

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 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.

➤ *Come, Holy Spirit (Gaither)*

Call to Worship (Psalm 105: 1-4, 45b)

O give thanks to the LORD, call on God's name

**make known God's deeds among the peoples.**

Sing to the Lord, sing praises

**tell of all God's wonderful works.**

Glory in God's holy name;

**let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.**

Seek the strength of the LORD; seek the Lord's presence continually.

**Praise the LORD!**

➤ *God of grace and God of glory*

490

† Gathering Prayer / Words of Hope

Surprising and mysterious God, you come to us when we least expect it – calling us out of our routines and plans – inviting us to follow Jesus into new opportunities. We praise you for the many ways you come to us. In moments of fear, you speak with words of reassurance. In moments of doubt, you reach out your hand to hold. In moments of turmoil, you bring calm to the storm. You are faithful to us through everything life can bring. And so we place our trust in you this day and every day, honouring you as Redeemer – our Saviour and friend.

Merciful and patient God, we confess that we still experience fear and doubt – even though you reach out to us with saving grace. You call us to live with courage and perseverance – yet we can give up too easily and opt for the safer route. You encourage

us to be bold in our struggles for justice – yet we remain silent in the face of unfairness. Forgive us when we let you down. Renew our lives through your mercy and grace. Amen

Be assured that God offers forgiveness and saving grace to everyone. Accept these gifts for yourselves and offer forgiveness to others in the name of Jesus, the Christ.

A Word to Ponder... **fear**

➤ *Nothing can trouble*

*617*

† Prayer for Understanding

**God of wisdom, as we gather to hear your Word this day, calm our spirits and still our minds so that we can receive your message with clarity and respond in faithfulness. Amen**

Scripture

**Colossians 3: 16**      **NT 201**

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

**2 Timothy 3: 16-17**      **NT 213**

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

**Matthew 14: 22-33**      **NT 16**

Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.

And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray.

When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.

And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, *"It is a ghost!"* And they cried out in fear.

But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, *"Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."*

Peter answered him, *"Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."*

He said, *"Come."*

So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, *"Lord, save me!"*

Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, *"You of little faith, why did you doubt?"*

When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, *"Truly you are the Son of God."*

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

### Message

I am fond of the story from Matthew's gospel today – the one about the storm and Peter and walking on water. It's an inspiring story – encouraging and challenging. It reminds me that we are invited to take risks in faith – that doubts are normal – that even a little faith can be enough.

Most of us – at some point in our lives – see Jesus standing out on the stormy waters of this world, beckoning us to come to him – to step out in faith. Like Peter, we seek to respond to this invitation – to find the courage and conviction needed to swing our legs out over the boat's side and step onto the water.

It's like they say when you are training for a big race: getting to the starting line is the real challenge because no matter how you finish – taking that first step is often the most daunting. When we venture forth in faith – even in small ways – we choose to walk to and walk with Jesus – to trust in him and hope that our faith makes a difference in the world.

True, we have fears – doubts – that threaten to undermine that confident hope. Peter did too. Yes, he floundered – so do we from time to time – yet for me the story is more about the faith we need to take that first step than about the anxieties that trip us up along the way. It remains inspirational.

When I hear stories of mission that our church supports around the world or the creative ministries that abound across the country I am similarly inspired – encouraged by the amazing work being done in God’s name through our church – on our behalf! It is humbling to be part of the acts of faith each mission field calls forth – to see ordinary people of great faith walking on water in Jesus’ name.

Some of this mission work takes place internationally through the formation, nurturing and strengthening of partnerships with churches and agencies around the world. Sometimes we support our mission partners by sending people to work alongside them for long or short terms. Sometimes we support innovative ministries closer to home like Cedar Tree Ministries among the Cowichan people or we encourage the nightclub ministry initiated by St. Andrew’s in Nanaimo.

**Brian Johnston** works at the Theological Seminary of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Romania. He teaches English and leads two choirs made up of seminary students.

