

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 lək'wəŋən 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 injustice and asking God to lead us along paths of reconciliation – inspiring new relationships of respect and solidarity.

➤ *O let the power fall on me* 364

Call to Worship

Make a joyful noise to God our Creator!

Sing to the glory of God's name!

Come and see what God has done!

Let the sound of God's praises be heard!

Let us worship God.

➤ *We Praise you O God* 425

† Gathering Prayer / [Words of Hope](#)

Holy One, our Creator and Redeemer, we come into your presence longing and listening for your voice. You have gathered us together; pilgrims on a journey. Thank you that the roads we have been journeying on have intersected together in this place. You created the world in your grace and by your compassion you redeemed it. The earth is resplendent with your holy fingerprints. We praise you and worship you. You have been with us through good times and hard ones. You give us strength to face the challenges around us. You offer us rest for our bodies and souls when life seems too demanding. We turn to you for wisdom this day, trusting we will find the peace and comfort we long for in your presence. We praise you for all you offer us in your great faithfulness. Fill us with your Spirit in this time of worship. Open our minds and hearts, so that we may see as you see, love as you love, and follow your ways for the sake of Christ our Lord. Ever present God, you know our inmost thoughts and see our thoughtless actions. We confess our impulsive reactions, when we spoke before we thought, and ask forgiveness if we have hurt others. We confess our stubborn attitudes, and ask forgiveness for refusing others mercy. Too often we trip and fall into traps of anger, jealousy or fear. In your kindness, O God, forgive who we have been, amend who we are, and direct who we shall be through the grace of Christ, our Lord.

Hear the good news! Our God is full of forgiveness and grace, Endlessly patient; faithful in love. God does not haunt us with our sins and failures, nor nurse grievances against us. God is greater than our sins. As vast as the heavens and as far as the east is from the west, so far away are our sins cast away from us. Friends believe the good news! In Jesus Christ we are forgiven people. Thanks be to God. Amen.

† Prayer for Understanding

God of wisdom, your thoughts are not our thoughts, your ways are not our ways. You promised to never break your covenant with us. Amid all the changing words of our times, speak your eternal Word that does not change. Come to us. Open our hearts and minds that we may hear your words of life and be renewed in your Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Scripture

Genesis 28:10-19

OT 24

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.

Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24

OT 577

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your

hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,” even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Romans 8:12-25

NT 158

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

NT 14

Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ ““An enemy did this,’ he replied. “The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ ““No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.” He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom.

The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

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

Message - Up against it

Have you ever gone high up on top of Mount Tolmie to watch the meteor showers or even go just to gaze up at the stars? Or maybe you've been to Cattle Point when it is night to do the same. It's far enough from the city lights to make that especially amazing. One time I went up to Mount Tolmie on an August night with my daughter Rachel. There were others gathered there that night gazing upward too. For the most part everyone sat or lay there in the silence waiting for each flash of light to soar over head. There were ooo's and aaaw's for each shooting star - well - meteor. We spread a blanket out over a large piece of rock and lay there with our backs against that while we watched the meteor showers in awe.

Jacob was up against it one night so very long ago. I imagine him stretching out - there in the silence and the dark, with a blanket of stars to cover him. He lays down on the quiet earth with a stone to support his neck, and camps out in the middle of nowhere. Perhaps he flings his thoughts far out into the expanse of the stars. They are entrancing, dizzying. They almost lift him out of himself. - almost. I imagine he rests, and settles into the earth remembering all that has brought him to this spot. He sighs with a deep breath. Now he's really gone and done it. There have been misunderstandings, squabbles, flaring tempers and family stories that cross-cross and merge into a well of worries and broken hearts. He's up against the conflict of his family. He has run off. But will he really escape? Will he be safe? Will he be alone? Can he ever go back? He has made hard choices, but they had to be made. And now he is faced with the unknown. He has made mistakes. To be fair, they all had. Jacob is a cheat and a liar. Jacob is up against the unravelling consequences of it all. His Grandpa Abraham had told stories about promises that were from God. Grandpa Abraham said that God had told him that his descendants would be like the millions of stars above. And that his people would find a promised land where many nations would be born because of him and his descendants. He told about a time when he and Grandma Sarah had welcomed some mysterious guests who had been travelling. They fed and welcomed them the way one should, and the guests said they would have a son. Grandma laughed and laughed because; seriously? She was already really old. And now, alone under the heavens, Jacob must be wondering what he has done. With all this

