

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

We gather at the bold, bright sounds of instrument and voice.

We come to worship the God of all creation.

We gather amidst the greetings of friends and strangers.

We come to worship the God who makes us all one in the sharing of our faith.

We gather in the solitude of reflection and the quiet of prayer.

We come to worship the God whose Word speaks to us and through us.

Praise be to God from whom all blessings flow.

➤ *God is love, come heaven adoring*

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† Gathering Prayer / Words of Hope (responsive)

Holy One, as you rescued your people from bondage in Egypt and provided them with all that they needed – so you deliver us from bondage to sin and provide us with those things we need. We thank and praise you.

Grant to us, O God, that in our time here today we might hear afresh your life-giving word and discern anew what your will is for us. Forgive us for those things we have done amiss. Bless our songs and our prayers – our every thought and every action as we worship you – that they may bring you glory and honour and praise, both now and always. We ask it in Jesus' name. **Amen**

The God who calls us to be merciful is overwhelmingly merciful to us.

God knows our weaknesses and lifts us when we fall.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, our sins are forgiven – be at peace.

A Word to Ponder... **forgiveness**

† Prayer for Understanding

God of wisdom, prepare our hearts and minds to receive your Word. Where it challenges us, lead us by your Spirit to respond in faithfulness for the sake of Christ who gives us both courage and compassion. Amen

Scripture **Romans 14: 1-12** **NT 163**

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day observe it in honor of the Lord. Also, those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

Matthew 18: 21-35 **NT 20**

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?"

Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy-seven times. For this reason, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with

his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So, the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.

But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt.

When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt.

So, my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

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

Message and "God's Dream"

In September 2001 I was at Vancouver School of Theology. The term was beginning with the *Strasbourg Reformation Intensive* – a week-long role-play event to help us gain insight into the Protestant Reformation of the 1500's in Europe. We had scripts and costumes and character dossiers. Scenarios had been devised; music prepared – we were even given recipes to create a wrap-up meal with authentic dishes. In the midst of the turmoil of 1524 – planes flew into towers and the turmoil of the present moment consumed us.

TVs were on all the time – people spoke in hushed tones or cried or expressed concern over those traveling. We wandered aimlessly – in shock I suppose – and wondered if classes would continue. That's how I remember it – 9/11 – more than twenty years ago now – the juxtaposition of the church at a time of drastic change centuries ago and the world being changed before my eyes. What do you remember? Do you have similar catastrophic events burned in your memory?

In those catastrophes – in the acts of terrorism or violence that come to our mind – are there villains – those responsible with whom we are angry and against whom we might want to seek vengeance? But we know that God said: vengeance is mine – not ours to exact. In fact, we are called upon to forgive – often and copiously – even when it hurts.

According to C.S. Lewis, everybody agrees in principle that forgiveness is a mostly lovely idea, and this agreement continues right up until that moment when you have an actual person in front of you whom you must forgive – then suddenly caveats, nuances, and provisos start to fill the air. Lewis wrote that shortly after the completion of World War II and so used the prospect of forgiving the Nazis and the Italians as his key example of where one's high-flying rhetoric about forgiveness sometimes smashes into the hard wall of bitter reality.

In the scripture Peter wonders if forgiving seven times would be enough and Jesus says, "No, more like seventy-seven times." Wow! That is a lot of times – almost an unbelievable number of times – to forgive someone. The sheer volume of forgiveness expected is something to contemplate...

I remember when we lived in the manse and sometime in late August the deluge of plums would occupy me completely. How much jam could I make and give away? How many plum cakes would my family be willing to consume? Would anyone pick and take some of this bounty away before it rotted on the ground? One night a Korean student we had hosted, Moon Hee, joined us for dinner and as we talked I told him about the plums on the tree outside the manse dining room window. I explained that Ian and his friends picked about 50 pounds and then a day or two later Steve brought in another 20 pounds. Tristan helped with preparing them, but it seemed as though all by myself I must have pitted about a gazillion plums! That's what I told Moon Hee – I pitted a gazillion plums! He looked at me quizzically and didn't say anything for a moment. I knew what he was wondering: just how much is a gazillion – how many are a gazillion plums?

