

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

We come to worship in Jesus' name acknowledging with gratitude the land where we are gathered. This is 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 Liturgy¹

On this fifth Sunday of Lent, we discover a troubled Jesus in prayer as he contemplates his death on the cross.

We are grateful for the prayers of Jesus and for the times in the gospels when Jesus prayed.

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus threw himself on the ground and prayed, *“Remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.”*

And so we pray, as Jesus taught us, *“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”*

PWS&D Story **From Leprosy Recovery to Empowering Others**

Gulam Hasmad, a 29-year-old man from Banke district in Nepal, was diagnosed with leprosy after experiencing symptoms such as blisters and swelling. Due to a delay in diagnosis, he developed complications, including a hand deformity and eye issues.

Gulam was able to undergo corrective surgeries at Green Pastures Hospital, supported by PWS&D. Gulam and his family were grateful that the procedures meant he regained the use of his hand and eye.

Afterward, Gulam started a self-help group for people affected by leprosy, including those recently diagnosed. He now actively raises awareness about leprosy and what can be done about it. Additionally, Gulam helped his mother and brother seek medical help, leading to their own leprosy diagnoses. Today, Gulam continues to be a positive impact in his community.

Thank you for responding to Christ's call to provide healthy futures for all. PWS&D is working to provide access to medical care and treatment for those who need it most.

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

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

Most Holy God, we come week by week to seek from you in this sanctuary some blessing or other. We come hoping that you will touch us, that you will fill us, but often we go away feeling the same as when we arrived. We feel Lord at these times that you have nothing to give us and we are tempted to give up on prayer and worship, we are tempted to abandon you.

We confess, O Lord that we are unwilling to consider that perhaps we do not receive – not because we do not ask, but because we are already full. Most generous God, help us empty ourselves so that we might receive your grace. Be merciful unto us and bring to life within us the message that you have written upon our hearts. We pray together as Jesus taught...***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***

According to God's steadfast love and abundant mercy our transgressions are blotted out. God creates a clean heart in us and puts in us a new and right spirit. Thanks be to God!

□ ***Open our eyes, Lord***

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Prayer for Understanding

O Lord, grant that through these readings we might learn the wisdom your Holy Word reveals. We turn to you now with open and uncluttered hearts, praying in Jesus name. Amen

Scripture **Jeremiah 31:31-34** **[OT 139]**

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD.

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Psalm 51: 1-12 [responsive / displayed]

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.

Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.

You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your holy spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

John 12:20-33 [NT 106]

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

Jesus answered them, "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.*"

Then a voice came from heaven, *“I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”*

The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, *“An angel has spoken to him.”*

Jesus answered, *“This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”*

He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

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

Message

When I read the text from Jeremiah – especially in light of the Psalm and Gospel from today – I hear *pathos* – suffering and grief – genuine sorrow. God is moved with deep feeling over the broken relationship with Israel and Judah. Like a spouse who has been jilted, God’s heart hurts – yet God is determined to try again – and again – and again. God seems always to be about the new day – the new opportunity for faithfulness. Thank God!

Sometimes it is overwhelming to come to a text hoping that I might have something new or wise or intelligent or hopeful to offer. What is there to say about love or hope or faith that has not already been said? How do you create a new clever spin on God so that maybe this time people will leap to their feet, energized for the cause of justice and righteousness in gratitude for a loving Creator who has made us in the image of the divine and has given us all the abundance which we so often take for granted? Where are the words? What is there to say?

So I thank God that there are always new opportunities for faithfulness – new promises to be realized – that God tries again and again to bring us into relationship – that God offers something new each day. I thank God for the messages of love and hope and faith we proclaim as the church: *that nothing will be able to separate you from the love of God – that God so loved the world – that there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, this or that, but all of us are one in Christ Jesus.*

When we remember that faith, hope and love really do abide – when we find the vocabulary and the courage to speak about such things – our proclamation has the power to change us and to change the world.