commotion and chaos in his life, perhaps he wonders if God is still there. Lying there under the stars I suspect it feels like some kind of disaster has befallen him. And I suppose it has. The etymology - the root of the word disaster is this : Dis: to be away from, to be separate or ill (as in disease). And aster: means stars. So a disaster is a calamity where one is separated from the stars and from heaven. The stars were where people looked for guidance. Astronomers were part of any king's staff and later on , were also on the staff of a pope. Jacob's Grandpa Abraham and Grandma Sarah would have followed the stars from Haran in their nomadic journey to the promised land.

The covenant that God made with Grandpa out under the starry, starry night, was passed on to each generation. God had promised, "Look toward the heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them.....so shall your descendants be." And so those mysterious visitors had been right. Sarah gave birth to Isaac - which means laughter, who became his father. Isaac grew up to marry Rebecca and they had twins, him and his brother Esau. And on the day they were born, Jacob apparently was grabbing at Esau's heel, trying to be born first. But Esau was the one born first. Jacob means 'heel catcher.' They were always disagreeing. They were kind of like oil and water. And Rebecca preferred Jacob - big help that was. Jacob steals Esau's birthright, all over a bowl of lentil soup. Then Rebecca and Jacob trick Isaac, who is blind by now, into giving him the blessing reserved for the oldest son. The blessing is akin to a will that cannot be revoked once it is given. With Jacob disguised as his brother, by wearing his brother's clothes and covering his arms with fur to mimic his brother's hairy arms, Jacob receives the power and promises passed down from Grandpa Abraham. "Look toward the heavens and count the stars if you are able to count them...so shall your descendants be." And with that Jacob is sent to go and marry a relative; someone with the proper ancestry. Jacob flees and it's not a happy send off. His brother is spitting angry. And as Jacob lies there against the stone, he stares up at those stars. I wonder if he feels somehow separated from the stars, which also implies a feeling of separation from God...the One who makes promises and guides - or at least had guided his grandparents and parents. God has brought him to this place with a stone for a pillow. God has brought him to a crossroads, and Jacob falls asleep and dreams of angels going up to the heavens and coming down to the earth. They keep moving on this stairway to heaven and stairway back to creation. And God stands beside Jacob - even Jacob the cheat! - and states this promise: "I am - the Lord your God. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised." Jacob wakes and he is in awe. 'Surely God is in this place, and I did not know it.' It's not the disaster that he had thought it was. This is the house of God! Which in Hebrew is Beit El. Beit means house, and El, is a name for God. Or Bethel. This is the Gate of Heaven! A house of God is an ancient idea of a sanctuary, a holy place - not necessarily a building though. It is a place where God meets people. Beit El. Some might call it a thin place - when the veil between the world and the heavens seems very thin. Jacob marks the spot with a cairn of stones. He anoints it with oil, an expensive commodity, in order to set it apart and to

serve as a reminder that God is there. It is holy. God is with you in this place. In the quiet curve of evening is the name of a wonderful hymn. Some of the lines are: In the rests between the phrases, in the cracks between the stars,

in the gaps between the meanings, you are there. In the melting down of endings. In the cooling of the sun, in the solstice of the winter you are there, you are there, you are there.

God often brings us to crossroads, and sometimes they are mysterious but elegant meetings of paths. We are all up against it too, at some time or another. That is - we all experience times of uncertainty and conflict. We all long to know the certainty of God's presence in our lives. Do you remember how, as children, everything new and unknown felt like an adventure? Someone once said that: "To embark on an adventure is to be up against it. The Latin word 'advenio' means to come against. The way cannot be seen clearly. It is an ancient unknown - silent and dark." Up against it. Advenio - adventure. The theologian Fred Craddock tells a story "About how our ancestors used to go out walking - usually on a Sunday afternoon - sometimes alone, sometimes incouples, sometimes the whole family - and they called it "going marveling." Marveling. They would look for unusual rocks, unusual wildflowers, shells, four leaf clovers; marvelous things. They would collect them, bring them back to the house and show off all the marvelous things they had found. When Craddock was reminded of this practice, he said "I went marveling myself. I left the house and went marveling. About a mile away I came upon a pavilion, and inside I saw a lot of people singing, praying, and reading scripture, sharing their love for each other. They were vowing that they would - they promised to each other, and they promised to God to make every effort, God help them, to reproduce the life of Jesus in this place. And I marveled, how I marveled. And I said to myself: "Look what I have found, right here in the little building." (Craddock Stories, p. 65) "Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place, and I can feel the mighty power and the grace." Right here, in this little building, vows and promises are often made before God. Baptisms, weddings, promises to support one another or to serve behind our own community. We make promises to God to change, to come closer to God's presence, to listen more closely to the whisper of the Holy Spirit. This too is marvelous. Even though we are only human, and are aware that we might even fail, we carry on and do our best with the wisdom that we have, and then we leave it in God's hands.