It is not a real number – I do know that – but it represents a huge amount – a fictitious name for an unspecified, larger than life number – an unfathomable number. Perhaps I am given to hyperbole but if that's so, I am in excellent company since Jesus too had a way with words and with exaggeration as a method to get his point across. When it comes to conveying the sheer size of the gospel and of faith, Jesus refused to do what many of us do today – we make the gospel small – neat, tidy, manageable – as though the whole thing could get contained in pithy slogans and forty days of purpose or something. Too often the gospel as presented is just not big enough.

Jesus used hyperbole to get his point across. Jesus was not averse to talking about someone walking around with an entire log protruding from his eyeball or pondering a camel squeezing through the eye of a sewing needle, or someone swallowing a camel but gagging on a gnat or telling a whole mountain to go jump in the lake. Jesus says that a

certain servant racked up a debt equivalent to thousands of lifetimes' worth of wages. A gazillion dollars – maybe more...

And Jesus wants us – expects us – to identify with that servant. We are the ones who have had the massive debt cancelled. The ones who are now called upon to forgive the debt of others – following the example set for us. How much and how often must we forgive?

The gospel changes everything about forgiveness. It is not optional, and it is not limited by the frequency or depth of what we are called upon to forgive. We don't have to forget – we don't have to forgo consequences for the perpetrator of a crime – we don't have to like it – but we do need to forgive. It is what Jesus teaches and expects for us. It is what God dreams for us.

Everyone agrees that forgiveness is a lovely idea until... until we actually have to figure out how to extend it to the unrepentant – the truly evil. For it is then that we come close to seeing the magnitude of it – its unfathomable nature. It is then that we realize that such forgiveness is going to cost us something – probably it will cost us an unknowable amount - gazillions.

As we reflect on the trauma and harm endemic in our world it's only right and proper that we struggle to let grace and forgiveness set a tone for us – a tone that our vengeful, spiteful, normal human selves may not wish to establish but to which the cross of Jesus points us. **Amen**

Read aloud *God's Dream*, a children's book written by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Douglas Carlton Abrams, and illustrated by LeYuen Pham. It's a book with a unique message of forgiveness and empathy and a beckoning pathway toward joy...

➤ *Forgive our sins as we forgive*

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Offering and Prayer

From generation to generation, God calls us to share redeeming love in all creation. Let us offer God our gifts this day as tokens of that love, needed so much in our broken world.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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We you give thanks, O God, because you have blessed us with so much. Yet we know that others have too little. Bless our gifts so they touch lives in need and become roots of justice in the world, for the sake of Jesus Christ, who sends us out in love. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

Amazing God, how do you keep track of us all? So many people, so many needs, so much suffering! Yet you love each one of us like the most generous of fathers and feel each pain like the most devoted of mothers. Help us to be inclusive in our loving just as you are.

We pray for those who are suffering and those who ease their pain – the sorrowful and those who try to comfort their grief – the diseased and those who work for their healing...

We remember the abused and those who seek justice for them – the weak and those who lend them unmeasured support – the heavy-laden and those who share the load...

We seek your blessing on the misunderstood and those who listen – the timid and those who speak up for them – the lost and those who will suffer to see their recovery...

We lift to your care the strong and those who keep them gentle – the wise and those who keep them humble – the kind and those who shield them from over-stretching themselves...

We pray for the strong in faith and those who learn from them – the happy and those who rejoice with them – for peacemakers and those who trust them – for leaders and those who vote for them...

Compared with you, Holy One, our compassion is miserly, and our circle of care is most meagre. Nevertheless, we want to be more like you, asking that you will conscript our prayers and actions into the work of your universal salvation, through Christ Jesus our Saviour who taught us to pray together boldly...***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***

➤ ***Make me a channel of your peace***

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Blessing

Jesus set a challenging goal before us: to forgive someone not just seven times, but seventy times seven. So, take up the challenge as you go, and allow forgiveness to change your life. In the days ahead, trust the divine to watch between us, to dwell within us, to move among us as an empowering Spirit of love and truth. And may the grace of Jesus, the Christ, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace and redeem us all.

➤ ***Jump with joy***

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