

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.

➤ *Come, Holy Spirit (Gaither)*

Call to Worship

Rejoice and be glad for God takes delight in us.

**We gather as God's community.**

Sing to God a new song. Come and hear God's good news.

**We gather as God's community that sings and listens to the good news of Christ's love.**

Even when only two or three are gathered, Christ is here in our midst.

**We gather as God's community that prays and shares our faith with one another.**

Let us worship God who is among us in this place.

➤ *Jesus, where'er thy people meet*

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† Gathering Prayer / Words of Hope

Gracious and loving God, your gentle spirit has stirred deep within us. You have called us from many places and backgrounds to celebrate your presence, to give thanks, and to grow together as a community of faith. May our hearts and minds be open to your wisdom, love and blessings. May we express our deepest faith and love through who we are and what we are called to do.

When we are tempted to evade the accusations of others, give us the courage to face issues directly. When we are tempted to take advantage of our power or position, give us the courage to walk in the shoes of the powerless. When we are tempted to compromise the truth, give us the courage to stand for what we know to be right. When we are tempted to ignore the demands of our faith, give us the courage of Jesus, who was faithful all the way to the Cross.

We bring our silent confession, O God of Mercy, gathered in the name of Christ... Amen

As we confess our sin – we remember the opportunity we have to begin again – to walk confidently in a new direction. Pardon and peace are ours. Believe that God accepts and forgives through Christ Jesus. Amen!

† Prayer for Understanding

**Gracious God, help us to grow as a community of faith. Open our minds and ears to hear your Holy Word. Open our hearts to support one another as we continue to journey in your way. Amen**

Scripture    **Romans 13: 8-14**        **NT 162**

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

**Matthew 18: 15-20**    **NT 20**

If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

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

## Message

It is back to school time! In Canada, this is the traditional return to school date – the week after Labour Day. One thing that is very important for a teacher to find out at the start of a school year is what their students already know. That way, they will know where to focus their teaching. I remember doing certain quick assessments and routine activities to get a sense of the strengths, weaknesses and personalities in a new group of students. So here is a little quiz for you – a Biblical “back to school” check-up! (Answers redacted for the print version so it doesn’t spoil things for those participating in person 😊)

- How many of each animal did Moses take on the ark with him?



- Here is question number two. Are automobiles mentioned in the Bible?



- Here is the third question: According to the Bible, can one plus one equal three?

I think it can. Jesus said, *For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.* If two are gathered in Jesus' name, Jesus is there with them – so one plus one equals three.

This is perhaps more complicated math than Tristan did during his engineering studies and would likely mess things up entirely if applied to recipes Ian uses at the restaurant where he works. A couple of weeks ago I mentioned that I didn’t mind teaching math because I remember learning it – now everyone will wonder at my skills in that department! Hopefully I didn’t do too much damage.

I would often start the year asking students to find out the day of the week on which they were born, and we would construct a chart with the information as well as using it in a poetry exercise. How many members of the class were born on Tuesday, or Friday or Sunday? Did the numbers really matter? Of course not – it was just information for a graph and perhaps a way for the children to make a connection with one another – but so often we do reduce things to a numbers game. How many people showed up at your music gig? How many students are enrolled? How many followers on Facebook? And so it goes. Does this really tell us much of anything about the quality of the music, the value of the class being offered, the significance of a particular post or poster?

It's normal, I guess, to find out the size of things – the number of people participating, attending, consuming. I've seen headlines in the Times Colonist noting record numbers at events – it doesn't give me clarity about the quality or content of the event but I know it was bigger than expected. Not sure the value in that except that in our culture these days it seems that bigger is almost always better. The success of most events is rated by how many people are involved – it is a numbers game – one that we buy into without giving it much thought.

Even at church gatherings – maybe especially at church gatherings, numbers are a constant focus. What was one of the first questions folks asked about the Worship and Picnic in the Park: *How many people were there?* We often think about our congregations in terms of the number of people on the roll or the number of bums in pews. One of the first questions I get asked at a conference or inter-denominational meeting is how big my congregation is. Does this give people any real sense of Knox Church? Does it tell them anything about the ministry and the mission of this community of faith? Is it a valid measure of our "success" – whatever that is?