While he was home on vacation in January 2012, he was asked to lead a service in the Knox, Waterloo sanctuary, which was designed to “let in the light”. He shared some ‘Romanian Reflections’ through photography, music and scripture passages. Upon returning to Romania his English students took an oral exam which included listening to a church service and offering their observations and opinions about it, so they used that Knox service. One student expressed disbelief that there could be so much art in a religious service. Brian noted that we are in church to worship God – creator and the greatest artist of all.

It seems to me that Brian is someone who got out of the boat. He moved beyond the traditional and expected approaches to worship in the confident hope that his risk of faith would enable him to do great things for God. He exemplifies the Colossians text which is about teaching and worshiping richly – fully – with enthusiasm.

Jeremy and Austin lead **UpperLVL** worship at a nightclub. They affirm that church doesn’t have to be neckties at 9:00 am. The community comes together at the club because they believe that church can be anywhere - as God is with us everywhere. They have definitely stepped onto the water heading toward Jesus! They call out to those who haven’t been to church in years – those who have never been to church. They welcome everyone.

Another inspiring story is that of **the Reverend Doctor Paul McLean** who worked with a team for over 30 years on the Hakka Bible project. (Hakka is an indigenous language in Taiwan.)

For the first time the Hakka people – like other Taiwanese folk – like you and I – can understand the scriptures in their own language. What kind of faith does it take to even begin such a daunting task – to even get to the start of that race?

Paul learned how to speak Hakka more than 30 years ago. I wonder if it all went smoothly all the time. Were there times when they doubted that the work would get finished – that they would live to see it – that they would continue to receive the funding they needed – that the Hakka language would even survive?

I wonder if there are efforts in the Cowichan Valley to preserve the Indigenous language of the people that Cedar Tree Ministries engages with.

I wonder what these people would think of my comparing their risk taking mission and ministry to Peter's willingness to trust in Jesus and step out of the boat.

Our understanding of God and our relationships with God and each other are influenced by many things. We lean on scripture – seeking to absorb its wisdom and allowing it to “dwell in us richly.” Even familiar passages can be re-read and new meaning can leap out at us in unexpected ways. Our context makes all the difference in how we understand Bible stories. A follower of Jesus who lives in Central or South America may read the text quite differently than someone in North America or Scandinavia or Sub-Saharan Africa. Someone living in a country weighed down by corruption, injustice and an absence of freedom may read it differently than someone living in a country with a strong democracy and relative peace. Reading the Bible in our mother tongue enables us to connect to it much more directly. We take for granted the many English translations available to us, forgetting that not everyone is as fortunate. Sharing art and music across continents or within the club scene connects us to one another and to God in new and refreshing ways. This must be God's intention – that we are designed to be connected with each other no matter our point of view.

Whether we are in the boat with the eleven disciples or out on the water with Peter we are still with Jesus. Or stated more appropriately – in our risk taking and our doubting – in our local worship or missionary endeavours – in or out of the boat - *Jesus is always with us.*

Earlier in Matthew's gospel Jesus wanted to get away and mourn the death of John the Baptist but instead he ministered to the crowd and nourished them in surprising ways. In today's text he is still trying to have some alone time so his disciples go ahead of him to the next stop on the itinerary and are caught in a sudden squall. Maybe there was no real

danger of the boat sinking but the buffeting of wind and water in the middle of a very dark night was frightening.

I had a recent experience that helps me relate to that feeling of uncertainty on the water. Heading from Ruxton Island to Galliano in a smallish craft on a sunny afternoon ended up feeling pretty stressful as the swells rose and the boat keeled dramatically. I know we were never in danger but I was definitely happy to get out of that boat on the float plane dock – even though the plane ride was another adventure!

Anyway... Jesus comes to his followers – reconnects with them – reassures them. Before he has a chance to actually get into the boat with the group, Peter intervenes with his strange challenge, “Lord, if it is you, then command me to come to you on the water.” Jesus says, “Come on,” and so Peter does.

