

Welcome, Announcements, and Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that the land where we gather for worship belongs to God, as does all of creation. We also know we are here as guests on the traditional and unceded territory of the lək̓ʷəŋən and the WSÁNEĆ. We live here not knowing the full story of the land and its people but seeking to learn more, and, by the grace of God, trying to walk a more hopeful and helpful path.

Celebrations / Joys and Concerns

*God's blessing on you. God's blessing on you.  
God's blessing, dear friends. God's blessing on you.*

➤ *Come, Holy Spirit (Gaither)*Call to Worship

We enter these gates giving thanks!

**We enter God's house singing praise...**

With prayers on our lips...

**With love in our hearts...**

With hope given life in every breath...

**We gather to worship our Creator together!**

Let us pray...

† Gathering Prayer and Words of Hope

Steadfast God, as the seasons change, we see that you are still at work in the world, transforming hearts and situations. You have shown us the true face of power in Jesus reaching out with healing and hope to touch desperate lives. We praise you for your love that works for reconciliation among neighbours and nations in this divided world. May we see the face of Jesus as we break bread at his table. Renew our hope by the gift of your Spirit at work among us, so that we can live to praise you with the whole church in Jesus' name.

All-embracing God, we confess we don't like to feel uncomfortable. We often turn away from suffering or injustice, even when the evidence is right before our eyes. We don't like to feel responsible for reaching out, even when we could. Forgive us, O God. Give us courage to love others as you love us and respond with the same mind we meet in Christ Jesus. Amen

People of God, believe that in Jesus you are rescued and healed! His mercy overflows. You are forgiven! Thanks be to God.

➤ *As water to the thirsty*

688

A Words to Ponder... **Communion / Lord's Supper / Eucharist**

➤ *Live in charity / Ubi caritas (repeat several times)*

501

+ Prayer for Understanding

**Awakening, enlightening God, your Holy Word is all we need to guide us. Prepare our hearts and minds to receive the wisdom offered to us today in scripture and prepare our hands and feet to respond. Amen**

Scripture      Exodus 17:1-7 [OT 64]

From the wilderness of Sin, the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink."

Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?"

But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?"

So, Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me."

The LORD said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink."

Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

**Philippians 2:1-13 [NT 197]**

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death -- even death on a cross.

Therefore, God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

**Matthew 21:23-32 [NT 23]**

When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"

Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?"

And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet."

So, they answered Jesus, "We do not know."

And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.'

He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went.

The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go.

Which of the two did the will of his father?"

They said, "The first."

Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him."

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

#### Message – *Seeking Freedom in the Wilderness*

"Is God among us or not?" Some of us have been wondering that recently. Is the idea of collaborating and potentially combining our resources the direction that God would have us go? Are our individual congregations struggling so that we can come together as a renewed, stronger and more vital community of faith with a critical mass that will enable us to engage more fully in the ministry to which God calls us? Are we resisting the difficult questions or embracing them? Are we prepared for the wilderness of uncertainty that looms ahead – the loss and fear and sense of failure? Do we trust that God is with us – among us – or not?

This provocative question weaves itself through today's readings. Our Exodus reading this morning reminds us of a familiar scene. The Israelites wanted out of Egypt. So, God, working through Moses, helped them get out. But once they were out, they began bellyaching. Expectations turned sour in the face of reality. The Israelites begin to quarrel and complain that Moses has led them on a death march. They ask, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?"

Each of us can tell similar stories, about when the reality didn't live up to the advertising – how the relationship went south once the honeymoon was over. When a new minister arrives to provide leadership and care in a congregation, all too often that person is not perfect – never claimed to be – and the cracks in a community of faith that had been glossed over begin to show again.

In the wider world – in the political sphere – the safest prediction anyone could make is that after any election is over – whatever the outcome – the reality will not live up to the promises. But then, that is true of almost all advertising. The product seldom lives up to the hype. Like herbal tea – the smell is nearly always better than the taste.

For his part, Moses appears frustrated at their impatience.

If you've ever been in a leadership role, or followed a leader, you'll know how initial dreams and expectations tend to dry up in the desert of reality. Most often, God's call is not to be a triumphant warrior riding into spiritual battle. The call is to keep on, living faith bit by bit and day by day – hanging in there, through forty years in the wilderness. Crossing the Red Sea, finding manna and water – those are the easy parts. The toughest call to answer is God's call to faithfulness.

The wilderness is no place to lose your way, but it's a wonderful place to find it. The wilderness is the place of desolation and waste, a place hostile to human existence. It is an unforgiving place without the things needed for survival and life. And yet ever since a group of ex-slaves stumbled out of Egypt and into freedom, the wilderness is where the people of God have gone to find their way. Beyond the hunger and thirst – the dry desert and the awesome expanse of emptiness that stretch to heaven and back again, there is richness and blessing and a world filled with God.

