

05 March 2023 – Lent 2 / Communion

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

For thousands of years, First Nations people have walked on this land – a relationship that is at the centre of their lives and spirituality. We are gathered on the traditional and unceded territory of the ləkʷəŋən and the WSÁNEĆ. We acknowledge their stewardship of this land throughout the ages. 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 – inspiring new relationships of respect and solidarity.

Celebrations / Joys & Concerns

*God's blessing on you. God's blessing on you.
God's blessing, dear friends. God's blessing on you.*

PWS&D Message

Bhachini Resumes Her Business

In India, Bhachini Devi lost her husband due to tuberculosis. After his death, she moved in with her eldest son and his family.

Using the money she earned from running her small general store, Bhachini took care of her family. Unfortunately, her eldest son also contracted tuberculosis, so Bhachini supported his treatment when he was in the hospital. When her income wasn't sufficient, she had to take out a loan.

Sadly, her son also died from tuberculosis. The stress of the situation left her unable to run her business.

Her story became known to staff at the Mohulpahari Christian Hospital, supported by PWS&D, and soon Bhachini was provided with assistance to restart her store. This outreach turned her life around.

Now, Bhachini beams with joy because her business is running well, her store has many more things to sell, and she can continue to support her family.

This Lenten season, let us be grateful that we are can faithfully respond to Christ's call to provide livelihood support. Through PWS&D, we are helping people achieve their dreams and support their families.

➤ *Let us build a house (verse 3)*

Just as the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness,

the Spirit sends us into places of uncertainty where we confront our weakness & insecurities.

Even when our situation changes, we cling to the tried and the true.

We insist that what worked in the past will work in the future.

Yet, Jesus calls us to die to our old ways so that the new will emerge.

He said that we need to be born again to see God's new realm.

Embracing God's realm will mean accepting different principles that no longer feed our egos.

It will mean putting the needs of others before our own.

We know the depth of God's love, revealed to us in Jesus, God's Son.

When we are reborn by God's Spirit, we will go where the Spirit leads us and love as God loves us.

➤ *We lay our broken world in sorrow at your feet* 202

† Gathering Prayer and sung Words of Hope

Merciful and infinitely loving God, help us open our hearts to one another, to receive each other in love and forgiveness even as you open your heart to us. Be known to us in our praise, in our singing, in our prayers, and in your Word to us, in this time of worship and every day.

Reconciling God, who holds the brokenness of the world in a vast embrace; restore us to your side. Remind us that we are not made righteous even by being right. Free us from the need to justify ourselves by our own anxious striving. Allow us to abandon ourselves fully to faith in you alone. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen

➤ *How deep the peace (repeat) – please remain seated*

† Prayer for Understanding

God of Wisdom, we turn to scripture to listen and learn. Send your Holy Spirit to help us listen carefully so that we hear what we have not heard before and learn to follow Christ with deeper understanding and renewed commitment. Amen

Scripture **Genesis 12: 1-4a** [OT 10]

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So, Abram went as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him.

Psalm 121 responsive / displayed

I lift up my eyes to the hills – from where will my help come?

My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

The Lord will not let your foot be moved; the Lord who keeps you will not slumber.

The One who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.

The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil, will keep your life.

The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.

John 3: 1-17 [NT 93]

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God."

Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?"

Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"

Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

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

Message

In every season of the Church year and every season of life, God's call is universal and pervasive. God is always moving and speaking, and faithfulness to God invites us to be on the move, too! God is alive and desires that we become fully alive, revealing God's glory in daily life. As we travel through the spiritual darkness of Lent, what is guiding us?

The story of Abraham's call celebrates forward movement – pointing to forward looking spirituality. God promises blessings in Genesis and the Psalm invites us to look up to the God who creates all things – including the threatening hills – as our helper.

You all know Abram and Sarai right? You know their story... They are the couple God calls to go from the known to the unknown – the ones who get their names changed to Abraham and Sarah later in the tale – the old folks who end up with a child and become the parents of us all. In fact, Abraham is of significance for the followers of three world

religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – because it is believed that it is God who called and inspired and led Abraham on a path to save the people who had gone wrong and disobeyed God.

One of the main things that we know about Abram and Sarai at the beginning of Genesis 12 is that they are unable to have children. They are representative of the barrenness of human history and that emptiness is a metaphor for hopelessness. Yet it is through this couple – these past childbearing, infertile folks – that God’s promise of life is fulfilled.

