

Welcome, Announcements, and Land Acknowledgement

As we seek to dismantle racism and attend to growing diversity, we lament current and historic injustices on this land. We know we gather today as guests on the traditional and unceded territory of the ləkʷəŋən 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

From the dust of the earth, the Holy One breathed us into life.

Through the breath of God we are all connected.

Shaped in their image, God formed us with a purpose:

To create – to serve – to tend – to protect – to love.

That life may flourish in all its forms,

May the Spirit of the Living God be manifest in us!

Let us pray...

† Prayer for All Saints Day (enfleshed)

Holy God, you have been with us throughout the ages. You have born witness to the ways in which the story of us – of all that has come into being – has been woven together piece by piece, life by life. We recognize, today, that it is because of the saints who have gone before us, that we are. Those who have struggled for justice, who have given so that others may live more freely – we would not be, if not for them. In remembrance and gratitude, we think of the saints who hungered for righteousness and whose sacrifices have contributed to a more just society...

Because of those who have loved us – those who have nurtured us, embraced us, celebrated us, or supported us. We are because they were. In remembrance and gratitude, we think of the saints who have shaped our lives and being...

We also hold in remembrance the ones whose lives were taken by injustice, the ones who were severed from their own sense of belovedness, those who passed on our faith, who gave us art, gave us song, gave us poetry. We are because they were.

Like us, we know they were imperfect too. There is no life that is not messy and contradictory, often betraying the very justice and love we seek to embody. And yet, you, O God, promise that our labor to Love is never made in vain. Help us to lean on the witness of those who have gone before us, drawing on the love, justice, community, and faith that weaves us together, generation after generation – past, present, and future. With gratitude and in remembrance we pray, **Amen.**

† Prayer of Confession / Words of Hope

I confess to God Almighty, before the whole company of heaven, and to you my sisters and brothers in Christ, that I have sinned by my own fault, in thought, word, and deed. I pray that God Almighty might have mercy on me, forgive me all my sins, and bring me to everlasting life.

May Almighty God have mercy on you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins and give you time to amend your life.

Amen

I confess to God Almighty, before the whole company of heaven, and to you my sisters and brothers in Christ, that I have sinned by my own fault, in thought, word, and deed. I pray that God Almighty might have mercy on me, forgive me all my sins, and bring me to everlasting life.

May Almighty God have mercy on you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins and give you time to amend your life.

Amen

Those who rely on God's grace cannot be overcome. Be at peace knowing that you are loved, and you are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

□ *Shall we gather at the river*

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Words to Ponder... **Saints / Souls**

□ *Spirit of the living God*

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† Prayer for Understanding

God of ages past, present and yet to come, your Word comes to us as the witness of your saints over many generations. Send the Holy Spirit to open our hearts so that we too may hear your wisdom and come to know Christ more deeply as your Living Word. Amen

Scripture **1 Thessalonians 1: 1-8 [NT 203]**

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace.

We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it.

1 Thessalonians 2: 9-13 [NT 203]

You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers.

As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.

1 Thessalonians 3: 6-13 [NT 204]

But Timothy has just now come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love. He has told us also that you always remember us kindly and long to see us – just as we long to see you. For this reason, brothers and sisters, during all

our distress and persecution we have been encouraged about you through your faith. For we now live, if you continue to stand firm in the Lord.

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18 [NT 204]

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.

For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.

Therefore encourage one another with these words.

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

Message

Grace to you and peace. This is how Paul begins his letter to the Thessalonians and how I hope we can greet one another. It is a generous, optimistic salutation with a certain elegance and desire for wellbeing in it. *Grace to you and peace* – it is encouraging.

We all long to hear encouragement – a good word – a word that brings good news – a word that can sustain us – a word that can give us the vision and courage to make it through another day – a word that tells us God is with us. What is the good word – the good news – the gospel – in this letter to the Thessalonians?

The gospel today is a good word about encouragement and about hope.

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy had proclaimed a hopeful message while they were with the Thessalonians, one that appears to have left the community with the impression that the moment when Christ would return to usher in the reign of God was imminent – coming soon – maybe even tomorrow. And then a problem arose: some of the Thessalonians died. This left them with a perplexing concern. What would happen to those who had died? Would they be excluded from participation in the new creation? Would they be left out?

Their concern was not only for those who had died, but for those who were still alive: what if they, too, should die before the coming of Christ? Would they also be excluded, and, if so, what hope did this offer them in the present? Anxiety about death is nothing new and even with the promise of resurrection humanity fusses about dying all the time.

