

03 March 2024 – Lent 3 / Communion / PWS&D Sunday

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)*

Celebrations / Joys & Concerns:

God's blessing on you. God's blessing on you.

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

Lent Liturgy¹

On this third Sunday of Lent, we see Jesus, overturning the tables of the money changers as he drove them out of the temple.

We are surprised by his actions.

Yet there is much in our lives and the world that needs to be overturned and driven out.

In the name of Jesus, we work to overcome oppression, poverty, and injustice in our local communities and with partners around the world.

We come together to worship God, to listen to God's voice and to let God nudge us in new directions. Let us worship God, as we first hear this story from PWS&D

PWS&D Story: Caring for Creation

The climate crisis is one of the most pressing issues of our time, and its effects are being felt worldwide. Unfortunately, the most severe climate events are often felt by those who are the least responsible for the emissions causing them. Extreme weather events like droughts and floods, are consequences of climate change. These events also affect health, with the increased risk of waterborne diseases like malaria and dengue fever. PWS&D's partners work to combat the effects of climate change. Partners promote sustainable techniques for the future and help vulnerable populations build resilience to deal with crises. In addition, PWS&D recognizes that climate change work also includes our own personal and collective actions and choices. Through our combined efforts and advocacy, we can help create a more just and sustainable world where everyone can live in dignity and with respect for the natural world around us. Thank you for faithfully responding to Christ's call to care for creation. PWS&D is committed to creating a more sustainable world.

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

Gathering Prayer & Words of Hope

The heavens are telling the glory of God.

Along with the earth and sky, we proclaim God's handiwork.

The law of the Lord is perfect and revives the soul.

Together, let us seek God's wisdom and let us pray:

As we come to worship you, Holy One, may the words of our mouths and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you. For you are our rock and redeemer, and so we praise you! God of grace and truth, you set the whirling cosmos in motion and call all creatures into being. Mountains and molehills alike speak of your majesty, for no detail misses your care and attention. You know each one of us by name, and make yourself known to those who seek you. We gather in your presence to listen for your wisdom for our times and our lives. To you, O God, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, we offer all honour and glory in our prayers and our praises this day and every day, now and always.

Jesus Christ, son of God, as we enter this time of worship we open ourselves to your discipline, your grace and your guidance. Be present among us, renewing, and strengthening us. May your Holy Spirit enliven us and help us to discern your voice. Wise and welcoming God, You are always seeking us out, yet we confess we are easily distracted from your presence. We envy those who are successful in the world's terms, and pursue our own desires. When we fail to question the cost of our desires to the earth or those in need, Forgive us, O God. Re-awaken us to your purposes and re-ignite our commitment to pursue them. Help us to shine brightly in the dark places of our world for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

Rejoice in the Lord greatly, again I say rejoice!

We are the precious people of Christ.

We carry with us the special promise - that we are still loved.

Each day is new. The future is open.

In Jesus Christ we are forgiven people! Thanks be to God. Amen.

➤ *Come let us sing*

706

Prayer for Understanding

God of mercy, you promise never to break your covenant. Amid all the changing words of our times, speak your Eternal Word that does not change. Then may we respond to your gracious promises with faithful and obedient lives. We pray this in the name of Jesus your Son and our Lord. Amen.

Scriptures

Exodus 20:1-17 (pg. 55 OT)

20 Then God spoke all these words, ² “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ³ you shall have no other gods before^[a] me. ⁴ “You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me ⁶ but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation^[b] of those who love me and keep my commandments. ⁷ “You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. ⁸ “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁰ But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it. ¹² “Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. ¹³ “You shall not murder.^[c] ¹⁴ “You shall not commit adultery. ¹⁵ “You shall not steal. ¹⁶ “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. ¹⁷ “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, male or female slave, ox, donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

Psalm 19, responsive (pg. 498-499 OT)

¹ The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament^[a] proclaims his handiwork.

² **Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.**

³ There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; ⁴ yet their voice^[b] goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens^[c] he has set a tent for the sun, ⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens and its circuit to the end of them, and nothing is hid from its heat.

⁷ **The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple;**

⁸ the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes;

⁹ **the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.**

¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

¹¹ **Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.**

¹² But who can detect one’s own errors? Clear me from hidden faults.

