

13 October 2024 – *Thanksgiving*

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement April Watt (worship elder)

Welcome to this place. We acknowledge with gratitude the ~~lək'wəŋən~~ and the WSÁNEĆ – Esquimalt and Songhees nations – on whose traditional territory we gather for worship. For many thousands of years, they have sought to walk gently on this land. We seek a new relationship with the Original Peoples of this land – one based in honour and respect.

□ *Come, now is the time to worship*

Call to Worship

God blesses us with gifts of love,

In relationships that bring joy and gratitude.

God blesses us with talents and opportunities to serve,

All we need for faithful living.

God protects us in times of danger,

And guards us from the time of trial.

So we gather to offer thanksgiving to the Lord our God.

Praise be to God for all good things, now and always!

□ *Song 466 Praise the lord with the sound of trumpet*

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

... 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

□ *Song 441 Can a little child like me?*

Prayer for Understanding Marianne Mortimer (lay reader)

God of wisdom, send us your Spirit to open our minds to your Word. Move our hearts to deeper love, and our wills to greater service, through Jesus Christ, your Word made flesh. Amen.

Scripture: **Psalm 126 (displayed)**

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,^[a]

we were like those who dream.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter,

and our tongue with shouts of joy;

then it was said among the nations,

'The LORD has done great things for them.'

The LORD has done great things for us,

and we rejoiced.

Restore our fortunes, O LORD,

like the watercourses in the Negeb.

May those who sow in tears

reap with shouts of joy.

Those who go out weeping,

bearing the seed for sowing,

shall come home with shouts of joy,

carrying their sheaves.

Scripture: **Matthew 6:25-33 (NT Page 6)**

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink,^[a] or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life?^[b] ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' ³² For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God^[c] and his^[d] righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

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

Message: *Your Heavenly Father Knows*

I read that, according to Statistics Canada, we have one of the lowest birth rates in the world. In fact, this trend is more than a decade old, not just a result of the pandemic, putting us in company with China, Japan, Russia, and, surprisingly to me, South Korea.

I'm not surprised when people living where they have little hope for the future lose faith in a future for their children.

But Canada? When did we lose hope?

The study doesn't tell us that, but one thing I did read is that we have a new anxiety in Canada—eco-anxiety.

This doesn't surprise me. When we become convinced that the entire planet's future is blighted, who wouldn't worry? We apparently are a worried lot.

It reminds me of a song by the Kingston Trio, "It takes a worried man to sing a worried song."

Then we read Jesus' words in Matthew 6, "Be anxious for nothing."

Easy to say, not so easy to do. But Jesus doesn't cut us any slack on this.

He says, don't worry about what you will eat or what you will wear. Your heavenly father knows what you need. Then, he proceeds to give us examples from the world of nature. The birds are looked after, and we are more valuable to God than birds. And he says no human-crafted splendor can touch the beauty of a wild Lilly.

His meaning is crystal clear. Stop being anxious.

I have to tell you that I don't think I ever said that to a client in all my years as a counselor. The reason is obvious. It wouldn't be helpful coming from me.

My favorite commentator on Matthew, Frederick Bruner, writes,

"As a missionary in the Philippines, I was convinced this could never be preached to the poor." It would be cruel.

How can you tell the poor of any nation, or those gathered for a meal at Our Place, "Don't worry about food or clothing or where you are going to sleep. God will look after it." That would be outrageous. And I don't think Jesus would be pleased.

Because what we should be saying, if we are going to say anything at all, is "How can I help?" Better yet, do more and speak less.

When Jesus saw the hungry crowds, he told the disciples to feed them.

That applies to us, but we know that. This is not the issue here.
The command to trust God is about self, not others.

The issue is chronic anxiety in life. Living in fear and worry.
I was reading an interesting article about the rise of the Christian faith in Britain and elsewhere in Europe. The author pointed out how the new atheists like Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris, among others, promised a utopia based on science and reason. Cue John Lennon's "Imagine".

As that dream lies in the dust of a nastier, regressive world, it has instead delivered a crisis of mental health and endless culture wars.

Hear Jesus again. (my paraphrase) "Listen, people, you are so anxious and tied up in knots about so many things...food, clothing, fashion. Your heavenly father knows you and what you need. Instead, seek the kingdom of God and let God take care of all the rest."

You see, it's all about that statement. Your heavenly father knows what you need.
You can find rest for your soul because you know God's character.
How do you know that? By looking at how Jesus is with people.
Can you trust Jesus to care for you and be able to do what you cannot?

And precisely what kingdom of God do we seek first?
If you attend regularly, you've heard it preached often enough.
It is encapsulated in the words of the prophet Micah.

He has told you, mortal one, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?

That's enough of a life plan for anyone.
Oh yes, and don't forget the joy and thanksgiving part. Give thanks always and have joy in that God loves us and isn't about to abandon us to our darkest fears.

I had thought about telling you an inspiring story of how our daughter-in-law prayed a simple prayer for her youngest son and how God answered her prayer in a marvelous, extravagant and hilarious way.
But that's someone else's testimony.
I could tell you some of mine, but you have your own.

Remember the times you have prayed and how in sometimes totally unpredictable ways God has answered.

It's all there for you. Remember and grasp the hand that is stretched out to you.

What about world hunger, expanding military conflicts, and climate change?

How about "Do what you can."

Jesus says God feeds and clothes the birds.

I think its pretty obvious Jesus expects us to fulfill our responsibility for feeding ourselves and helping others. All the while we give thanks for God's provision.

But remember in whose hands we rest.

A psalm I especially love is Psalm 131.

Here it is from the Contemporary Jewish Bible by David Stern.

Adonai, my heart isn't proud;
I don't set my sight too high,
I don't take part in great affairs
or in wonders far beyond me.
²No, I keep myself calm and quiet,
like a little child on its mother's lap —
I keep myself like a little child.
Isra'el, put your hope in *Adonai*
from now on and forever!

Amen

□ *Song 625 Seek ye first*

Offering and Prayer

□ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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Generous God, we offer you our thanks for all the goodness we enjoy in Christ and in creation. Bless the gifts we bring, and use them to relieve the need and anxiety many feel these days. May anxious lives see signs of your love and joy in what we can offer them in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and friend. Amen.

Pastoral Prayers

By your Spirit, O God,

May our friends see in us signs of a grateful heart.

□ Song 457 Now thank we all our God

Blessing

May the Lord bless you and hold you close,

May the Lord fill your heart with peace and an abundance of gratitude.

May you rest in the assurance that God loves you completely, uniquely, and beyond measure, anxious for nothing.

May you step into the fullness of God's love for you,

May you work for justice, cling to kindness, and walk humbly with Christ in your midst, anxious for nothing.

May you live for one another and for God,

With open hands, minds, and hearts,

Not just during the short days of this thanksgiving season,

But for each and every day to come, anxious for nothing.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

□ May the God of hope go with us every day

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