

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

We come to worship in Jesus' name acknowledging with gratitude the land where we are gathered. This is the traditional and unceded Coast Salish Territory of Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ. We continue to pray that past and present injustices can be reconciled as we commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships.

□ *Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary* (repeat)

Lent Liturgy<sup>1</sup>

On this second Sunday of Lent, we hear Jesus teaching about the suffering and rejection that he would endure on his way to the cross.

**Like Peter, we resist this teaching.**

**We prefer an easier way without struggle and suffering.**

But Jesus does not hold back.

He tells us that to become his followers we need to deny ourselves and take up our cross.

**May God help us as we learn more of what it means to be friends and followers of Jesus.**

PWS&D Story: From Crop Harvest to Small Business

In Pakistan, Mohammad Saleh owns three acres of land in his village, where he grows guar beans. Despite sporadic rains, he had a relatively successful harvest—some of the beans were sold in the market for cash. The rest was used for food at home.

Farming is part-time in the desert area of Umerkot because farmers are challenged by unpredictable rains, droughts and floods, and can't grow enough to sustain themselves. Many work as unskilled labourers to make ends meet while waiting for their crops to ripen.

Unfortunately, the crops were not enough to last the year and Saleh worried about providing for his family when the guar ran out.

Saleh and his family received food aid through PWS&D's partner Community World Service Asia, which enabled them to access food in difficult times. Since then, he managed to save some money and set up a small store in his home, which his wife could manage while he continued to work in construction, providing the family with a sustainable income.

PWS&D is working closely with local partners to provide communities with the resources and training they need to build better futures. Thank you for faithfully responding to Christ's call.

Gathering Prayer / the Lord's Prayer / Words of Hope

Faithful God, who fulfilled the promises made to the generations before us, thank you for your grace, may everyone tell of your goodness and your grace. Generous God, we praise you for

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<sup>1</sup> Written by the Rev. John Bannerman (PWS&D Committee Co-Convener)

gracious presence with us throughout the years and for sending Jesus Christ to deliver us from all manner of injustices and inequalities. Your glorious Spirit fills this world and renews our hearts and visions so that we can see your image in every person irrespective of background, race, and ethnicity. Your love moves beyond divides and borders and works in us to end misunderstanding, racism, and injustice; creating communities of human flourishing. We praise you for reconciling your world and making us one in Christ. Amen. Forgiving God, we do not readily open our hearts to others who are different from us. We want to follow the example set by Jesus to love everyone, but we are scared of the unknown and scared that we might lose ourselves. We fail so often to share your unconditional love with others. Forgive us, Lord, and remind us of Jesus' sacrificial love for us and all humanity. Strengthen us where we are weak, that we may faithfully respond to your call to love one another as you have loved us. Make us channels of your peace and people, who will build your kingdom of love and justice. We ask as we offer the prayer Jesus gave us:

***...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***

As descendants of Abraham we are covered by God's grace that has set us free. Let us give God thanks that we have received salvation through the resurrection of Jesus. Go, live in peace, love the Lord, and love others. Amen.

## **Amazing Grace**

**670**

### Prayer for Understanding

**Gracious God, your Word instructs us how we live and how we should grow in relationship with all you have created. Open our hearts to receive your Word of truth and may your truth lead to our liberation. May your Word help us to strive for justice, peace and equality for all people and set us on fire with love for you. Amen.**

### Scripture

#### **Genesis 17:1–7,15–16 [page 13 OT]**

17 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty,<sup>[a]</sup> walk before me, and be blameless. <sup>2</sup> And I will make my covenant between me and you and will make you exceedingly numerous.” <sup>3</sup> Then Abram fell on his face, and God said to him, <sup>4</sup> “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. <sup>5</sup> No longer shall your name be Abram,<sup>[b]</sup> but your name shall be Abraham,<sup>[c]</sup> for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. <sup>6</sup> I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. <sup>7</sup> I will establish my covenant between

me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

<sup>15</sup> God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. <sup>16</sup> I will bless her and also give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”

This is the word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Psalm 22:23–31 (displayed / responsive) [page 501 OT]**

You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

**For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me but heard when I cried to him.**

From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

**The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD. May your hearts live forever!**

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.

**For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations.**

To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him.

**Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.**

This is the word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Romans 4:13–25 [page 155 NT]**

<sup>13</sup> For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup> For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. <sup>15</sup> For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there transgression.

<sup>16</sup> For this reason the promise depends on faith, in order that it may rest on grace, so that it may be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (who is the father of all of us, <sup>17</sup> as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”), in the presence of the God in whom he believed,<sup>[a]</sup> who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. <sup>18</sup> Hoping against

hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So shall your descendants be.”<sup>19</sup> He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already<sup>[b]</sup> as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), and the barrenness of Sarah’s womb.<sup>20</sup> No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,<sup>21</sup> being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.<sup>22</sup> Therefore “it was reckoned to him as righteousness.”<sup>23</sup> Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone<sup>24</sup> but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe<sup>[c]</sup> in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,<sup>25</sup> who was handed over for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

This is the word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

### Message: Faith, God’s Superpower Gift

Albert Einstein's father gave him a compass for his fifth birthday. He shook and twisted it, seeing if he could manipulate the needle into pointing in a different direction. Still, it always ended up pointing north, mysteriously.

