will be praised, and Jesus' love will be spread in this generation and those to come.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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† Offering Prayer

Generous God, you are faithful and fruitful in every generation. Bless our gifts and make them fruitful beyond our imagining in the work of your kingdom. Keep us faithful in this generation so we can offer the inheritance we have received in Christ to the generation that comes after us. Amen

A Statement of Belief [Living Faith 9.3]

For some today "God" is an empty word indicating no reality they have ever consciously known.

They do not believe there is a God.

Many find it hard to believe in a loving God in a world where so many suffer.

Unbelief threatens many with despair, the feeling that nothing really matters and that beyond this world is emptiness.

The Bible witnesses to God in Christ entering deeply into our human suffering.

As we behold our Saviour on the cross, we are convinced of God's love for us. Faced with the pain and agony of the world, only a suffering God can help.

God is with us in our anguish.

Faithful men and women of the Bible also knew pain and uncertainty. Yet they experienced God and felt compelled to speak of God moving powerfully in life.

Christian faith is a response to the searching presence of God.

Christian belief brings new meaning into one's life, for life's true purpose is to glorify and to enjoy God.

† Pastoral Prayers

Creating and reforming God, we give you thanks for your forgiveness and your abundant blessings. We pray for ourselves and your church throughout the world.

Fill us with a spirit of openness to your Spirit, to hear and receive your promises and to keep our covenant with you. Where we are corrupt, purify us – where we are in error, direct us. Where we are in need, provide for us. Where we are divided, reunite us. And where we are close-minded, reform us and make us new.

Merciful God, we remember this morning those who are burdened by illness, injury, injustice, and adversity...

May they remember your gracious promises, receive assistance from God's people, and live in the joy of Christ's salvation.

We also give thanks, timeless God, for the saints of our history, especially those who have taught us your word – including the prophets, the apostles, and the reformers. Encourage us so that we may not only believe their teachings but also follow their example by faithfully proclaiming the Gospel for generations to come.

Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your compassion, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

➤ *Mothering God, you gave me birth* 312

Blessing

The time is coming when God will make a new covenant with the people. God's law will be written upon our hearts, and our sins forgiven forever. So let us go in peace, to love and serve our God. And may the grace of the Living Lord, the love of God and the community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all.

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

