

## 21 May 2023 – Ascension Sunday / Healing & Reconciliation Sunday

### Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

As we gather for worship in Jesus' name, we remember that we do so on the traditional and unceded territory of the ləkʷəŋən and the W̱SÁNEĆ. 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 injustice and asking God to lead us along paths of reconciliation – inspiring new relationships of respect and solidarity.

➤ *He is Lord (repeat*

*252*

### Call to Worship

Let us be joyful before God!

**We will sing praises to God's holy name.**

Let us lift up a song to the One who rides upon the clouds,

**who protects orphans and widows, and gives the desolate a home.**

Sing to God, all nations of the earth;

**We will sing praises to the Lord, our God!**

➤ *Many and great, O God, are your works*

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### † Gathering Prayer / Words of Hope

God of Majesty and Mystery, we praise you – maker of the deepest dimensions and delicate details of all that is. You live beyond time and hold all our days in your hands. You still come to us in Jesus as our merciful friend, to walk with us wherever we are in the world. You claim us as beloved children, blessed by the Spirit in Jesus' name. Receive our prayers and praise this day, and inspire us to live as witnesses to your grace and goodness here and now.

Holy One, you call us to carry the Good News of love and forgiveness to the ends of the earth, yet we often cannot find the words to tell others of our faith and hope. We fall silent when we could speak up. We try to act out your love, but confess we usually act in our own best interests. Forgive us all the ways we fail to follow you.

You set us in relationship with each other, to share the earth you made and care for each other as neighbours and nations. We confess that relationships among indigenous and non-indigenous peoples need repair. Years of hurt, trauma and misunderstanding create pain, suspicion and resentment on all sides. Forgive our reluctance to reach out to those with a different story to tell and awaken the desire for reconciliation within us. Amen

[We can cast all our anxiety on God who cares for us deeply. Be assured that the Holy Spirit is resting upon us – restoring, supporting and strengthening us to turn away from hostility](#)

and seek reconciliation with God and neighbour in kindness and humility. In Jesus Christ God offers forgiveness and peace. Thanks be to God!

➤ *Sometimes a healing word is comfort*

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† Prayer for Understanding

**God of Wisdom, send your divine Spirit to give us fresh understanding of your Word today. Inspire us to respond with renewed commitment to follow Jesus. Amen**

Scripture **Acts 1: 1-11** [NT 118]

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

**Psalm 47** [responsive/displayed]

Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with loud songs of joy.

For the LORD, the Most High, is awesome, a great ruler over all the earth.

**The Lord subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet.**

**The Lord chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom God loves.**

God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.

**Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises.**

For God is the ruler of all the earth; **sing praises with a psalm.**

God reigns over the nations; God sits on the holy throne.

**The princes of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham.  
For the shields of the earth belong to God; the Lord is highly exalted.**

**Ephesians 1: 15-23** [NT 192]

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

**Luke 24: 44-53** [NT 91]

Then he said to them, *"These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled."*

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, *"Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."*

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

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

## Message

In the reading from Luke's gospel, we hear the two men in white robes ask, *...why do you stand looking up toward heaven?* And so, even though this is a day when the readings tell us about the Ascension of the Lord, we are going to heed the words of the angels and look around at one another – look around at Jesus with us rather than looking up toward heaven. As we look around let us think of ourselves as a family – a Christian family – *the church, which is [Christ's] body, the fullness of [Christ] who fills all in all.*

We are called to be one body in Christ: together rejoicing when things go well, supporting one another in sorrow, celebrating the goodness of God and the wonder of our redemption. [That's what it says in *Living Faith 8.2.1 & 8.2.6*] The church is the family of God in which all should be valued for themselves. And so, as we see one another this morning we need to understand our congregation, our community of faith, as a family of which each one of us is an important part. But beyond that we can also consider our nearby sibling congregations – Chinese Church, Knox Sooke, Saanich Peninsula, St. Andrew's, Trinity, and Grace Korean – all of these we can consider as part of our immediate family. And the whole of The Presbyterian Church in Canada and the larger church throughout the world as our extended family. Indeed, I would say that we can contemplate the idea that all humanity and all creation is intimately connected to one another and the wellbeing of one enhances the wellbeing of all. There is an ancient African word – *Ubuntu* – that means *humanity to others*. It is often described as reminding us that *I am what I am because we all are* or in a more philosophical sense *the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity.*