I think sometimes that many of us look around our congregation and our denomination – around the Christian church generally – and see it as barren or comatose. Are we just old and no longer able to create new life? Has the lack of children – the absence of offspring – caused us to give up hope of a vibrant future? If we see ourselves as barren and hopeless, how can we be faithful to God’s promise?

Perhaps we wonder where or how we need to move beyond our current – even positive – past? What adventures await us if we explore new ways of mission and worship? Where will our spiritual walk take us? Movements of the Spirit can be just as challenging as geographical expeditions. In both cases, we must leave the familiar and adapt to a new landscape – a new seascape – of possibilities. Divine movement builds on the past but lures us toward untraveled futures, personally and institutionally. In our heart of hearts, we know we must continue moving or stagnate – exploring new ways of ministry and outreach. Given our current situation – numerical, financial, contextual, demographic, theological – where is God calling us to go?

Abram and Sarai are told to get up and leave their homeland, their family, everything familiar and comfortable. And the amazing thing is that they do it! What courage they must have! Can we see ourselves on a similar journey of faith or are we bound by places, people, property and purse?

We can be encouraged to step out, as Abram and Sarai did, facing the difficult choice to leave the familiar behind so that we might journey towards blessing. We might be reminded that there are many people who have left kindred and home, in search of such blessings. Maybe that was you as a post war immigrant, a war bride. Maybe it is someone you have met or heard about fleeing oppression and hoping to be blessed in a new land. Maybe it is a student stretching their wings and broadening their horizons. How will we welcome them, journey alongside them, and ultimately be a blessing to one another?

Abram and Sarai enter a new history that begins with a call and a radical breaking away from the old history. They are invited to leave their secure barrenness for the sake of a risky future. It seems counter intuitive just when things are settled and predictable to relinquish control – our natural instinct is to do the opposite – to hold on to things as they are for dear life. Yet God calls and promises something more, something new.

This call from God subverts much usual wisdom for it is a call to move beyond three very human, powerful and deeply rooted fears – the unknown that we cannot control, those who are different from us, and personal powerlessness in the face of seeming impossibilities.

God calls Abram and Sarai to leave their geographic place. They leave all custom and comfort, family and friends – all the regularity and rhythm of their shared life. Abram and Sarai journey from what they have, to what they do not have – from the known, to the unknown – from everything that is familiar, to all things strange.

They also have to leave behind their narrow, insular, limited vision – the tendency in all of us to exclude the strange and the stranger. Our common inclination is to fear the other – to suspect and marginalize the unfamiliar – to dismiss all that is different from who and what we know. God calls Abram and Sarai – calls us – to a universal and inclusive embrace of everyone.

Abram and Sarai are both about seventy-five years old when God calls them and while they might not have had our knowledge of the biology of human reproduction, they know full well that they are beyond their child-bearing years. They face an impossibility that brings them face to face with their own powerlessness to alter their circumstances. Biologically-speaking, barren Sarai and impotent Abram are “as good as dead.” However, they believe that God has the power to fulfill divine promises – they move from fear of powerlessness to faith that God can truly make something out of nothing.

When God calls, Abram and Sarai challenge conventional wisdom and move beyond what might be normal and understandable human fears – ignorance, inclusion, and impotence. Why do they go? Not because it is the easiest thing to do, but because God intends for them to do it. And through the words of the Psalm these pilgrims are promised protection... God is with them and will care for them – God is with us and will care for us. Of course, we know that there is no guarantee that our journeys will succeed or arrive at

some pre-conceived destination. Still, we move forward with trust that God will guide us on the way, asking in times of challenge, “...from where will our help come?” Where will our community of faith find the resources and the will to move forward? Where is God in our pilgrimage?

What are the stories of blessing and faithfulness that will sustain us as we journey through the darkness of Lent – through the uncertainty of modern life that includes environmental crises and financial instability? Who are our fellow pilgrims – those who share our burdens and our blessings – our stories, hopes and dreams?