What is truly marvelous is that it doesn't all depend on us. We have promises to hold on to as well. We have promises that God will guide us too and be with us in any disaster. God's promises to us are never ending. And Jesus - who is our bright and morning star says to you and to me: My shalom I give to you. Do not be afraid. I call you my friend. Abide in my love. Even the hairs on your head are numbered. Follow me. I am the way for you. I am the life for you. I am the truth for you. Blessed are your eyes for they see. You are my witness. You are my brother,

my sister. I am hungry, give me food. I am in prison, come to me. I am thirsty, give me a drink. I am a stranger, welcome me. I am naked, clothe me. I am sick, visit me. Abide in me and I in you. I will drink wine with you in the Kingdom of God. You will shine like the sun. You are in me and I in you. Ask and it will be given you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. I am the vine; you are the branches. I will give you rest. You are the light of the world. You are the salt of the the earth. You are my sister. You are my brother. Give and it shall be given to you. Love others as I have loved you. The truth will make you free. Feed my sheep. Watch and pray. I am with you always. (Iona Abby worship book.) These truths; these promises; are marvels to behold. What gifts we have been given.

➤ *How firm a foundation*

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Offering and Prayer

There are some who have much and some who have little. We are called to serve one another. In compassion, we are called to share what we have, so that others may grow in God's Spirit. Let us present our offerings that others may experience God's abundant love.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow 306

Gift-giving God, we are so grateful for all that we enjoy in the world around us, and in the assurance you love us all. Teach us to love with expanding hearts. Bless the gifts we offer today, that they may express your love for the world itself and to all who need to know you care, through Christ Jesus, your greatest gift. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

Oh Christ of the least and the lost, the homeless and the betrayed, Come close to us this day, that we may come close to you Shine on us with your grace We thank you, O God, for welcoming us into your presence again. Sometimes we can simply breathe in the wonders of your creation, on a summer evening or in a quiet forest, and know you are near. Other times you surprise us in a word, an unexpected kindness, a sense of your tenderness with us in prayer. Whenever, however we meet you, we are so grateful for your presence at the heart of our lives. Assured of your great love for us, we bring before you the people we love and the situations that cause us deep concern.

Today we pray with those who rejoice at a baby's birth or a summer wedding, and with those who mourn the loss of a friend or loved one. We pray with those whose work has found success and reward, and with those who are anxious because there is no work to be found. We pray with those who feel bored, without enough to do this summer, and with those who

are exhausted, facing still more to do. We pray with those grateful for renewed good health, and with those who find illness, anxiety or uncertain health lingering. We pray with those who have found peace or safety after turmoil, and with those who fear what tomorrow might bring. We pray with those who enjoy the love of family and friends nearby, and with those who feel lonely or isolated.

Ever present God, we thank you that you hear us in every situation of life, for we all find ourselves in these situations sooner or later. Help us to support each other, standing together in gladness and challenge. Strengthen our life together as your people. Give us the generosity we meet in Jesus to respond wisely to those whose lives touch ours – inside and outside your church. May our hands serve as your hands in all that we do for Jesus' sake, for it is in his name we offer the prayer he taught us:

... 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

➤ *He leadeth me* 650

Blessing

Remember that Jacob met God in an unexpected place. So as you leave this place, keep your eyes open for God at work in the world. Expect that God will meet you, too, perhaps when you least expect it. May the guarding of the God of life be on you. The guarding of the Loving Christ be on you. The guarding of the Holy Spirit be on you, to aid you and enfold you, each day and each night of your life. Amen.

➤ *Jump with joy* 406