

Welcome / Announcements / 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.

➤ *For mornings bright (verses 1 and 4)*

Call to Worship

O Lord, open our lips,

And our mouths shall declare your praise.

O Lord, open our eyes,

So that we may behold your presence.

O Lord, open our ears,

So that we may hear your call to follow.

O Lord, open our hearts,

So that we may offer you worship in love and joy.

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

Holy God, our Creator and Redeemer, your faithfulness endures forever. You offer new life in Christ and call us to follow him. You challenge us to bring life and hope to the world you love. In you we find strength and courage to face every challenge. And so we offer you our praise and gratitude to you.

Faithful God, you sent Jesus to seek and save the lost yet it's hard to recognize when we have lost our way. Wash over us with your cleansing Spirit, and renew our commitment to follow your divine purposes. Forgive and guide us always as we are bold to pray... ***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***

Let us rejoice, for God has put a new song in our mouths! Trust in God's enduring love and mercy, washing over us every day. Know that forgiveness is yours through the grace of Jesus Christ. Amen

➤ *Songs of thankfulness and praise (verses 1, 2, 5)* **170**

† Prayer for Understanding

Holy One, you have blessed your people with wisdom over the ages. We seek your wisdom today. Send your Holy Spirit, to give us understanding through your Word read and proclaimed this day. Amen

Scripture

1 Corinthians 1: 1-9 [NT 165]

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind — just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you — so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

John 1: 29-42 [NT 92]

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel."

And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said

to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?"

They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?"

He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed).

He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

Message

The author of John's gospel is not trying to give a chronological account of the life of Jesus – which to a large degree the other gospels do. The intent of John's gospel is stated directly near its end at chapter 20, verse 31: *these things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.* Belief is the key issue for the author of this gospel, and it is to this belief that John the Baptizer testifies in our reading. He says: *Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.* He tells all who will listen – priests, Levites, the crowd, his followers, you and me – he proclaims clearly that Jesus is the one people have been expecting, Jesus is the one in whom the Spirit dwells, Jesus is *the Son of God*. This is why John baptized, to reveal Jesus as God's light.

And what is the *sin of the world* about which John speaks? Not murder, theft, adultery, greed or envy. Not the new righteousness of the community outlined in Matthew. The sin of the world, according to the gospel of John is not about prayer or fasting or stewardship or the Golden Rule. When the Baptizer announces that Jesus removes sin, he doesn't mean that Jesus has come to sort out problems with divine law in these significant ethical and moral areas of life. No, what John means when he talks about *sin* is **unbelief** – the failure to trust God and enter into

communion with God as illuminated by Jesus. Jesus is *the light of the world* who saves – the one who destroys our sin – by revealing God.

Sin, in John's gospel is unbelief, and getting rid of – taking away – that one *sin* is the highest priority of the Jesus that he presents to us in his writing. *Faith* then is the opposite of sin – it is spiritual knowledge: knowing God and knowing Jesus, whom God has sent into the world. Those who know God are set apart from the world's blindness (think of the man born blind in Chapter 9) – those who know God are set apart from the world's hatred and enter into oneness with God – they **abide** with God. Remember, this gospel was written so that people could and would get rid of their sin of unbelief – so that they might come to faith and have real life, abundant life – an unobstructed and eternal life **resting** in the presence of God.

Rest and **abide** – **stay** and **remain**.

The word *remain* is from the same root as the word *abide* or *dwell* – such a significant term in John's gospel. The whole of chapter 14 talks about the meaning of *abiding*, *remaining*, or *dwelling* in God. It talks about dwelling places – mansions, rooms – places to *abide* or *remain* with our Father in heaven. The word for *staying* and for *remaining* in Greek is the same word – **meno** – used in this story five times in very quick succession.

The words jump out at me: **remain** and **stay** – **rest** and **abide** – related words repeated in today's reading. John was told that *the one on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who will pour out into human life the Spirit of God, the life of God, oneness with God. John saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on Jesus.*

Next my attention is drawn to the question Jesus asks: *What are you looking for?*

If Jesus asked you such an open-ended question, how would you respond? Surely you'd want to muster something profound like, "I'm looking for the meaning of life. What's it all about? I want to understand how to square a good God with the bad things that happen in this world. I want to know what my future holds."

But the two disciples ask: "*Where are you staying?*"

What a weird little exchange! What are we to make of it? Why is it important enough to record? What is John trying to tell us?

"*What are you looking for?*"

When people walk into our churches – into Knox – how would they answer Jesus' question? Are they looking for meaning, purpose, community, a place to sing their praises to God – a place to lean inward after a chaotic *outward* week? Are they looking for a place to stay?

"*What are you looking for?*" Jesus asks the two disciples. And then the part that really gets stuck in my brain – the question the disciples ask, *where are you staying?*

At first blush this looks like a blown opportunity! They've got the Son of the living God, the Lamb of God, ready to give them great insight and all they ask is, "So, where are you hanging your hat these days?"!!! But that's just at first blush.

It's an ordinary question that you might hear anywhere, anytime. When you run into people on a holiday or at a conference it is the most natural question in the world. A friend connecting with a colleague on Facebook in preparation for an upcoming event in Victoria queried, "Where r u staying?"