Today there is good news to be proclaimed: a new covenant – assurance of pardon – transformation of our lives and our life together – a future filled with hope! All of this because God is at work as God always has been, in the midst of the people. There are many stories in the Hebrew Bible about covenant: from Noah and the rainbow through Abraham and Sarah and their many descendants to Moses and the people at the foot of Mount Sinai. In this week’s beautiful reading from Jeremiah, the prophet speaks of a covenant written deep inside, on the very hearts of the people.

The images used in this chapter are predominantly familial rather than political or military. Female images – especially associated with birth and new life – predominate. God is described as a loving, nurturing parent – comforting those who sorrow and tending the needs of this bruised community. God doesn't do these things merely out of some kind of stubborn faithfulness but out of deep, wounded love and profound grief that have moved God beyond anger to tender caring and forgiveness.

Rescue and release – restoration and return – Jeremiah speaks of God's promises to the people of Israel while they are still in captivity, still in exile, steeped in loss and grief that have broken their hearts and their spirits, too. It is roughly 600 years before the birth of Jesus. The Babylonians have conquered the kingdom of Judah and by force removed from them the two clearest symbols of their God: the temple in Jerusalem, destroyed, and their king, Zedekiah, taken away in chains. This doesn't seem like the appropriate time to be speaking of the nearness of God yet into this experience Jeremiah brings the people a new message from God – a word of comfort and hope.

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

The new covenant is to be accompanied by a repopulation of the land and a rebuilding of Jerusalem. The context is earthly, not heavenly. This covenant is given to Israel, not to some new people that God will create. God will make a new covenant with all Israel – to a dispirited people in exile. Israel will now be constituted as the people of God in a new way. God will give them a new heart so that they will know the Lord – all the people will know the Lord – will enjoy an intimate relationship with God. And the law – a key point of continuity between old and new – will be written upon their heart.

God makes sweeping promises of restoration and return and relationship. Like God's promises to Noah, to Abraham and Sarah, and to Moses and the people at Sinai – God promises to be a presence with the people – abiding with them: *I will be your God, and you will be my people.*

They shall all know God and God will forgive their iniquity – this is the center of the new covenant. Israel's past becomes truly past – they never again need to wonder whether God will remember their sin. Everyone – from whatever class or status: from priest to peasant, from king to commoner, from child to adult – everyone will *know the Lord*.

But what does that mean – *to know God* – what does it mean to “know” anything? How are our deepest longings satisfied and our greatest yearnings fulfilled? Is it about our head or our heart? In scripture knowledge of something – especially knowledge of God – is more than education – more than law – more than facts and figures, dates and data – it is full awareness of something – it is about relationship and intimacy – about our core – our heart.

Because the pace of our world today pushes us to be preoccupied and distracted much of the time, it can be difficult to truly “know” things anymore – difficult to be fully attentive to those deep yearnings that poke and prod our spirit. Yet, every once in a while something may call us up short: a piece of music – a photo – a poem – a moment in the woods or surveying

crashing waves – and it stabs at our hearts and reminds us of such profound beauty that suddenly the mundane nature of our work-a-day world seems tawdry by comparison. It reminds us that beyond this particular moment, we pine for something beyond ourselves – something elusive, ethereal and eternal – we hope for the divine “more”.

In the movie *The Shawshank Redemption*, a lifelong convict nicknamed Red, keeps telling his fellow prisoner, Andy, to stop talking about hope since in prison, hope is a dangerous thing. It's better to live without hope than to have a hope that will torment you by virtue of it's not being fulfilled.

But then at one point in the story Andy barricades himself in the warden's office, flips on the Shawshank prison P.A. system, and plays a portion of a Mozart opera, bringing the entire prison to a standstill as each prisoner listens to the aria. Even Red, the one who resisted all talk of hopes or dreams, could not resist this spot of beauty. And so Red muses, *“I have no idea to this day what those two Italian ladies were singin' about. I like to think they were singin' about something so beautiful it can't be expressed in words, and it makes your heart ache because of it. I tell you, those voices soared, higher and farther than anybody in a gray place dares to dream. It was like some beautiful bird flapped into our drab little cage and made those walls dissolve away. For the briefest of moments, every last man at Shawshank was free.”*

Whether we know it or not at any given moment, what we all most want to know about life is that we are loved, that there is meaning. The things we most dearly want to “know” have a whole lot to do with the things we most intently feel and long for. Maybe that's why the knowledge of God that Jeremiah talks about goes beyond just what we think to what we feel – to understand not in the cerebral pathways of our brains but in the deepest fibers of our very being. That is, “knowing” as Jeremiah understands it.

