

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.

PWS&D Message ***Rabin Smiles Again***

In Nepal, 22-year-old Rabin Budha kept finding dry red patches all over his body. He ignored the issue for weeks and when he could no longer do so, he mentioned it to a health outreach worker in his village who recommended Rabin go for a check-up. After an initial test, a dermatologist suspected that Rabin had leprosy and sent him to hospital for further testing.

Rabin began treatment at the Shining Hospital, where doctors admitted him after finding his blood pressure very low. Upon receiving medication and close supervision, his condition improved, and treatment is ongoing.

Today, Rabin is grateful for the support, care and love he received at the Shining Hospital and is optimistic about a full recovery.

This Lenten season, we are thankful that we can faithfully respond to Christ’s call to provide care and hope to those who are suffering. Through PWS&D, we help people build healthy lives. *In Nepal, PWS&D supports the Shining Hospital, which provides health outreach in remote villages, and care and treatment for those experiencing illness, in particular leprosy and tuberculosis.*

➤ ***Let us build a house*** (verse 4)

PWS&D Lenten Liturgy Written by Jim Goring and the Rev. Ian Fraser (Pointe Claire, Quebec)

Just as the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness,

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

Here we are taught to pay attention to those whom others ignore.

Jesus insists that grace is revealed in unlikely people.

God's realm is a place where all are welcome, regardless of their state or position. In a world of disparity, we recognize that some receive what is denied to others.

Let us break through barriers that keep many from receiving the grace that they need.

➤ *My Shepherd is the King of Love*

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† Gathering Prayer / the Lord's Prayer / sung Words of Hope

Gracious and loving God, you are the Source of all that sustains us. You are compassion, embracing us when we call for mercy. You are mercy guiding us through anxious times. You are wisdom, revealing truth to challenge and renew us.

Holy One, you bless us with your presence day by day, so we turn to you in worship, to seek your blessing once again. We offer you our love and loyalty, our prayers and our praise, for you are Love, Light and Life for us, and we belong to you.

God of life and love, these days we confess that events around us shake our trust in your love. When terror strikes and innocents fall, we wonder if love can defeat violence. When truth is twisted by misleading claims, we wonder if love can prevail over lies. When we face trouble, we wonder if you love us at all.

Forgive us, God, when we lose our trust in your love. Help us to know and to believe that as the children of your love, we are free to begin again, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray with these words;...***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, for ever. Amen***

Listen to the words of St Paul: *"Neither death nor life, nor things present nor things to come can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus."* Today, let us trust that, no matter what is happening around us, no matter what we may have done, God's deep love will never let us go. In Jesus Christ, God's love and forgiveness has been lavishly poured out-for each one of us. Friends- believe the Good News! In Jesus Christ we are forgiven people.

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

† Prayer for Understanding

Eternal God; source of all love and light and wholeness, drench our hearts and minds with your goodness and mercy. Blow away the shadows of doubt and darkness. Enfold us with your presence, and your peace. Open our ears to hear what you are saying to us today – that renewed and strengthened we may serve you where you have placed us. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen

Scripture

Psalm 23 [OT 501]

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;

he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

Ephesians 5: 8-14 [NT 194]

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

John 9: 1-41 [NT 102]

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.

His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is

day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?"

Some were saying, "It is he."

Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him."

He kept saying, "I am the man."

But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?"

He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight."

They said to him, "Where is he?"

He said, "I do not know."

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see."

Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath."

But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided.

So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened."

He said, "He is a prophet."

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"

His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself."

His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner."

He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?"

Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."

The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him."

Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he."

He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.

Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind."

Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?"

Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

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

Message ***Seeing is believing...or is it?***

Those of you who are familiar with children's literature, may remember the author Jean Little. Ms. Little was blind and had a guide dog. Being blind never stopped her from being a prolific author though. She earned a degree in English literature, was given 6 honorary degrees, was made a Member of the Order of Canada and wrote over 50 books. She died 3 years ago at age 88.

When our daughters, Rachel and Letha were young, they loved to read her books. One time Jean Little was visiting their school, and they had the opportunity of meeting her and asking her questions. That day, Letha, who was 5 and in kindergarten, came home for lunch; all excited about the event. When asked about what had happened at school that day she announced with great compassion and interest that there had been a lady at school with a blind dog.... She had the whole situation a bit mixed up.

Even those of us who are adults can experience some awkwardness or misunderstanding about those who are blind. Before I was ordained, I worked for the North Vancouver School District as a special education aide. For a number of years I worked with students who were blind. I had a supervising teacher named Isobel who had done her practice teaching in a school for blind girls in Scotland. She would tutor me in Braille and correct my lessons.

She loved to recount an incident when she was supervising a sports activity outside. I think the girls had been playing volleyball or something like that. It was getting late in the day, and the sun had gone down. In fact - it was dark. Isobel laughed as she told me that she had nearly told them: to come inside – because it was too dark to play, but fortunately, she caught herself in time!