It means, "Are you comfortable?" "Are you located nearby?" "Do you need accommodation, or transportation, or hospitality of some other kind?" – It means, "Can we get together?" "Are you on your own?" – "Hi, it's great to see you! Where are you staying?"

"What are you looking for?" asks Jesus.

After John bears witness to who Jesus is – after he reveals Jesus as Lamb of God and Son of God in whom the spirit of God rests – then we hear the first words of Jesus in this gospel. He asks two of John's disciples, *"What are you looking for?"* What do you seek? What is it that you hope to gain by all your striving and working and thinking? What is the goal of your living?

And the followers respond, *"Rabbi, where are you staying?"* The word *staying* is the same word as is translated *abides*, *dwells*, or in earlier verses *remains*. Think about this for a moment... they are not asking some polite or meaningless question. They are not looking for an address or asking, "What town are you from? "Which house or hotel are you staying in? "What's the name of your street?" "Who are your neighbours?" They haven't blown their opportunity after all. Their reply is really a way of saying, "We're looking for you – where will you be?" They want Jesus. They want to be where he is. They want to follow where he leads – to remain with him and stay where he stays.

Remain. Remain. Stay. Stay. Stay.

Could this story be telling us something the disciples don't fully know yet themselves? What people are looking for is not information, answers to questions such as "Who is Jesus?" or "Is this the one?" Or "Am I right about this church business?" Not even the answer to the question of why stories of meeting this man have captured the human heart for generations.

They have asked the perfect question – the question we all should seek the answer to. They want to know where it is that Jesus really dwells – does he truly live in God and God in him?

Rest and abide – stay and remain.

What we are all looking for – without even knowing it – is a place to *stay*, a place to *remain* always. Jesus is that place, a person who is himself a home – a place to belong – a whole way of life. Jesus knows that what the disciples really want is a place to belong.

“Where are you staying?” they say.

“Come and see,” Jesus replies. He doesn’t issue a bunch of pre-requisites, doesn’t make them jump through moral hoops before letting them take their first steps of discipleship. Jesus doesn’t say, “First you have to see me in full faith and only then may you come along with me.”

That’s the way we sometimes frame it. Come and talk to us after you have your act together. Come and join our church after we’re sure you’ve got your spiritual and moral vision clear. Jesus says, “Come, and see.” So they did. They go with him. They end up *staying*, and his story becomes their way of life.

So began the gospel. So began the church.

When Jesus asks, *“What are you looking for?”* can we say we are seeking union with Christ – do we say that we want to dwell in him – to stay with him? Perhaps we are looking for less than that. Maybe we just want to learn more, to study and think. Possibly we simply want the perks Jesus could offer like a better job – success in our relationships – fair weather and clear sailing – comfort and ease. We may find all these things in our relationship with Jesus through the abundant grace of God, but we will not have arrived where the writer of this gospel thinks we should be. These things are written *so that we may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah... and that through believing we may have life in his name* – so that we might come to faith and real life – eternal life, resting in the presence of God.

Rest and ***abide*** – ***stay*** and ***remain***.

Jesus asks, *“What are you looking for?”*

“Teacher, where are you staying?”

➤ ***May the mind of Christ my Saviour***

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Offering and Prayer ***Praise God from whom all blessings flow*** ***306***

God has given us a new song in our hearts, a song of thankfulness and praise. We bring our gifts with thanksgiving and with hearts cheered by God’s goodness.

Gracious God, we offer our gifts with humble hearts. Each offering seems small on its own, yet we ask for your blessing on each one. Through the work of your Holy Spirit, surprise us with all that our gifts can accomplish. Amen.

† Pastoral Prayers

God of purpose and promise, we open our hearts to you in prayer, trusting in your mercy to bear the burdens we carry.

We thank you for the work and witness of your Church, bringing Good News into many lives and situations throughout the earth. Today we pray for congregations that are struggling financially – for churches caught up in conflict, and for all those church members who are tired and need your renewing Spirit... Guide them with your grace.

We thank you for the healing that comes from your hand, O God – in times of reconciliation when your forgiving love is at work, and in times when pain is eased and grief is comforted. Today we pray for those whose emotions are raw – for those whose bodies are weakened in this winter of sickness and for any whose minds are troubled... Give them hope for new life with you.

We lift to you people around the world who work for justice and unity to prevail in the midst of division – in nations where conflict has broken out or repression rules – in places facing poverty, famine or destruction from disaster – anywhere racial and ethnic disparities weaken common life. We pray for Canada in this time when resentments simmer and differences deepen... Send your justice to bring relief and your peace to help understanding prevail.

As followers of Jesus, give us courage to unite not only in prayer but also in action for the needs of this world. Strengthen us to work together so others may see what it means to follow you in Christ's name.

Hear these and all the unspoken prayers of our hearts, O God, and in your mercy, answer. Amen

➤ *Morning has broken*

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Blessing

Go with strength and humility, for you are servants of our Saviour who walks with each one of us. And may the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the friendship of the Holy Spirit bless and sustain you, now and always. Amen

➤ *We are marching (repeat)*

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