

11 August 2024 – Proclaiming the Year of Jubilee

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind... [Isaiah 61:1-2 & Luke 4:18-19]

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement **Fiona**

As we gather for worship in Jesus' name, we remember that we do so on the traditional and unceded territory of the ləkʷəŋən and the WSÁNEĆ – Esquimalt and Songhees nations. We acknowledge their stewardship of this land through the ages. As we pray, reflect, and celebrate in this place, we do so as guests lamenting past and current injustice. We ask God to lead us along paths of reconciliation – inspiring new relationships of respect and solidarity.

➤ ***Come, now is the time to worship***

Call to Worship (Psalm 146 – selected verses with a sung response)

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

➤ ***Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Let the earth hear God's voice!*** (350)

Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever

➤ ***Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Let the people rejoice!*** (350)

The LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous.

➤ ***Oh come to the Father through Jesus the Son,
and give God the glory, who great things has done.*** (350)

➤ ***Blest are they*** **624**

Gathering Prayer / Words of Hope

Living, giving God, you are the source of all good things. Your love reaches wider than the expanding universe, and your kindness embraces the tiny sparrow. In Christ, you offer us the Bread of Life to sustain us day by day. Through the Holy Spirit, you are present in every situation, our daily tasks and demanding challenges. And so we gather to offer our love and loyalty – the very best of ourselves – heart, body, mind, and soul.

Living, forgiving God, you promise us new life, yet we often cling to old disappointments and tired habits. Forgive us and free us to live according to your mercy.

Jesus calls us to proclaim recovery of sight to the blind, but we have not remembered people with disabilities. About 25% of Canadians over 15 years of age have at least one disability and the disability rate increases with age. People with a disability are twice as likely to live in poverty than those without disabilities. Forgive our lack of care. Help us pay attention and advocate for change. Help us create accessible and safe spaces free from unintended barriers and stigma

Eternal God, we confess that we have tried to hide from you because we have done wrong. We have lived for ourselves and apart from you. We have turned from our neighbours and refused to bear the burdens of others. We have ignored the pain of the world – passed by the hungry, the poor, and the oppressed. In your great mercy, forgive our sins and free us from selfishness, that we may choose your will and follow Jesus...

➤ *Take, O take me as I am – summon out what I shall be – set your seal upon my heart and live in me.*

God is tender hearted and gracious to all, offering forgiveness in Christ Jesus. Trust in God's grace – be kind to one another, forgiving others as you have been forgiven.

Prayer for Understanding (responsive) **Mary**

Liberator Christ, you came into a holy place and read the sacred word about sight for the blind and freedom for prisoners.

Come to this place now. Read these words to us until our own eyes are opened, our faith unlocked, and we can see the world as it is – as it could be.

Until the yearnings of ordinary people are taken seriously; until your kingdom is celebrated everywhere, and your church is good news to all. Amen.

Scripture **Isaiah 35** [OT 663]

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, *“Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God who will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense – who will come and save you.”*

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Luke 14:12-23 [NT 77]

He said also to the one who had invited him, *"When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*

One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, *"Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!"*

Then Jesus said to him, *"Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, Come; for everything is ready now."*

But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets. Another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets. Another said, I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.

So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.

And the slave said, Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.

Then the master said to the slave, Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled.

Listen to what the Spirit is saying to God's people.

Message ***Remembering People with Disabilities***

The people of Israel have been so long in exile in Babylon that many have given up hope – hope of returning to their home – hope that their God has even remembered them and will act in a saving way on their behalf. Without a home – and without a God – many have begun to make their home in exile and to worship the gods of their captors. It is into this situation that the words of Isaiah come as a clarion call: *even after all these years, God indeed has not forgotten God's people.* Not only that, but God is also acting again to bring the exiles home to the long-ago promised land.