There are various definitions of the word *Ubuntu*. The most recent was provided by the African Journal of Social Work: *A collection of values and practices that people of Africa or of African origin view as making people authentic human beings. While the nuances of these values and practices vary across different ethnic groups, they all point to one thing – an authentic individual human being is part of a larger and more significant relational, communal, societal, environmental and spiritual world.*

Wikipedia goes on to say... There are many different (and not always compatible) definitions of what *ubuntu* is, yet within the various definitions Ubuntu encompasses the interdependence of humans and the acknowledgment of one's responsibility to their fellow humans and the world around them. It is a philosophy that supports collectivism over individualism.

So, look around again and think about the collective that is Knox Church. How do relationships within our community of faith support one another – in our journey of faith,

through our joys and sorrows, in the mundane and exotic experiences of everyday life? How would you describe this group to others? What are the important characteristics to point out – the key features that tell who we really are as a congregation? The welcome page on our website says this...

*At Knox Presbyterian Church, our Christian community of faith aims to create a welcoming space for all by upholding the values of diversity and inclusion. We recognize that some people experience historic and current systemic barriers based on their country of origin, gender identity and expression, Indigenous identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, ability, and faith experience. We seek to serve in our community and the world in ways that contribute to dismantling these barriers.*

*We are committed to celebrating diversity, identity and expression, implementing anti-racism and anti-bias practices. We continue to seek opportunities to develop our cultural competence and humility awareness.*

*As Jesus did, and as he taught, we strive to respect and affirm the dignity and worth of all whom we meet, especially those who seek spiritual, emotional and physical support through our community of faith.*

*We are a small, strong congregation – a community of all ages from many national and ethnic backgrounds representing the universality of God's love – all siblings in Christ. We seek to know one another and to care for one another as we journey in faith. Our fellowship is warm and friendly. Everyone is welcomed gladly and encouraged to share their gifts through and with this community of faith.*

*We try to spread the good news of God's love through our words and actions. We are also just ordinary people involved in the real world. We care about the social and justice concerns of our community and our world and are continually seeking ways to address them.*

And the congregational statement declares that...

*We are a welcoming, reformed Christian community of faith that values inclusivity, affirming and honouring the diversity of God's creation. We believe we are stronger together.*

*Relying on the enduring love and grace of God, we endeavor to follow Jesus' example of caring for the most vulnerable in society and making a positive difference in the world.*

*We look for meaning through intellectual engagement and sacred reflection. We believe that science and religion are compatible – we need to learn each other's language.*

*We believe that harmony with the divine implies a good relationship with the earth – caring for all creation responsibly while walking humbly with God.*

*We seek to provide safe space so that each person can bring every aspect of their identity as they participate in the life of this community. We would like to know each other better.*

Not bad descriptions, I think. Do they tell the whole story – do we always embody the ideals outlined in those statements? Probably not – is that even possible?

We are a family that has experienced loss in the past year. Some people have died and are sorely missed. Others have moved and we wish them well in their new locations. Several people have joined our congregational family – bringing their unique gifts and expectations to our midst. And like any family there are things that some people like and others don't – changes that some people resist, and others crave – those who enjoy formality and those who thrive on a more casual atmosphere. Like any family there are those among us that we look to for our history – those who can tell the stories of our past and keep the memories alive. And there are those we look to as our future – those for whom we have great hope and who will lead us forward. Like any family we have differences of opinion to resolve and joys to celebrate.

One thing about families is that they are always shrinking or growing, shifting and moving in new directions. The important thing is that, like the church at Ephesus, we might come to know God through Christ Jesus – that the eyes of our heart might be enlightened – that we might discern the hope to which God calls us – that we might realize the inheritance God has planned for us and have confidence in the greatness of God's power. This is what the author of the letter to the Ephesians prays for that community of faith – for that Christian family – and what we need to continually pray for ourselves.

