

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

As we come to worship in Jesus' name we acknowledge with gratitude and respect the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – on whose traditional and unceded territory we gather.

Announcement: MOTION by A. Krauss, seconded by A. Watt, that the Session of Knox Church recommends to the congregation that the merger with St. Andrews not be further pursued. Carried.

➤ *People in darkness*

124

Call to Worship / Advent Candles (PWS&D Resource)

In a world too often divided, we gather to embrace the gift of peace.

We come with hearts open to reconciliation and understanding.

We light the second candle of Advent, a symbol of God's peace in a troubled world.

May the light of this candle guide us as we seek to fulfill our calling as peacemakers.

Holy One, strengthen us by your Spirit to commit ourselves to standing against injustice in our communities and the world. Affirm within us a dedication to foster your peace. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Songs of Advent¹ Peace

(singing) *It is well, (it is well) With my soul (with my soul) It is well, it is well with my soul.*

These words have rung through the hearts of believers for more than one hundred fifty years. They are a deep cry from the heart to God. It is a song about peace.

Peace in a world with unexplainable tragedy. Peace in a world where darkness often looks like it will win. Peace in the hearts of women and men who experience unspeakable challenges. Peace because the God who made and loves us offers a peace that surpasses all understanding.

This song was written by a man named Horatio Spafford in 1873. The lyrics came to him when he was at sea.

Just days before, Horatio was in Chicago, preparing to travel to Europe to help the evangelist D.L. Moody with his revival services. His wife and four daughters traveled ahead of him, sailing across the Atlantic.

He stayed behind for a few days to deal with a zoning issue with their house. Like so many in the city, Horatio and his family lost their home in the great fire of Chicago a few years before. They lost everything and were rebuilding their lives.

In the midst of this busy week, planning to join his sweet family and dealing with the hassles of bureaucracy, he received a telegram that forever changed his life. Six words from his wife, Anna: **(as though reading the telegram)** *"Saved alone. What shall I do?"*

The tragedy of losing his home to a fire was suddenly a small thing when Horatio learned that his four precious daughters had drowned – the boat they were on, shipwrecked. Only his wife survived.

As he sailed to England to meet his wife and mourn with her, the ship's captain stopped the boat at the spot where the tragedy occurred so that Horatio could mourn and remember his daughters. And that's when the words to this song dropped into his soul. Words became flesh – peace came into life's storm – Jesus came bringing comfort and hope.

As we prepare for the joy of Christmas, so many of us are also reminded of deep pain and grief. Friends and family who are no longer here. Unresolved hurts or sorrows that billow or roll against us. Today we remember that Jesus came to bring peace into our world and into our lives. Perhaps Jesus can teach our troubled hearts to say, no matter what we face, that *"It is well, it is well with my soul."*

➤ *It is well with my soul*

Gathering Prayer / Words of Hope (PCC Resources)

God of peace and promise, you are the giver of life, living in us through the power of your Holy Spirit. You are the voice that calls us from our wandering, setting us on a new path. You are the living water that purifies, baptising us for service in the world that so badly needs your love. You are the Way that we are called to walk, and you are the one who supplies all things for the journey. Refresh us in this time of worship and reignite our desire to serve you every day.

Merciful God, in your gracious presence we confess our sins and the sins of this world...

Merciful God, baptism promises the washing away of our sin – the start of our new life in Christ. But we confess that we are still in love with our old ways. We sin against you and one another, in what we do and in what we fail to do. We excuse ourselves – taking comfort in what is familiar and pleasing to us rather than what serves you. Forgive us when we mistake such comfort for the peace you offer in Christ Jesus and prepare our hearts to embrace new ways of following him. Amen

Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, proclaimed this hope: *“By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, giving light to those in darkness, guiding our feet in the way of peace.”* Receive God’s tender mercy today and trust that God’s peace will prevail.

➤ *While we are waiting, come* (seated) 92 (PCUSA)

Prayer for Understanding

O Lord, we pray, speak in this place, in the calming of our minds and the longing of our hearts – by these words of scripture and in each heart. Speak, O Lord, for your servants are listening. Amen

Scripture: **Malachi 3:1-4** [OT 889]

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight – indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

Luke 1:68-79 [NT 58]

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.

By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Philippians 1: 3-11 [NT 196]

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Luke 3:1-6 [NT 60]

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.

He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, *"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."*

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

Message

➤ *There's a voice in the wilderness crying*

128

Offering and Prayer

This Sunday in Advent celebrates God's gift of peace. When we look around the world, we see so many places where peace is missing – in neighborhoods and nations. But

because we know the gift of God's peace, we can trust that our gifts will help restore true peace to souls and situations by the power of the Spirit.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

God of promise, we offer our gifts in Jesus' name, for we know peace through his forgiveness and faithfulness. Bless our gifts and our lives. Help us share the peace you offer with lives that touch ours throughout the world you love. Amen

Pastoral Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

Come, Christ Jesus, be our guest and enter our lives with your blessing. We are lonely for you and the peace you bring. Draw near to us in friendship and faithfulness, so that in this season of celebration, we may know how near you are.

Come, Christ Jesus, be our guide and show us the way to wisdom and gratitude in the face all that is distorted or untrue. We thank you for the kindness we know in friends and good neighbours, in warm houses and warm smiles. We pray for those who have lost their way in life and feel like there is no place to turn. Equip us to reach out to those who need your embrace and ours.

Come, Christ Jesus, be our hope. Touch us with your healing and grace in every way we need these gifts. We remember before you those we know and those known to you alone who are living with loss or illness this season – those who face depression or discouragement – all who are worried... Bring your comfort into their lives and ours.

Come, Christ Jesus, rule in our lives and claim your rightful place in our hearts. Your world struggles for the justice and mercy you bring. We remember before you places marked by violence and upheaval, and the devastating impacts of the climate crisis... Draw near to all leaders and citizens working for peace and justice. Encourage honourable action and co-operation in confronting global challenges and local needs. Give hope to people under oppression and those who live with fear or hunger day by day. Hasten the day when the world's people will live as neighbours, reconciled in your truth and freedom.

In hope for your world, we pray together with confidence ...**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**

The Texts Behind the Tunes²: In the ancient context: **Isaiah 7 and 11**

❖ **Isaiah 7:13-14** [OT 636]

Then Isaiah said: *'Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.*

❖ **Isaiah 11:1-9** [OT 640]

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

➤ *Come, thou long expected Jesus*

110

Blessing

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we go into the world to fulfil our calling as the people of God – the body of Christ. Go in peace. Love and care for one another. May God richly bless you as we wait with anticipation for the day of the Lord's coming. May the love of Christ make the rough places smooth and the light of the Holy Spirit guide you in your daily walk now and always.

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² An Advent Program created by the Rev. Dr. Patricia Dutcher-Walls, Moderator of the 2024 General Assembly/Professor of Hebrew Bible, Emerita, Vancouver School of Theology © 2024.