The land of Judah, so rugged and inhospitable, nestled above the desert to the south, will become lush and fertile like the best land in Palestine. The persecuted and apprehensive can take heart, for the Lord is about to deal with the enemy. The oppressing nations will no longer ravage the people of Israel. The sick and the distressed will be healed. No longer will this dry and parched land be at the mercy of the rains, but water will bubble from the ground giving life to the land and its people. Isaiah sees a highway driven through the rough terrain from the countries where the people of Israel have been taken into exile. It leads to Zion – the city of the Lord. This is a straight and true way – a safe route for those returning. There will be a new Jerusalem and its gates will be opened wide for the returning exiles. They will return and be overtaken by gladness and joy. Sorrow and sighing will flee away. Isaiah sees a vision of hope.

This saving action of God will surpass every human expectation: *Blind eyes will be opened; deaf ears unstopped, lame men and women will leap like deer, the voiceless break into song.* The saving acts of God are life-changing – they include the transformation of creation itself: *Springs of water will burst out in the wilderness, streams flow in the desert. Hot sands will become a cool oasis, thirsty ground a splashing fountain.*

Although rooted in history, these passages ring true beyond their chronological underpinnings. Both the place and the people seem to be in ruin. Yet like the wilderness, the poor and weak will feel the saving touch of God. Those beaten down will be strengthened with a new boldness. The ailing will be healed. The blind will see.

God's salvation is for the whole person. The gospel is truly good news for our unfortunate situations – a blessing in the midst of myriad brokenness. We too often limit salvation only to the forgiveness of sins. God comes to address whatever might keep us short of the potentials of our created humanity – mental, physical and spiritual. Listen to this good news proclaimed for all who come to hear a saving message from the Lord. Courage! Take heart! God is here – right here – on the way to put things right – God will come to save you!

The announcement of God's restoration and saving presence is filled with wonderful reversals – the same reversals that occur in the banquet that Jesus describes to his listeners in the Gospel of Luke: insiders are out, and outsiders are in. The host invites the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind – the most vulnerable of society – those whom today we would call disabled. These are the broken – those who are easily marginalized and forgotten. Today we seek to remember...

Let's start by thinking about what it means to be disabled – it is often not the condition, but the stigma society associates with it. The truth of our faith is we are valuable because of who we are and whose we are – God's beloved, not because of how we look or what we accomplish. And that applies to all of us, the disabled and the temporarily able-bodied alike. People here in this congregation have various abilities and disabilities. How welcoming is this community of faith to those who struggle to hear or see or walk? How hospitable is Knox as a physical plant? How accommodating are we to various needs? How accepting are we of difference? Are we committed to being an open, accessible, and barrier-free church, where there is full participation of people with disabilities?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WGA33xVGyvo>

We know that God creates us full of potential but with different abilities. As such, Christians have a special responsibility to be caring, sensitive individuals, attentive to God and to their fellow human beings. Each person must seek integrity and wholeness in their own life and nourish these qualities in others. The gift of life is precious: those who enjoy its advantages fully have a responsibility to share that fullness with the disadvantaged.

I have spent some time in the company of children and adults who struggle with social conventions and behavioural norms so the following story rings true for me:

While on vacation, a minister went to a nearby congregation for Sunday worship. It proved to be an unsettling experience since throughout the service there was a coolness about the people all around. The minister experienced communion as disconnected and false, and at the fellowship time after worship she felt a numbing uneasiness.

There was tension in the hall. People were chatting loudly but there was no feel of community. The few wealthy people in the church clung together. A couple of newcomers found backs turned toward them. The young people beat a hasty exit. A group that the minister approached traded gossip and occasionally gestured at someone in the room. A few of the elderly folks sat separately and were not spoken to.

The visiting minister thought she was the only one who noticed the disconnectedness, but she was wrong. A mentally challenged young man named Rupert not only noticed,

but being a wise and brave disciple – a person given to extremes – he acted. He got more and more agitated and upset until tears formed in his eyes. Then he grabbed a tray full of fruit punch in small cups, plopped a large handful of cookies on the side and trudged across the room. He pressed the tray against the belly of one of the gossipers, looked him straight in the eye, and said in a loud voice, “Christ for you!”