There is a story about an elderly carpenter who was ready to retire. He told his employer-contractor of his plans to leave the house building business and live a more leisurely life with his wife enjoying his extended family. He would miss the paycheck, but felt he needed to retire – they would get by.

The contractor was sorry to see such a good worker go and asked if the carpenter would build just one more house as a personal favour. The carpenter agreed, but in time it was easy to see that his heart was not in his work. He resorted to shoddy workmanship and used inferior materials. It was an unfortunate way to end a dedicated career.

When the carpenter finished his work, the employer came to inspect the house. He handed the front door key to the carpenter. "This is your house," he said, "my gift to you."

The carpenter was shocked! What a shame! If he had only known he was building his own house, he would have done it all so differently.

So, it is with us and with the building up of our community of faith – our Christian family here at Knox – the community we are strengthening with our sibling congregations – the wider church and with all creation. We are entrusted with building the future of this congregation – for maintaining a strong foundation and providing creative opportunities for new growth. We are invited to envision ways to extend our family – to connect with and nurture relationships beyond ourselves and our church walls. We are called to put our best effort into this work because the community of faith that we build – the society in the world that we strive for – is where we will live – and it will, we hope and pray, live beyond us into the future.

Today we have much to celebrate in our renovated space – a space we can be proud of – a space we can enthusiastically invite people into. We have technology that enables us to reach those who are unable to be with us in person. Today we have prayed in new and familiar ways – sung new and familiar hymns – seen new and familiar faces. Today we can give thanks that in this community of faith we may *receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation as we come to know Christ Jesus, so that, with the eyes of our heart enlightened, we may know what is the hope to which God has called us.* **Amen**

➤ *Amigos de Cristo/Friends of the Lord*

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

This Sunday brings the season of Easter to a close. Yet we will continue to receive the blessings God pours out for us in Christ and in creation, for God is good to us. We offer to God our thanks for such goodness in our tithes and offering.

**Eternal and ever-present God, we offer you these gifts in thanksgiving for the work of Christ in our lives. Bless them and us with the power of the Spirit, enlisting all our gifts for the work of reconciliation Christ has given us to do in the world you love. Amen**

† Pastoral Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

God of the generations in time and eternity, we turn to you in these quiet moments to offer our thanks and our hopes for our lives. This morning we give you thanks for all those who have shown us your face and taught us to follow you through the loving example of their living faith. We are grateful for their wisdom and courage which continue to inspire us. Thank you for our life together in your church and the saints we've known here. May

the light of Christ shine through our lives, too, so that we offer light for the world you love as your witnesses.

Christ of Compassion in action in you, we receive our call to live with purpose. From you, we learn how to love those around us. With you, we find strength to face each new day. So today we offer our prayers for those facing challenges and seek your guidance to respond to their cries.

We pray for those brought to mind by news headlines this week – for situations of violence and deprivation, danger and devastation.....

We pray for families going through difficult times – for all who are sick or in sorrow – for all who are lonely or despairing...

We pray for those agonizing over important decisions and responsibilities – for those in leadership roles and for those who care for the most vulnerable...

Spirit of healing and hope, this Sunday, we pray for the work of healing and reconciliation in Canada, between indigenous peoples and those who have settled in this land. Heal lives limited by misunderstanding and bring hope for just resolutions to problems of long-standing. Embrace those indigenous families who have lost someone in years past and honour their tears in gentleness. Increase in us all the spring of generosity we need to create communities of dignity and mutual respect wherever we live on this land we call home.

Creator, Christ and Spirit, move with us into the week ahead. Remind us each day to live according to your will in all our relationships for we want to bear witness to the love we meet in Jesus who invites us to pray together... ***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, for ever. Amen***

➤ *Let all the world in every corner sing* 271

### Blessing

Go as witnesses to Jesus – risen and ascended – and bear his love and mercy wherever you go. Trust that the Holy Spirit is your companion. And may our Gracious Creator give you a spirit of wisdom, filling you with the hope to which you are called as God's beloved.

➤ *Jump with joy* 406