Think about it. A church is often assessed by the number of children in Sunday school. A choir rated by how many people gown-up – sometimes this detail takes precedence over the quality of the music! Clergy play the game as much as anyone else – keeping track of the number of people visited or called – tallying the registrations in Bible study – the number of people in worship (we used to record this number each week in our bulletin though I have no idea what purpose it served) – the number of funerals or weddings or baptisms in a year. We can be obsessed with "how many" and I think perhaps it clouds our judgment because Jesus didn't seem to play the numbers game at all.

Jesus talked about two or three gathered in his name. Are we still a church if we are small? Are we still a church if people worship with us via livestreaming technology? Is Jesus still present with us when we are 20 or 40 strong on a Sunday morning rather than the hundreds of yesteryear? Is the Biblical education of one person somehow not worth it? Do we only sing when there is a multitude, or can a small group lift their voices in praise of our Creator? How many is enough? How many is too few?

Jesus suggests that the number is not as important as remembering that we are gathered *in the name of Christ*. In our gospel reading today we realize that those gathered don't even have to be especially friendly – even as we sin against one another, if we are gathered in Jesus' name, we are the church. That is the key – being gathered *in Christ's name*. It is not about the numbers but how and why we are together.

When even a small number meet in the knowledge that they belong to the risen Christ and that he is present in all they do, that is the church. When two alienated Christians, with or without a mediator, come together to work toward reconciliation despite all the anger and hurt that separate them, they are humbled and strengthened by the awareness that Christ is in their midst – it changes everything. It is for his sake that they search for a solution to their problem. If the Christian community is to survive the strains imposed by human failure, it will be only because the risen Lord sustains it.

The church is a community. We want to be wanted. We want to be loved. We want people to treat us as friends. The church is a fellowship – a community. The church is family.

Jesus said, *“Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”* There is no greater power within a congregation than that of small groups of Christians, caring for and loving each other, and lifting each other up in prayer and support.

We need to know each other so that we can truly care for and pray for one another meaningfully. When the sessions of Knox, Trinity and St. Andrew’s gathered in June we engaged in something called “speed connecting” – like speed dating if you have ever heard of such a thing. We spent 2 minutes talking with one person – responding to a question and sharing something of ourselves. Then we listened as the other person shared. Next, we moved to do the same with another person. A series of short, animated conversations that helped us connect with one another quickly and meaningfully. It was a bit chaotic – but fun! Let’s give it a try right now... **Speed connecting exercise.**

Look around this room. I’m not sure exactly how many people are here this morning – and I’m not sure it matters – but whatever the number is, you can add “One” to it, because Jesus is here too. **Amen**

➤ **God bless your church with strength** (tune: *Diademata 274*) **491**

#### Offering and Prayer

God calls us to show our love through the kindness we offer our neighbours. Our offering will spread the gifts God has given us to neighbours in need in the name of Jesus.

➤ **Praise God from whom all blessings flow** **306**

**Gracious God, receive these gifts, offered in a spirit of generosity and humility. Bless and use them for the work that you long to do in the world you love for Jesus’ sake. Amen**

## † Pastoral Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

God of love, Creator of heaven and earth, we are filled with gratitude for the blessings of this life. For making us in your image to love and care for one another, we give you thanks. For the gift of Christ, who redeems and guides us, and who gives us a pattern for everyday living, we praise you. For the inspiration of the Spirit, that works in us, through us and beyond us, we praise you. Hear us now as we pray for situations where your love and grace are sorely needed.

We pray for the church in this place and around the world, facing challenges and seeking to respond to many enduring needs...

We pray for this beautiful planet, the fragile home we share with all living things...

For children and youth who worry about the future and their place in that future...

For those who govern in Greater Victoria, BC, Canada and all nations of the world, that they may find the wisdom and courage to do justice for all in the decisions they make...

For the homeless and hungry, the unemployed and the uncertain, and for all who struggle with daily decisions...

For those who mourn, those who face illness or isolation, and for all whose situations we carry on our hearts this day...

God with us, we thank you for your all-embracing love that touches all life and each life. We join our voices now in gratitude, praying as Jesus encourages us to do:...***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***

➤ ***We cannot own the sunlit sky***

***717***

## Blessing

Owe no one anything, except to love one another – for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. Go in peace and may God, the Source of Love – Christ, the Face of Love in action – and Holy Spirit, the transforming Power of Love, go with us all – move through us all – to heal and bless God's world.

➤ ***Jump with joy***

***406***