For about three years I worked with a boy named Max. He had been born in a prison in Kathmandu, Nepal. He was blind and couldn't walk. His mother had been imprisoned because of an illness if I remember correctly. When she died, Max was left on the streets to beg. Mother Teresa's sisters found him, and a Canadian couple visiting the city adopted

him. I got to introduce him to the thing called school, and I worked with him through grades 2, 3 and 4.

At recess, I would push him in his wheelchair around the school yard and many of the children would surround us, and ask me questions about Max. I often had to say, just ask Max yourself. He can answer your questions. Usually anyway. Max had a following everyday at recess time.

We value our eyesight. We will go to great lengths to restore it, to maintain it if possible. Many of us have to wear glasses or have had eye surgery- perhaps for cataracts. Most of us rely on our sight, to maintain our independence, although many who are blind can carry on with their lives, just fine.

The story we read in John's gospel today tells us about a man who had lived with blindness for his whole life, at least up until Jesus walked into his life! The world as he knew it, was forever turned upside down and inside out. He had a choice in how to respond to Jesus healing actions and touch.

Some people who receive their sight after being used to being blind often find it difficult. I am told that some may come to resent it because it becomes a new challenge. It may be tiring to be inundated with so much more information than they are used to. They may not necessarily be pleased. We all choose how we see a situation.

But the man that Jesus heals, reacts with joy and wonder it seems. Actually – he isn't given much time to consider what his response is. His sight is a whole new experience. It is unlike anything that he has ever known, or imagined. His whole world – and in fact – his whole world view- is changed. The questions begin to spin around him, like a flock of paparazzi. The neighbours want to know: Are you really the same person that used to sit and beg? How did it happen? Who did it? Where is he?

They take the man to the Pharisees, respected leaders of the community. And then the tone of the story takes on the shades of an interrogation. Who's responsible? Who should be blamed? John puts the Pharisees in a bad light most of the time. The Pharisees seem to be so busy picking the whole event apart, that they can't see the forest for the trees. They just don't seem to see what is really important at all.

John wrote this gospel near the end of the first century. At that time, those who claimed that Jesus was the Messiah, even though they were Jews, were thrown out of the synagogue. The disagreement between those who followed Moses and those who followed Jesus was a violent one, and this is reflected in John's writing.

The Pharisees quiz- or rather - they interrogate the man who was blind. None of them seem to believe his story. The more they hear, the more indignant they get. The passage begins with the disciples asking Jesus who had sinned: the man born blind or his parents. That whole idea of who is sinful peppers the whole drama.

The Pharisees are clear in their minds that Jesus is sinful because he has done this all on the Sabbath. He has clearly broken the law by not following the rules surrounding observance of the Sabbath day. Later- they point the finger at the man born blind saying that he was born entirely into sin.

What could he possibly have done? In Exodus 20, tucked into the second commandment, it says for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments." The sins of the generations have clearly been made visible in the man born blind, as far as they can see.

Besides the former generations being able to leave the mark of sin on a child, the rabbis also believed that the infant could sin even while it was still in the womb. There really was very little hope for this man, from their point of view.

Then the Pharisees decide to speak with the man's parents. Perhaps they will have pertinent information. They are able to confirm that yes, this is their son and yes, he was definitely born blind. But the parents end the secondhand interrogation. They tell him to go and speak to him themselves. He's a grown adult, after all. So they go back to the healed man, but you know; and this amazes me, they never actually speak to Jesus himself. They prefer to rely on the secondhand information of neighbours and parents who weren't even there. As for the man himself, the man formerly known as the blind beggar", he proclaims to them that, "all I know, is that I was blind before, and now I see."

While the Pharisees stumble around in their own darkness, and can't see who Jesus is, the man who was born blind; the one who has sat in the darkness his whole life, is brought to see the light physically and spiritually. He confesses; proclaims during the first interrogation, that Jesus is a prophet. They try to trap him with their words, but the second time around, he confesses that Jesus is from God, because "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

The Pharisees are offended by Jesus' violation of the Sabbath as well as by the words that the man confesses. They throw him out on to the street, and Jesus comes looking for him.

Jesus asks him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" And the man confesses for the third time. "Lord, I believe."

John is challenging us. Who do we say that Jesus is? The answer is clear to the cured man. But the Pharisees simply can't see who Jesus is. Like those with tunnel vision, all they can see are their rules, their habits, their laws, and traditions, the things they are used to. They keep missing the point of what Jesus has done! His compassion extends far beyond any concept we have of rules of law.

The time of Lent, especially in the early church, was a time to prepare for baptism. It was a time to learn what a Christian believes. Early before the sun rose on Easter, the new catechumens- that is those who were about to be baptized stood waiting to confess their faith. Once they confessed their faith, they were submerged into the waters of baptism, where, by water and the Holy Spirit, God claimed them as their own and washed away their sin. Emerging from the water, signified that death was conquered and they were rising to new life in Christ.

They were anointed with oil after baptism and given a white robe to wear. Then, to complete the sacrament, they were allowed for the first time to stay with the rest of the believers to partake of the Lord's Supper. Some of you may know that in the early church there were separate buildings called baptisteries. No one was permitted into the church itself until they had been baptized.