It was to the desert that John the Baptist went and called out, "Here, in the wilderness, in this place make a straight path for God." It was to the desert that Jesus went to be tempted and to prepare for his public ministry. It is to the desert that monks and hermits and even people much like you and I still go. There are treasures to be discovered if we have eyes to see.

So here is the whole congregation of the Israelites who have journeyed by stages as the Lord commanded – here they are at Rephidim – deep in the wilderness – in a place which shows up on no maps, even today. They were nowhere, and when they got there, right in the heart of nowhere, they set up camp. But there was a problem with this campsite – there was no water, not even bitter water. And the people were not pleased.

"Moses," they cried, "give us water to drink." The demand was direct and insistent. Should they not ask for something so basic? Should Moses, as their leader, not provide them with this? There was no thought of asking God. Despite the miraculous breakout from Egypt and the miracles of the past few weeks, the people were still not accustomed to looking to God to have their needs met.

Moses hears their demand for water, but he turns the demand back on to the people. "Why are you arguing with me?" he asks. "Why are you testing God?"

"Testing God? That thought never crossed our minds," the people must have been saying. "We're thirsty. Is that a sin?"

Moses sees that beyond their physical needs there is a theological problem. And though the two can never be wholly separated, they are equally serious. Moses sees that their questioning of him is really a way of questioning God. Is God really there? Can God really do something?

In response to the conflict and irritation – in answer to their thirst – God miraculously provides water from a rock. And perhaps even more significant than the provision of water is the means by which God

provides. The same staff used to strip God's enemies in Egypt of drinking water now provides water for God's covenant people. By having the elders as witnesses, the community is shamed for its forgetfulness. Just as God had the power to take away drinking water, the same God has the power to provide it.

Water and its potential to sustain or destroy life is a potent theme in Exodus. From baby Moses' river-rescue that we explored at our picnic worship in August to the Israelites crossing of the Red Sea, to the Israelites thirst for water in this chapter, water imagery is present throughout the narrative. How do they know that God is among them? Because God continues to use elements such as water, which can give or take life, as a tool for life-giving acts on the way to the Promised Land.

So Moses talks with God and strikes the rock as God commands and water flows out for the people to drink. And then Moses does one more thing – he names the place where this episode occurs. Moses gets the last word, and he uses it to interpret what has happened. He calls the place Massah – which means testing and Meribah – which means quarreling, because for Moses none of this was about being thirsty and having no water – it was about the people of God questioning God's very presence among them. Though they never used the words, Moses says that the people were asking the question, "Is God among us or not?"

That's a good question to ask in the desert. Amid harshness and emptiness – is God really present at all? In the middle of muddles and messes and major disappointments, is God present as we seek to find our way?

The hymn we are going to sing next has a wonderful phrase in it that interprets the wilderness as a place for the people to seek not only their way but their freedom. I wonder about the wilderness and the cry to allow the people their time in it. It seems that in our 21st century lives not only do we shy away from the wilderness, but we seem bent on obliterating it altogether. What does it do to our faith journey if the path is always groomed, weeded, smooth and comfortable? The hymn suggests that without wilderness we cannot see the light.

Even our efforts to control everything are seen as a type of wilderness. It seems that we must struggle and admit to our need of God. Recognizing that there is wilderness out there that we need to traverse, are we listening for God's word and watching for God's hand? Do we accept that we must be scattered in untamed places, removed from our zones of comfort and placed at dis-ease to be the people God needs us to be? If we manage and confine and contain our faith – if we say "no" to every suggestion of compromise or change – aren't we resisting the very wilderness God calls us to explore – the very wilderness God invites us to journey in preparation for the life of promise offered by divine grace? Let us pray...

*Great God of cloud and water, where is the wilderness through which we must wander? Help us to be open to the rugged way you set before us. Give us a clear voice to call on you when we are in need and wisdom to know that need when it arises. In this way O God, may we discover the freedom of abundant grace – living to serve others in your name. Amen*

**† Offering and Prayer**

World Communion Sunday celebrates the relationship we share with Jesus' followers around the world. Let us share our gifts with God, so there can be a global outpouring of generosity in Jesus' name.

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

**306**

**Generous God, we have received so much from you in Christ and in creation. Bless the gifts we offer so that they will speak of your love for the world in all its detail and diversity. May our gifts touch the need around us in the name of Jesus who makes us one. Amen**

The Apostles' Creed – an affirmation of faith

**539**

**I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen**

Gathering at the Lord's Table

It began last night – as you were going to bed – World communion Sunday.