"I can still remember...that this experience made a deep and lasting impression on me. Something deeply hidden had to be behind things."

Finding the deeply hidden forces behind things became his life's work, culminating in his general and special relativity theories.

The apostle Paul isn't setting out to describe a theory of the deeply hidden forces of the world, but he manages to do so nonetheless. We read in 1Corinthians 13, after describing spiritual gifts, he offers this:

*But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. We know in part and prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, thought like a child, and reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now, we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then, we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*

*And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.*

I think you can make a pretty good case that you have the three primary spiritual forces of all creation right there. Faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of all is love. John says, "For God is love."

So what does this have to do with Romans 4 and Genesis 17?

A great deal. In Genesis, we read of the covenant God made with Abraham and Sarah—the promise of a son through whom all the earth would eventually be blessed.

The sign of this covenant was to be circumcision. As improbable as this was, Abraham was ninety, and Sarah would have been near that age, so childbearing was impossible.

But God made good on the promise, and as Christians, we believe we are heirs, by faith, to this blessing, if not the same covenant.

Paul wrote his Opus Magnum, Romans, to a church he had never visited. The other letters of Paul are addressed to churches he had personally founded, but not this one.

A bit of background:

Sometime around 49AD, emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome. The Roman historian Suetonius wrote that it was because of public disputes between Jews and Christians over the teaching of Jesus. Aquilla and Priscilla were among those expelled. They headed to Corinth, where they met Paul, became believers, and helped establish the church in Corinth. They went to Ephesus also but ended up back in Rome after Nero allowed Jews to return. We know this because later in his letter, he says, "Greet Aquilla and Priscilla for me."

Here's what likely happened. Someone other than Paul did the groundwork of preaching in Rome and began the church there, but this in turn, fuelled very public debates among Christians and Jews—a phenomenon which happened repeatedly with Paul as well.

Claudius expelled Jews from Rome, which would have included Jewish believers but not the gentile believers, who would have carried on. For a time, Rome had the only all-gentile church. Gentile believers found out they could function with all the authority of God without Jewish brethren.

When Nero overturned the expulsion around fifteen years later, Jews and Jewish Christians returned. But they returned to a church now overseen by Gentiles, who had gotten used to being in charge. Imagine a church experiencing a power struggle based on religious background or ethnicity. Not too hard to imagine.

It's to that church that Paul is now writing, explaining that God approved Abraham and Sarah by faith. And it is by faith that gentile believers are heirs to the same promise as their Jewish brethren. So, there is no distinction to be made. We are equal. (see Galatians 3:28)

And it is the same for us. The promise of God comes to us through faith.

It was the same for Jewish believers. They entered into the new covenant through faith alone. They didn't inherit eternal life by following the law of Moses alone. To follow the law perfectly is impossible.

We know that well enough. Try as we might, we all fail—repeatedly. (Paul writes about this as well) There is only one hope for reconciliation with God our Creator.

We celebrate that every time we come to the table. We hear how Jesus took the cup; he said, "This now is the new covenant, in my blood."

We enter into the new covenant by putting our faith in what Jesus has done for us, namely shedding his blood for redemption of our sins.

One of my favorite passages encapsulating this perfectly is in chapter two of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. He writes, For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works so that no one can boast.

Faith in this context means trusting in the promise—just like Abraham and Sarah had to do. The promise is this: You cannot get yourself perfect enough for God.

If you've visited the observation platform at the CN Tower in Toronto or walked across the suspension bridge at Capilano Canyon in N. Vancouver, you understand faith.

When you come to the glass floor hundreds of feet above Toronto, you can step on it and look into the abyss.

Same with the Capilano suspension bridge. You step out onto it and feel it swinging and swaying beneath your feet.

Do you turn and go back or continue forward? If you continue forward, it is because of faith. You mentally calculate that the engineers who built it knew their craft and the folks overseeing its upkeep are doing their job. And you see the others out there enjoying their thrill.

Faith is not an emotion. It is not the absence of fear or even some doubts. It is about the choice you make to trust or not to trust.

Faith in God means trusting that what God says about things is the truth. And you make a decision,—continually—to base your choices on what you know about God. You trust that what Jesus, in particular, says about something is reliable, and you act on it as best you can, which is imperfect for sure, but it needs to be deliberate as well.

It is God's work to give you perfection as a gift. Trusting that Jesus' death and resurrection provide all we need to be acceptable to God. We say, "I'll do it God's way rather than my own."

Faith in Christ was all that the Jewish or gentile believers needed to be equally accepted by God. It is all we need.

Have faith. Trust in what God has done for us by sending Jesus. That's all the credentials you need. That's all the credentials you will ever need.

*Guide me O thou great redeemer* 651

#### Offering and Prayer

**Generous God, you have blessed our lives with many diverse gifts and peoples. We pause with grateful hearts to offer you gifts of money that you have provided for us. We also give to you our hands, our feet, our voices, our time, and our abilities. Use all that we are along with these gifts to spread your love throughout the world. We dedicate ourselves and all that we are to your work. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.**

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

*This is my father's world* 328

#### † Pastoral Prayers

*Precious Lord, take my hand* 675

#### Blessing

*Bless the Lord* PCUSA 544