God lays out a vision and a promise which Abram and Sarai find compelling enough to take risks for. As a church, perhaps that is also what we need to do – to listen for and believe the compelling vision that God has for where we are going. Then as a community of faith we will find the courage to take risks as we journey where God calls. **Amen**

➤ *To Abraham and Sarah*

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Invitation to the Table

Friends, Lent is not simply a time for temporary self-discipline. It is time to refashion our relationship with God and to be refashioned by God’s strength and grace. This meal is the gift of that strength and grace. It comes not as a whole loaf and bottle for each one to take away and relish in private. It comes in broken pieces and deep sips shared to remind us there will always be enough for everyone who seeks a place at this table. So come, you who have much faith and you who have a little – you who have been here often and you who have not been for a long time. Our Saviour invites all those who trust divine grace to share this feast as a foretaste of the kingdom.

Offering and Prayer

Our lives are blessed with the goodness that comes from God. Let us trust that goodness to sustain us and so offer God our gifts to share with the world in need with glad hearts.

➤ *Here, O my Lord, I see thee (verses 1-3)*

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Generous God, we offer our gifts in gratitude for all we have received in Christ and in creation. Bless our gifts and our lives, so that we can share in the building up of your kingdom in the world you love. We join our voices now to affirm our faith...

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

† Celebrating Together with Thanksgiving

On the night Jesus was betrayed by friends who thought their intentions good and commitment strong, Jesus sat at table with those very friends. While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, he broke it and said, "Take, eat, this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is the new covenant, poured out for many, for the forgiveness of sins." As often as we eat this bread and drink from this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again. As Jesus gave thanks to God for the gifts of the earth, so let us give thanks for what we receive from God's hand.

God be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to God.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is good to give God thanks and praise.

Holy and Mysterious God, it is right to bring our thanks and praise for you are the source of all that is. You spin the galaxies that twinkle in the night sky. You give life to fragile creatures shivering in the chill of winter and offer them hope as the sun stirs new growth deep in the earth. Your mercy sustains creation day by day and so we sing in praise and wonder...

O holy, holy, holy God, O God of time and space. All earth and sea and sky above bear witness to your grace. Hosanna in the highest heav'n, creation sings your praise. And blessed is the one who comes and bears your name always!

Lord Jesus Christ, we come to the table remembering your love for the world. We remember how you walked the road with those who suffer, touching those in pain and grief, giving strength to those in weakness, welcoming those who had been pushed aside, standing up to those with callous hearts. You lived to offer mercy to all. You died because we find it so hard to offer mercy to each other. And so we remember in silence those who need your mercy this day... [silence]

We sing in remembrance of your grace...

***Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again!
Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again!***

Holy Spirit, move among us in kindness now as we remember what mercy has cost the God of love. Pour out your grace on the bread we break and the cup we share today. Let us taste the passion of Jesus baked into this bread and be moved to act with compassion in his name. Let us taste the renewing love of Jesus that refreshes us from this cup and be moved to greet each day with fresh hope.

Holy God, strengthen us by your undying love, so that we may remember to show mercy to others, and to seek mercy from others, living unafraid to bear the cost of mercy day by day. We offer our lives to you as we sing...

***Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen!
Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen!***

Sharing Bread and Cup

The one who suffered for our injustices is now present in this bread.

The one whose body was hung on a cross is now offered in this cup.

The bread of life – the cup of grace – we remember and share with thanksgiving.

Come and share in these gifts. In them God comes to us so that we may come to God.

*Please come forward to receive Holy Communion – everyone is welcome at this table.
If you are unable to come to the front, please signal an elder who will come and serve you.*

*We use gluten and dairy-free bread. Both juice and wine are available.
Pre-packaged elements are provided on request.*

† Prayer after Communion

Holy One, only you know what is up with us – our doubt, our fatigue, our desire to ignore, our carefree forgetfulness – O God, you know. Breathe your life into us. Encourage and uplift us – surprise us with your powerful spirit. You know, O God how dry we are – how thirsty our souls are for your breath of life. Work in us and through us, O God, to fill the world with your spirit. In gratitude for this meal – these people – we give ourselves to you. Trusting in you, we offer all our quiet thoughts and prayers into your care. May we go from here, strengthened, refreshed, and empowered by your Spirit to be true and joyful witnesses to Jesus Christ – living to your glory in all we do. We sing our prayer together...

➤ ***Our Father in heaven*** (*The Lord's Prayer – no repeats*)

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Blessing

As we continue our Lenten journey, may we remember the promise of the Psalmist: *"The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forever more."* So let us go now, trusting that our help comes from God, and may God's presence strengthen us, Jesus' faithfulness guide us, and the breath of the Spirit bring us energy to serve with love.

➤ ***Bless the Lord*** (*repeat*)