Needless to say, this got people’s attention. For the next ten minutes the room was still and quiet as self-appointed deacon Rupert made his rounds. It was a most holy communion, with Christ potently present. The only voice heard in the room was that of an increasingly happier young man – perhaps speaking with the voice of God. Certainly proclaiming good news.

We read in the parable from Luke’s gospel that the slave had to *compel people to come in*. What I hear in these words is that we cannot simply ask once and let it go at that. We cannot assume that people will get the message with a quiet nudge or a note in the mailslot. We can’t depend on ordinary niceities to break down barriers and help us to remember all whom God calls us to remember. We are to engage in hyper-hospitality – to use what our son Ian once called, “beastly vigor” and “the firey passion of the Christ”. It sounds extreme but think about how extreme the vision Isaiah described sounded to those exiles – think about the extreme actions of Jesus – think about the extreme call to proclamation that resounds in the words: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind...*

We could stand to be a little more extreme. Please join with me in prayer...

Compassionate God, you have created all persons and blessed us with a range of gifts, with different ways of seeing the world. Grant us deep pleasure at the variety which enriches humankind and fill us with joy at the contacts which bring us understanding of one another.

*We give thanks for the opportunities found in this place – to be creative, to be productive, to find support and companionship and friendship. Open our eyes to the good work done here, the lives fulfilled, the relationships formed, the hopes made whole. In a spirit of gratitude, we pray. **Amen***

➤ *In loving partnership*

759 (alt tune: VU 603)

Offering and Prayer

Scripture speaks of God's goodness and generosity repeatedly. So we keep offering our gifts to God in gratitude as often as we can. May our contributions help to feed the world with God's goodness for the sake of Jesus, the Bread of Life.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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Holy One we bring our gifts to you, knowing you have given yourself for us. Bless these gifts. Make them a source of your abundant love in the lives we touch through mission and ministry in your name. Amen

Pastoral Prayers / The Lord's Prayer

Let us pray for all God's people: for people who are blind or cannot see well and for people who can see but do not see those in need; Lord, in your mercy help us to see you and each other.

For people who are slow and cannot move well and for people who are fast but will not slow their pace; Lord, in your mercy teach us to move in step with you.

For people who are deaf or cannot hear well and for people who can hear but block out cries of pain; Lord, in your mercy allow us to hear you and each other.

For people who learn slowly or cannot think clearly and for people who learn quickly but who close their minds; Lord, in your mercy show us how to search and learn from you.

For people who are sad and cannot cheer up and for people who are happy and avoid all pain; Lord, in your mercy make us know you and each other.

For people who are sick and cannot get better and for people who are well but do not thank you for health; Lord, in your mercy encourage us to serve you while we can.

For people who are kind and serve the needy and for people who are awkward in the face of need; Lord, in your mercy help us to know that we need each other.

For people who feel trapped by their impairments and for people who feel strong and add to that despair; Lord, in your mercy equip us to set each other free.

For people who feel worthless and unlovely and for people who feel proud and do not recognize your love; Lord, in your mercy open our hearts to know your love together.

For all the people in your whole creation, that we may cherish each other and learn to live in peace; Lord, in your mercy teach us love and give us peace. We pray together with

confidence in Jesus' name... ***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***

➤ ***Christ's is the world***

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Blessing

Go in gratitude, relying on the presence of Christ as bread for your journey. Go in peace, with Christ as your friend and companion.

May the God who feeds the hungry and frees the prisoners – who gives sight to the blind and release to the captives, fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that you may abound in hope as God the Spirit brings you growth – God the Son tends you with wisdom – and God the Source assures you that you will never walk alone. Amen

➤ ***May the God of hope go with us every day***

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