Perhaps even in the life of faith many of our questions come from that anxiety. In all times and places, death has provoked any number of questions bearing on faith. In our time, those who embrace their death with calm thankfulness risk being thought depressed or worse. In Paul's time, those who witnessed the deaths of believers couldn't help wondering if in dying they had missed their chance to be part of the great return of Christ.

How does all this work? What will happen to those who have died? Will we see them again? Can they die in the hope of resurrection? Do we need to fear death? Paul, like all pastors, priests and clergy in every time and place is asked these questions.

What Paul describes seems to have instilled new hope in the Thessalonians, but for us it all sounds a bit strange. He outlines an apocalyptic scenario in which Christ descends from the clouds with a cry of command – the sound of a trumpet – and lifts the faithful up into heaven. Are we required to take this at face value as a description of what is to come?

Paul speaks in metaphor all the time, and this is no exception. Despite the tendency of some to read this as a literal description of some sort of rapture, it is more likely language designed as a challenge to imperial Rome – the oppressive government of the time. Christ is described arriving with precisely the same pageantry and fanfare that would announce the arrival of an imperial messenger or even the emperor himself – an event that was often accompanied by a declaration of good news – a promise of encouragement and hope.

The description Paul offers the Thessalonians of the coming of Christ is intended less as a literal description than as assurance that the promises of God are backed up by a power even greater than that of Rome. True peace and security are found in God.

Paul assures the people that God is always present and always active in their lives – even in their death. With the resurrection of Jesus, God has put into motion a

transformation that will not only overcome death but will bring believers into the very presence of God. Why then are we anxious about our death? We can be comforted in knowing God is still speaking – still acting today and we are part of that same great transformation.

It may be fair to say that Paul's timeline is a bit off, but the heart of his argument is sound – the Lord will return in God's time and those who have died will not be left out. Furthermore, those who will die before God's promise for creation is fully realized – likely you and me – we too need not be distressed. We do not need to grieve as others do who have no hope – we can encourage one another.

We can remember that God directs our way – the Lord allows us to increase and abound in love for one another and for all. We can be encouraged because God strengthens our hearts in holiness that we may *be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.*

We continue to look for signs that can assure us that God has not forgotten us – that we will not be left behind – that we will not be separated forever from those who have already died – those whom we love and who, amazingly, love us too.

I see the transformative work of God in how some people choose to live and in how they choose to experience death. I see it in how we remember the fallen – the saints who have gone before us and the cloud of witnesses that encourages us always to hope.

Paul's instruction is clear: encourage one another – live in hope – even in grief we can trust that the story is far from over. Just as the Thessalonians were – we too are swept up in the great transformation – the resurrection work of God. John Dominic Crossan says, *“To claim that God has already begun to transform this earth into a place of divine justice and peace demands that you can show something of that transformative activity here and now. To which Paul would have replied unabashedly: To see God's transformation in process, come and see how we live.”*

Ultimately, we must each speak to this out of our own experience. I find this hopeful transformation – this model of how to live – in the little things rather than the apocalyptic scenarios. Through these small things – lived day by day – the power and presence of God becomes real – more real than an image of Christ coming down out of the sky. In these small things I am offered hope to face each new day with some measure of courage.

All Saints' is one of those holy days in the Christian year that provides an opportunity to re-evaluate and reshape our imagination of death and God, heaven and holiness and saints. Today we celebrate the communion of the saints – a spiritual communion between the saints who have gone before us and those who live and breathe among

us. These are the *company of heaven* who are acknowledged in our prayers as we gather around the Lord's Table for Holy Communion.

How might we imagine this *company of heaven*? Who are these saints we celebrate?

For many, saints are those who were exceptionally gifted by God to live exemplary, sinless lives. The *company of heaven* based on this understanding is thought of as a mixture of angels and saints who stand guard over heaven, mediating between us and a holy and inaccessible God.

We, however, affirm that saints are those who are faithful – not those who stand over and above others but those who stand with others – those who live in humility as servants of God in the world. If saints are those who have a holiness to be imitated, their holiness is not the result of some supernatural gifts that made them exceptional when compared to everyone else. Their holiness is the mark of lives that were given in humble service to others. Like Jesus, their holiness is the result of their love which offers us examples of the character of God and glimpses of the beauty of heaven.

As we gather at the table in *the company of heaven*, let us not imagine that we have been transported to heaven as a place over and above earth and all the rest of us. Let us approach God with freedom and confidence, seeing the truth that God chooses to be in the midst of us – that heaven is among us. And let us be inspired by the same Spirit that empowered all the witnesses before us so that we recognize ourselves as saints in the hands of a humble heaven. *Grace to you and peace...*

□ *The Lord bless you / Aaronic Blessing*

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† Offering and Prayer

The gifts of God have touched us through the work of many hands and the commitment of many lives over many centuries. We give our gifts to honour God and all God's saints, praying that we too may be a blessing to those who come after us.

□ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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Generous God, thank you for your steadfast love which has inspired so many to give their lives in sacrifice. Bless the gifts we bring and inspire our discipleship so that our lives will also witness to your love in Christ's name. Amen

The Apostles' Creed – an affirmation of faith

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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

□ *For all the saints (verses 1 and 2)*

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Remembering the Saints

Today we direct our attention to the richness of Christian history and the varied experiences of the grace of God by lifting up the lives of the saints.

We celebrate saints as those who aspire to the sanctity of God whom they serve. Because the Holy Spirit dwells within them, they too are made holy. A saint, therefore, is one who reflects the blessedness of the God they serve: to be a saint in this sense is a sign not of perfection, but of fidelity.

We think of all the people of God, living and dead, who together form the mystical body of Christ and we name in our hearts those known to us who have died since our last remembrance of the saints. We remember them in our prayers – we give thanks for their lives – we find strength in their faith and the faith of all the saints both known to us and known only to God. **Doreen Daviss – October 30, 2023, at age 103**

□ *For all the saints (verses 4 and 8)*

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Gathering at the Lord's Table

We have heard about God, who loved confusion into order and gave each creature a divine image, making the world.

We have heard about Jesus, a poor man whose banquet feeds the world, a healer whose wounds give life, a teacher whose wisdom traces love's order in the world, finding the divine in each of us.

We have heard how Jesus died, and how, for those who loved him, he rose again.

We have heard about the Holy Spirit, who breaks the bonds of race and class, of gender and creed, to show God's love for everyone. And we have heard that love makes all things new. We come to this table asking for the bread of such blessings.

These miracles begin with simple human gestures, bits of bread in a basket, tongues that talk, souls that yearn. And so, we bring bread and wine, prayers and our own yearning, that the miraculous may begin in us today.

The Holy One be with you

And also with you

Open your hearts to the One who is Love

We open our hearts to you, O God

Let us give thanks to God, who gathers us together

To the One who welcomes us to the table, we give thanks and praise

Generous God, your invitation to come and feast in your presence is but a taste of the love you extend to us every day. By your very nature, you are always seeking us out – searching for ways to connect us and connect with us. You meet us in the most ordinary of places and you make them sacred. By your grace, we come to recognize the holiness that dwells in the world around us, in our neighbors, in ourselves. Therefore, with all the company of heaven and 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!

Blessed are you and blessed is your eternal table. You welcome all who thirst for justice and hunger to grow in love. You ask us to extend this same welcome to all our neighbors, but since our beginning, we have struggled. And so in your love for us, you took on flesh in Jesus. Through his life, you pointed to your presence on the margins. You revealed the sacredness in all life. You showed us how to live together, even among forces of destruction.

Believing it could transform the world, Jesus proclaimed the Good News. He called for the captives to be set free. He spoke of the lowly being lifted up. He talked of redistributing wealth and eradicating the causes of poverty. His commitment to practicing love knew no bounds – not even the bounds of death.

On the night of his arrest, Jesus shared a meal with his companions. He took bread, blessed it, broke it, gave it to his disciples saying: *“This is my body which is for you. Do this to remember me.”*

After the meal, he took the cup, blessed it, and shared it saying: *“This cup that is poured out is the new covenant. Drink this all of you, to remember me.”*

As we gather for this meal prepared for us, we ponder and affirm 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!

Pour out your Spirit on these gifts, O God. Make these ordinary elements into the Sacred gift of your presence with us once again. May they awaken us anew to your everlasting invitation into a life of resurrection. Enliven us in our pursuit of a world where all needs are met, power is balanced, and the worth of every creature and creation is celebrated. 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 who grieved for the death of a friend, shares solidarity through this bread. The one who is surrounded by the saints in high heaven, offers consolation 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

Holy One, by the bread of heaven and the cup of life, you make us one body. Bind us together by your spirit that we might live into your hopes for us, a community centered in Christ and rich in compassion, commitment, courage, and care. We are bold to pray as Jesus taught, singing...

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

□ ***Here, O my Lord, I see thee (verses 4-7)*** 530

Blessing (adapted from *A Black Rock Prayer Book*)

The world now is too dangerous and too beautiful for anything but love.

May our eyes be so blessed we see God in everyone. Our ears, so we hear the cry of the poor.

May our hands be so blessed that everything we touch is a sacrament. Our lips, so we speak nothing but the truth with love.

May our feet be so blessed we run to those who need us. And may our hearts be so opened, so set on fire, that our love, our love, changes everything.

May the blessing of the God who created you, loves you, and sustains you, be with you now and always.

We will go out with joy

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