Although some of the details may be different, this is just what happens to each one of us when we are baptized. By the power and the gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ, we are each assured of God's love for us, a love that reaches past any imagined boundaries we might have for that love.

This passage in John was read to those who were preparing for their baptism. When Jesus takes his saliva and mixes it with dirt, creating mud, he anoints the man's eyes and tells him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. This anointing and washing was quickly associated with the anointing at baptism and the power of God's Holy Spirit acting at baptism. It was and is a gift of grace from God. The healing touch of the Son of God, the Messiah, has let loose the light of his love. For he is and was the light of the world. He has brought new life, new insight, new vision.

Sadly, all the Pharisees can see, is sin, and darkness. And all they can bring themselves to do, is to judge and mutter, while the darkness eats away at their souls like acid. And so,

while those who oppose and misunderstand Jesus, willingly plunge themselves further into the darkness, Jesus boldly proclaims that...

- there are no laws,
- no rules,
- no historical traditions that super-cede the law of love.

There are gaps in our understanding and in what we think we see or what we think we understand. When the disciples were following Jesus they didn't know where they were going and usually, neither do we. Sometimes we all find ourselves walking in the dark, unsure of where we are going. But the Psalmist in Psalm 139 (verses 11-12) reminds us: *If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night, even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you."*

We may experience a dark night of the soul, but we are never alone. We see through a glass dimly. Any words we have to describe our experiences of God are inadequate. We have not seen God and as the hymn says: *Immortal, Invisible, God only wise. In light, inaccessible hid from our eyes.*

A number of years after I had worked with Max, I was doing supply for North Vancouver schools, and I remember that one morning when I walked into a certain class room in a high school, and I saw Max sitting there. My heart felt so full. I said Max! And his face lit up and after all those years apart, his response was 'Mrs. Victor!' He had had multiple surgeries on his legs and was no longer in a wheel chair, and could walk. We got to spend the entire school day together and it was a joy.

God is with us in the dark places too. Jesus chose to enter the abyss of darkness when he walked to his crucifixion. The light of the world came to to us. And as the Gospel of John says at the very beginning, 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.' Amen

➤ *Open my eyes that I may see*

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Offering and Prayer

Praise God from whom all blessings flow 306

Holy God, our Good Shepherd, and our guide, we bring you our gifts and ask you to use them and us to comfort the lonely, to heal the sick, to feed the hungry, to bring reconciliation and to build a new world filled with your peace and your grace – a world where your purposes are fulfilled for all people. Bless all we bring to you with your love for the sake of Christ, your Son, our Saviour. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers

God, Shepherd of our Lives. We give you thanks for all the things you provide that make life good and full: for the rhythms of nature which water thirsty lands, producing food for all creatures; for energy to work and for community to share in the produce of work.

Yet we are still thirsty in this land of plenty: thirsty for hope when work fails; thirsty for love when friends fail; thirsty for justice when sharing fails. Shepherd God, fill us with your love... **Lead us on your paths.**

God, Shepherd of our Lives. Thank you for the light you shine in a world filled with complexity to bring hope and increase understanding: understanding to address human need and improve daily life; understanding to deepen relationships and mutual respect; understanding to tackle problems and seek solutions. And so we seek your light to lead us: the light of wisdom to bring people of different perspectives together; the light of courage to work for change in desperate situations; the light of hope to persevere when change is difficult. Shepherd God, fill us with your love... **Lead us on your paths.**

God, Shepherd of our Lives. Thank you for the purpose and potential you create for us in Christ: for creating friendships and neighbourhoods that support us, for creating co-operation to accomplish goals that seemed impossible, for creating gratitude for the gifts we discover in each other. And so we seek the gifts of the Spirit we need in these challenging days: the gift of confidence to renew our ministries in humility and hope, the gift of generosity to renew lives in need around us, the gift of faith to trust you for a future we cannot yet see ourselves. Shepherd God... **Lead us on your paths.**

God, Good Shepherd of our Lives, we give you thanks that Jesus walks beside us and leads us on the paths you set before us into the future. We pray for all who suffer any sorrows or trials...

Compassionate God, your son gives rest to those who are weary with heavy burdens. Heal the sick in body, mind and spirit. Lift up the depressed. Support those who grieve. Comfort the anxious. Stand with victims of abuse and crime. Teach us all to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ... the law of love.

In the silence, let us pray for those who we are particularly concerned for today...

God of life and glory, hear our prayers for others and for ourselves... Open our eyes to see the radiance of your glory, and bring us at the last to your everlasting kingdom, where in light undimmed and unending, you are worshipped and adored, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Blessing

May the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, shine in your hearts, transform your lives, and brighten the world. May the God who knows you better than you know yourself grant you courage to face the unknown without fear. May the God who loves you better than you love yourself grant you the gift of understanding and acceptance. May the Son of God, the Prince of Peace, uphold you and strengthen you with love, laughter and grace. Amen

➤ ***Bless the Lord*** *(repeat)*