¹³ **Keep back your servant also from the insolent;^[d] do not let them have dominion over me.** Then I shall be blameless and innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

John 2: 13-22 (pg. 93 NT)

¹³ The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵ Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, with the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸ The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

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

Message: Brilliant

It was a brilliant day. Just brilliant. But it hadn't seemed all that remarkable at first. I'd gone to do some groceries in Fairfield mall. The sun was shining and it was a pretty nice day all in all. But when I walked outside leaving the store I could see some very dark clouds in one direction. And I thought to myself, there are clouds and rain over in one direction, but sun in the other, so maybe there's a rainbow somewhere. My dog Johann and I drove over to Clover point to see what we could see. And yes - what I saw was just brilliant.

There was a huge double rainbow that was visible in its entirety. I was taking pictures from all kinds of angles as were all the other people there. We were all in awe. I noticed that Colina Titus reflected on that rainbow too, in the Lenten meditations that have been shared by Linda Coggin. We definitely agreed - it was a brilliant day.

You can probably think of some brilliant days too of course. Maybe you have enjoyed some of those clear views of Mount Baker and the Cascade Mountain range where the white of the snow gleams against a brilliant blue sky. I think of my 11 year old grandson glowing with joy, his face lighting up with a smile or my daughters erupting into laughter together. Perhaps for you it is a magnificent musical performance or the joy of seeing someone you love that you have missed for a long time. Brilliant moments. Days like these make you want to stop, stand back and give thanks, to reflect and think about what is most important in your life.

I imagine that King Solomon had such a day when he looked out upon the world around him. Feeling the warm sun touch his skin, and sensing the brilliance of what God had given him, perhaps it was in a moment such as that that he decided that it was unseemly for God's home to just be a tent.

The ruler of all Creation deserved a better place to dwell. Solomon's father, David had considered and wanted to build such a place but it was not to be. Solomon decided it was time, and so he built the Grand Temple of Jerusalem. It was brilliant. Until that time, God's people had worshiped in a tent as they moved about. The tent held the Ark of the Covenant and in it there were the tablets that held the Laws given to Moses by God up on the holy mountain. How unseemly to keep dragging the Ark of the Covenant around wherever they went. God needed a spectacular place - a proper temple - a Holy place for God to dwell. The Temple became the only place to worship God. It was THE place. And in Solomon's eyes it was just brilliant. The temple complex was a series of courts that encircled the Holy of Holies. The Royal porticos led to the outer court where the Gentiles were welcome . From there if you were a Jew you could walk through the Gate Beautiful to the court of the women as well as the temple treasury.

Right ahead of you through the next gate, and in the next court would be the altar of sacrifice. Then there was a court that was just for the Jewish men and then one for the priests. Closer to the center was the altar of incense . Getting closer now - there was the veil and finally behind that was the HOLY of HOLIES. That was where the Ark of the Covenant was kept where only the high priest could enter once a year.

But before there was the temple, of course - there was the Law - the Torah. In Hebrew the word Torah translates as the Law, but also teaching. It provided a way to enable God's people to stay in a relationship with God, the Holy One, the Creator. And before there was the law, the commandments - there was God's love and grace that created the universe. It was God who initiated a relationship with Adam and Eve, who made a covenant with Noah and his family with a brilliant rainbow being the sign.

There was God's covenant with Abraham and Sarah and the promises made to them and to Moses. It was God who initiated the rescue of the Israelites from Egypt and then led them through the wilderness. And God keeps on initiating and seeking us out. Brilliant.

The story of Jesus that we read in John where he is turning the tables, cleansing the temple and getting rid of the money changers - is found in all the gospels . In all of the other gospels though you will find the story taking place after Jesus has entered Jerusalem on a donkey - palm branches waving all around him. But in John it serves another purpose. This story comes

near the very beginning of John, right after the Wedding in Cana and just before the priest Nicodemus comes to him in the dark with all of his questions.

Just who are you, Jesus? The writer of the gospel of John was written by a Jew, to a Jewish community who followed Jesus. They understood the Torah, its laws and requirements and they knew what the Temple was about. The financial exchanges going on in the Temple were on the up and up. This wasn't a dishonest enterprise as you may have been led to believe, or an issue of loan sharking or some other malfeasance.

The worshippers needed someone to provide the animals for sacrifice, and the Temple authorities needed the revenue to keep the worship going according to the law of God. The Temple provided a service for all the pilgrims who had traveled long distances to Jerusalem to the temple to make their sacrifices, in order to fulfill the law's requirements. But there was a serious problem - more serious than any set of dishonest scales for weighing the coins. It wasn't a problem of doing business on the Sabbath either. No - it was a greater problem than any of those. Even though they were under the occupation of Caesar's armies, the authorities in the temple still had the responsibility and the right to collect the Temple tax, their only indigenous national tax.