The great preacher Fred Craddock is said to have had a habit of intentionally memorizing scripture or verses of favourite hymns or inspirational lines of great literature or poetry, so that when in the middle of a sleepless night or while sitting in the hospital waiting room or when pulling up the driveway of a friend who had suddenly passed away, he could pull out those reminders and repeat them to himself or share them with others: written in his memory – written on his heart.

God's desire is to be that close – that natural – that easy – as near to us as our next thought – as necessary as our next breath. God wants to be written within us: to know and be known.

In the life of Jesus, we discover the lengths to which God will go to write this promise – this covenant – this love, on our hearts. It is a resurrected love that cannot be swallowed up by any temporary setback or disappointment – not even death itself – an eternal love that knows no end. We are not alone. We have a God who comes to us in human form – who intervenes in the course of human history – who reveals to us a presence that refuses to let us go. That is what God is writing within you – on your heart. That is, “knowing”. **Amen**

□ *Spirit of God, descend upon my heart*

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Offering and Prayer

Jesus reminds us that a seed surrenders its life to the ground in order to bear fruit. What we surrender to God in our offering will also bear fruit in the world, for the sake of Christ, our Lord. May we sow seeds of God's love as we offer our gifts to God.

□ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

God of growth and new life, with our gifts we offer our thanks and praise for the promise of resurrection in Christ Jesus. With these gifts, accomplish more than we can ask or imagine, as they bear fruit in the world you love, in Jesus' name. Amen

□ *Now the green blade rises* 256

† Pastoral Prayers

Steadfast God, amid many changes and challenges around us, we are grateful that you are with us. You understand our fears; you support and guide us; and you give us courage to face whatever lies ahead. Thank you for the gift of faith so that we trust you to keep working – in ways seen and unseen – for goodness to prevail.

Loving God, in this time when there is much to be anxious about, we pray for the world you love. Send your healing Spirit to bring peace with justice to the troubled places... Bring care and comfort to those who have been hurt in conflict, wisdom to those who seek to end hostilities, and courage to those who advocate for the most vulnerable.

Send your healing Spirit to mend relationships between religious and cultural groups who find themselves in tension or turmoil. We pray for mutual respect to grow between people who look at each other with suspicion, and among people who have painful histories with each other. Open our hearts and minds to those whose situations and concerns we don't understand and bring your gift of reconciliation to us all.

Send your healing Spirit to people we know and to the earth you love.

We remember before you friends in grief...

~those suffering illness and all waiting for treatment...

~those facing difficulty at work or finding work...

~disagreements in our community...

~concerns about the environment we depend on...

We pray for the continuing ministry of the church in our neighbourhoods and around the world. As we move toward our celebration of Christ's resurrection, send your healing Spirit to raise our hearts and our hopes with the promise of new life in Christ. Restore to us the joy of your salvation and sustain in us all a willing spirit. Amen

Annual Meeting see report...

Grace and Blessing

O God, you who gathers us together as a church. Help us today to be your church at its finest. May our friendship be fond, may our conversation be creative, may the decisions we have made bear witness to your presence in our midst and to your promise for our future. Bless the food that we go now to share and bless those who prepared it for us. May we all give thanks for the abundance we have been given to serve in the world. We trust that your Spirit will guide us always toward being a church of committed and compassionate disciples in service to the One in whose name we pray.

We go now, to serve Christ and follow him. May we let our old life to fall like a grain of wheat into the earth so that we may bear much fruit as we allow God to reshape our hearts. And may the tears of Jesus wash over our sorrows, the Spirit of God dwell in our hearts, and God's promise of new life lead us through each day ahead. Amen

□ *Bless the Lord (repeat)*