We don't know precisely how far Peter got before he started to sink. Maybe a gust of wind knocked him off balance – a larger-than-usual swell made straight for Peter – suddenly the logic of the situation was just too much to discount – he yielded to the inevitable tug of gravity. Jesus saves him – of course – chiding him for his doubt (but loving Peter even so). Then they both climb into the boat – the storm stops as quickly as it started – and the disciples who had remained in the boat all along end up doing the utterly proper thing – they worship Jesus as God's Son.

Last week with the miracle feeding of the people in the wilderness, Jesus showed himself to be ruler of creation – manipulating sustaining and life-giving things like bread and fish for the nourishment of all those gathered. Today we see Jesus again as divine – having control over water, wind and waves – the very elements of nature that might threaten harm. In both cases we recognize in Jesus the almighty presence of God – one of Matthew's main theological themes: Emmanuel – “God with us.”

And that is where the focus needs to remain – on the reality of God with us in Jesus. When we put the focus too much on Peter – too much on ourselves and our own morality or courage – we may have missed the boat altogether. The Good News is that Jesus is with us – stays with us no matter what. Whether or not Peter succeeded in imitating his Master's neat trick neither adds nor subtracts from the core revelation that whether we stay in the boat with the eleven or hop out with the one, Jesus is with us. He's with those of us who stay in the boat, calming the storm that threatens. He's with those who try some bigger, bolder move – risking fame or failure – stilling the waves.

It is an inspiring story – not so much because we see Peter as courageous and impressive – which he is. In the same way the stories of mission and ministry I shared are inspiring – not so much because of the lifelong commitment or willingness to move beyond the expected (all of which is amazing in itself) but inspiring – encouraging – live-giving because Jesus is present. Jesus' presence and power are the key to these stories and to our own story. **Amen**

➤ *With the Lord as my guide*

*574*

### Offering and Prayer

Thankful for the good gifts God gives us in Christ and in creation, let us present the fruit of our living for the work of God in the church and the world.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

*306*

**Faithful God, bless the gifts we bring today. Use them and us to plant seeds of faith, hope and love in the world so that your goodness will flourish, and your name be honoured for Christ's sake. Amen**

### † Pastoral Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

Astonishing God, you can always surprise us. You come to us in unforeseen circumstances and in unexpected people. We give you thanks for help offered by a stranger – kindness in an anxious moment – good news that changed expected outcomes – relief in the midst of ongoing crises – and signs of hope when things seemed bleak...

We pray for all who face upheaval and uncertainty, whatever the cause. Fill our hearts with compassion and understanding for the fearful. Steadying God, reach out to us in the storms of life.

God of peace, you reassure us. You remind us not to be afraid when troubles arise. We pray for those who struggle with illness or grief – anxiety or depression. We remember those who feel worthless or ashamed, whatever the reason. May they know your peace and strength. Equip us to reach out in every way we can to embody your love in our words and actions. Steadying God, reach out to us in the storms of life.

God of hope, you challenge us. You come to us in the midst of the world's troubles and invite us to stand for truth and work for justice. We pray for anyone crying out for fair treatment – working against racism and discrimination – telling painful stories of their lives.

Open our hearts with understanding and motivate us to act for change. We pray for those who resist the stories of injustice and defend inequality. Open their minds to the truths they deny and show them new possibilities for relationships that bridge divides.

Send your Spirit to work in our communities to create mutual respect and new ways to live as neighbours. Steadying God, reach out to us in the storms of life.

Faithful God, we place our trust in you and your purposes. Answer our prayers according to your wisdom and will, for we offer them humbly as we pray together in Jesus' name ... ***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***

➤ ***Precious Lord, take my hand***

***675***

### Blessing

God sends each of us out into the world around us to serve and be served, remembering that together we are the body of Christ. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, which daily renews us, and the love of God, that enables us to love others, and the community of the Holy Spirit, that binds us together in one body be with each one of us today, tomorrow and always. Amen

➤ ***Jump with joy***

***406***