The law of Moses prescribed a half-shekel tax per year to be collected from every adult Jewish male over 20. They would pay the tax when they made their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Simple enough you would think. But there was a problem - one we are familiar with - inflation!

The value of the coinage in their day was very simply the value of the metal used in them. The Roman Imperial coins were no good for the Temple tax because they were only 80% silver, or even less, whereas the coins that had been used before the Romans invaded were almost pure silver - above 95%.

Those pure silver coins were minted up to the year 19 BC in Tyre, in Phoenicia, and during Roman times the Empire allowed the Jews to mint pure silver replicas. And even though the coins had pagan symbols, and even though it was against the second commandment to make graven images, the religious authorities had ruled that it was more important that good money be collected for the temple tax, so it was the Tyrian shekels that were required. Devalued coins just wouldn't do for them any more than we could pay the Canada Revenue Agency with Canadian Tire money. It was complicated.

So - in order to make things more convenient and efficient for the pilgrims streaming into the temple in Jerusalem, there were money changers set up in an outer court of the temple, that is - in the Court of the Gentiles, where all the various types and values of coins could be exchanged for those Tyrian coins, needed to pay the tax.

And to make things easier, there were also stalls for vendors who sold the necessary animals for sacrifice - everything from little doves to great big oxen were available for whatever sacrifice you wanted to make. It would be a great convenience - especially if you were walking for three days from Galilee. The last thing you would want to have to do is to drag a lamb or an ox or a cage full of doves along with you.

And so Jesus walks into this chaos and din of transactions, and upsets and turns the tables. Meanwhile, all the lame and the blind, those deemed unclean and needing healing remained on the steps of the temple - not allowed to enter. Those who were excluded from worship, barred from coming close to God- well they had the doors slammed in their faces. Why?

The blind and the lame weren't allowed in the Temple! They were excluded because their illnesses showed that they were clearly under the curse of God. It's a terrible irony. The religious leaders who should see so clearly and understand so deeply who Jesus is, just stand stiff and blindly criticize him, while the blind do see who he is and the lame run to his side.

And that is the real problem, the real reason why Jesus releases doves into the air and tosses tables, and kicks over kiosks. Because the whole enterprise is upside down. The Temple, its leaders, the vendors and the money changers, and the worshippers themselves - because they have taken God's love for the world and twisted it into religion for its own sake. They have abandoned the vocation of Israel as the children of Abraham - which is to be a people through whom the whole world will be blessed., and they have turned inward with their self concern. They have neglected justice and the care for the poor and the broken and focused instead on ritual purity. They have done whatever they wanted all week long in a false confidence that because they sing the right hymns and offer the right sacrifices that God is pleased with them. "I too am watching, says the Lord." And they thought that God didn't notice or care if their lives were cruel as long as their liturgy was correct.

It's also important to know that John's gospel was written after the temple had actually already been destroyed and the Romans had laid it to ruins. This is good news for those who read and hear this text!

It is also an offense to some: such as the temple priests and those with power.

Jesus is the new Temple: that is where God is. In Jesus we see who God is, and when Jesus speaks of the Temple being resurrected on the third day he is of course speaking of himself. Jesus will be resurrected after he has been laid in ruins.

As John 1 tells us, Jesus is the Word made flesh - come to live among us. This story answers the crucial questions of the time. **How do we communicate with God when there is no temple building any more? No building? Jesus is saying that all the sacrificing and temple taxes are no longer needed. He is the new temple. Jesus shakes things up and shatters the past.**

It is in Jesus where we find God's presence. God is still with us, the people of God. This is the Good News!

It is Brilliant! Jesus has turned the tables indeed! Jesus heals those on the temple steps, those living on the edges, the blind, the lame and those deemed unclean. Jesus is the place where God's presence dwells. Whatsoever you do to the least of these, Jesus tells his friends: - you do to me. And so the doors are wide open to all people. That is - Jesus' arms are wide open to all. All of those who we know or don't know who are broken and hurting; all those who are in need and are dying to be loved and touched and cared for - Jesus is shining in their eyes too,

And it is a brilliant sight. Just brilliant.