In Asia, Christians shared the bread and the wine. Churches in China met in secret so that they would not be arrested. Christians in the Middle East met under the watchful eye of the government as they celebrated the Eucharist. In Europe, Christians gathered in churches that used to be much fuller and celebrated the Lord's Supper. In African communities the sacrament was celebrated in great numbers by a growing number of Christians, many of whom bear scars of persecution as they commune together.

Those celebrating today include Presbyterians, United Church, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Pentecostals, Baptists – and so many others.

Christ's followers meet in public and in secret – in freedom or gathered under threat of persecution and death. Some take the sacrament today with organ music, others with simple singing, and still others in quiet contemplation.

In wealthy churches and in desperate poverty the sacrament is observed. In churches, homes, huts, and in God's creation this seal of the covenant is experienced. The bread is given to people who could overeat all day and to those who have no idea what they will eat or where they will get food today.

The one thing in common is that we all come to the table of our Lord. All are invited – all are welcome...

➤ **I come with joy**

**530**

God be with you.

**And also, with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to God.**

Let us give thanks to our Creator God.

**It is good to give God thanks and praise...**

Gracious and loving God, we praise and thank you – you are the creator of all goodness and the source of abundance...

In the beginning, your Spirit danced on the waters and brought us life. In your generosity, you created a garden of delights and nourishment – you called us to live with respect in creation and to care for one another.

You brought your people out of slavery into a land of milk and honey – flowing with streams of living water and planted with groves of olive trees.

When we turned away from you – living in greed and violence – you sent us prophets to call us back and remind us to live for a day when no one would be hungry and we would live together in justice and peace. ...And so, with every generation before us, with all who will come after us, we lift our voices in joyful praise...

*O holy, holy, holy God, O God of time and space. All earth and sea and sky above bear witness to your grace. Hosanna in the highest heav'n, creation sings your praise. And blessed is the one who comes and bears your name always!*

Generous God, we give you thanks for Jesus, who came to live with us. We remember how he called his disciples to follow him and become fishers of all people. He told stories and taught us to pray. **We thank you that he loved eating and drinking around tables where strangers became friends and where outcasts were included.**

Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried, but you raised him from the dead – and like his disciples we meet him again in the breaking of bread as we gather around his table.

We remember and give you thanks, O God, that as he sat at the table with friends – sharing the fruit of the vine and the harvest of the fields – he took bread, blessed it, broke it and shared it, saying: "Take – eat – this is my body which is for you. Do this to remember me."

When supper was over, he took the cup and raised it, saying: "This is God's new covenant, made possible because of my death. Drink this all of you, to remember me."

As we gather for this meal prepared for us, we proclaim the mystery of faith...

*Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again! Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again!*

The bread used around the world today might be of different types and colors – created from wheat or rice or other kinds of grain. Some will have bread left over at the end of the meal. Some will share such small pieces that it will barely give every Christian there a morsel. It all represents the body of Christ – new life which is for all of us.

The cup around the world will also be filled differently. It may contain wine – or juice – and some will celebrate with water that had to be carried from a dirty well many miles away. Some will use individual cups, others fancy goblets, still others have been passing around whatever cup was in the home where they were meeting. It all represents the new covenant of God's grace.

We thank you, O God for this sacrament of communion shared with Christians around the world. Pour out your Holy Spirit on the simple gifts of this meal. and on those who partake – that we may be one in Christ and one with your vision of peace and plenty. In Christ, with Christ, through Christ – by the power of the Holy Spirit – all glory is yours, now and forever and so we sing...

***Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen!***  
***Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen!***

### Sharing Bread and Wine

The one whom the universe could not contain is present for us in this bread. The one who redeems us and calls us by name now meets us in this cup. The bread of life – the cup of grace – we remember and share with thanksgiving these gifts in which God comes to us so that we may come to God.

*Please come forward to receive Holy Communion – everyone is welcome at this table. If you are unable to come to the front, please signal an elder who will come and serve you. We use gluten and dairy-free bread. Juice, wine, and pre-packaged elements are available.*

### † Prayer after Communion

God of sweet bread – God of tart juice and wine – we give thanks that you have fed us again. So much more is received than just what we swallow. So much more is absorbed than just what we taste. We give thanks for each person present with us today. Bind our hearts by the receiving of this sacrament. Bind us firmly with all who do this in remembrance of you. Bind us in your Spirit. Send us out, O God, with tender-heartedness to touch an ordinary everyday world with the promise of your holiness. We are bold to pray as Jesus taught, singing...

➤ ***Our Father in heaven (The Lord's Prayer – no repeats)*** **469**

➤ ***In Christ there is no east or west*** **480**

### Blessing

We have been bound together by the gifts of Jesus. We are held together by the grace of God. We go forth together in service by the power of the Holy Spirit. May the blessings of our Creator – boundless love – redeeming grace – enduring presence – be among and within us all.

➤ ***Jump with joy*** **406**