➤ *Lord of all Power*

626

Offering and Prayer

Jesus grew angry at the money changers in the temple, reminding God's people that our offerings are not just financial transactions. What we give expresses our commitment to God's ways. As we present our offerings, let us consider what commitment to God's purposes our gifts express.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

306

We praise you, O God, and ask you to accept this money that we humbly bring and lay before you. Bless the ways in which we make it. Bless the ways in which we use it. And bless this part that we give back to you, so that with it, we may give you our lives, body and soul - to work for you, here on earth. Amen

The Apostles' Creed # 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

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Lent is not simply a time for temporary self-discipline. It is time to refashion our relationship with God and to be refashioned by God's strength and grace. This meal is the gift of that strength and grace. It comes not as a whole loaf and bottle for each one to take away and relish in private. It comes in broken pieces and deep sips shared together to remind us there will always be enough for everyone who seeks a place at this table. So come, you who have much faith and you who have a little, you who have been here often and you who have not been for a long time. Our Saviour invites all those who trust his grace to share this feast as a foretaste of his kingdom.

➤ *Will you come and follow me*

634

Celebrating Together with Thanksgiving:

On the night Jesus was betrayed by friends, who thought their intentions good and commitment strong, Jesus sat at table with those very friends. While they were eating, He took a loaf of bread and after blessing it, he broke it and said, "Take, this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said, "This is my blood of the covenant, poured out for many." (Mark 14.22-24)

As often as we eat this bread and drink from this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again. As Jesus gave thanks to God for the gifts of the earth, so let us give thanks for what we receive from God's hand. 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 with us.

To the One who took on flesh, we give thanks and praise.

Creator of all that is, Mother of life itself, by your hand we were formed...

Holy and Mysterious God, It is right to bring you our thanks and praise for you are the Source of all that is. You spin the galaxies that twinkle in the night sky. You give life to fragile creatures shivering in the chill of winter and offer them hope as the sun stirs new growth beneath the surface of the earth. Your mercy sustains your whole creation day by day, and so we sing in praise of our Lord, first born of all creation:

...Therefore, we join our voices with your people on earth and all the company of the heavens, singing praise to you...

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!

In our longing for your presence with us, we often expect your arrival in traditional places...

Lord Jesus Christ, We come to the table to remember the love which led you to lay down your life for the world. We remember how you walked the road of this world's suffering, touching those in pain and grief, giving strength to those in weakness, welcoming those who had been pushed aside, standing up to those with callous hearts. You lived to offer mercy to us all. You died because we find it so hard to offer mercy to each other. And so we remember in silence those who need your mercy this day:

(Brief moment of silence.)

Holy Spirit, look now in kindness upon us as we remember what mercy has cost the God of love. Pour down your grace on the bread we break and the cup we share today and we who share it. Let us taste the passion of Jesus Christ baked into this bread and be moved to act with compassion in his name. Let us taste the renewing love of Jesus Christ that refreshes us from this cup and be moved to greet each day with fresh hope.

...In remembrance of all you have done to save us, we proclaim the mystery of our 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...

Holy God, Three in One and One in Three, Strengthen us by your undying love so that we may remember to show mercy to others and seek mercy from others, living unafraid to bear the cost of mercy day by day, so...

...In collective longing for a taste of your Kingdom on earth, we join together singing...

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

Sharing Bread and Cup

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

God of Grace, you renew us at your table with the bread of life. We thank you for your Son Jesus who is our peace. We thank you that you give us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet in your eternal kingdom. May this food strengthen us in love, And help us to serve you and each other. Send us out in the power of your Spirit, to live and work to your praise and glory And grant that we who have received this sacrament of the body and blood of Jesus our Lord, may abide in him and he in us. May we be filled with the power of his endless life, and help us to trust the power of your transforming love at work in us, through us and around us. Create in us hopeful hearts, as we face our broken and divided world.

We pray for people who face discrimination because of their race, religion, gender, orientation, or ethnicity. Open our eyes so that we may learn to see each other differently, each one as precious to you. God of mercy, we pray for peace in our world that is marked by so much violence, anger and conflict. We especially pray for the people of Gaza, the West Bank, and all living in fear in that region. We pray for those living in Ukraine ...for those in Sudan, and the myriad of other people in the midst of famine and violence. Jesus Christ, light in our darkness, lighten the burdens of those we bring to you in the silence of our hearts. For those who are grieving, those who are afraid, for those who are sick... By your Spirit, you have made us one with Christ, and united us with all who share this feast in every time and place. Send us out as your faithful people, filled with the joy of new and eternal life. Strengthen us to serve you in the places you have called us to until that day when we feast with you in Glory. And so together we sing in the words that Jesus taught his friends...

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

Blessing

Beloved, go! Go out into the world, ready to fulfill your calling as servants of Christ. God chooses YOU for unexpected outpourings of grace! Go in peace, filled with hope and confidence, And may the love of our God, Creator, Christ and Spirit Be with you this day and always. Amen

➤ *Bless the Lord PCUSA 544*