

Welcome/Announcements/Land Acknowledgement **Lorraine Whiting (worship elder)**
Welcome to this place. We acknowledge with gratitude the ləkʷəŋən 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.

□ There is room for all

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Call to Worship

We gather together as pilgrims on a journey of faith.

We come seeking an awareness of God's presence as we travel on.

God is very near to each one of us

We are all called into the circle of God's love.

Let us worship the God of love.

□ Angels from the realms of glory

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

Come Spirit of gentleness, come and sweep your wind among us. Stir us, coax us, call us, goad us, open our eyes and ears. Draw us into your loving presence. God of power and mystery, heaven and earth are full of your glory. The galaxies sing your praises and reflect the infinity of your love and mercy. Ever present God, the greatness of your love is beyond our grasp. We thank you for your son, Jesus who came to us as a baby and lived among us.

Too often we have lost sight of who you are, and whose we are. We confess our brokenness and woundedness. Forgive us when we have fallen into traps of anger, or fear. Heal us and redeem us we pray. Renew and remake us, and set us free to worship and serve you in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray, saying... ***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, forever. Amen***

Sing a new song unto the Lord! Sing his praise throughout the world. And do not be afraid, for God says to us: I have redeemed you; you are mine. I have set you as a seal on my heart. I have carved you on the palm of my hand. In Jesus Christ we have seen the love of God, and we know that we are forgiven people. Thanks be to God for such grace.

Prayer for Understanding **Dennis Sutherland**

Lord of life we come to you, seeking the light of your face and the surprises of your grace. By the power of your Holy Spirit, open to us the treasures of your love and your wisdom. Encourage what you have begun in each of us through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Scripture **Psalm 23** [from **The Psalter**]

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. The Lord makes me lie down in green pastures: leads me beside still waters; restores my soul and leads me in right paths for the sake of the Lord's name.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil: for you are with me; your rod and your staff – they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies: you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all my life: and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for the length of my days

Philippians 3:10-14 [NT 198]

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal, but I press on to lay hold of that for which Christ has laid hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider that I have laid hold of it, but one thing I have laid hold of: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal, toward the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

John 10:22-30 [NT 104]

At that time the Festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "*How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.*"

Jesus answered, "*I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me, but you do not believe because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, in regard to what he has given me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one.*"

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

Message **Where the Wild Things Are**

Max is a young boy with a wild streak in him. He is full of mischief and full of life. One evening Max turns into the wildest little boy creature you could imagine, donning a wolf costume and wreaking havoc in the house. His mother can't take it anymore and sends him off to bed without his supper. But a strange thing happens when Max is alone in his room.

There alone in his own little space, his imagination is set on fire and a wild forest begins to grow all around him. A wild sea takes form, and he sails off on an adventure to the land of 'The Wild Things.' Max describes himself, after all, as an explorer. Perhaps you know the movie or the book 'Where the Wild Things Are' by Maurice Sendak.

Max comes face to face with all the darkness and wildness that is in him when he encounters the monsters on that far away island. There are battles and mysteries, friendships and rage, and boundless play. And when he comes to the place where the wild things are they roar their terrible roars and gnash their terrible teeth and roll their terrible eyes and show their terrible claws till Max says "BE STILL!" and he tames them with the magic trick of staring into all their yellow eyes without blinking once and they were frightened and called him the most wild thing of all. They even made him king of all wild things.

As king he declares a wild and wonderful kind of party. "And now," cries Max, "**let the wild rumpus start!**"

Eventually one day, Max realizes he is lonely and homesick. He wants to be where someone loves him best of all, so Max heads back home, waving goodbye to all the wild things. ***He sails back to the place where he is loved, his home! And there in his room, he finds his supper still hot and waiting for him.***

The monsters in the book were indeed a wild mixture of frightening and whimsical. When our children were young and I was reading children's stories on a regular basis, I think we passed over this book too quickly without much thought. It never occurred to me then how positive it would be to venture into wild territory and make friends with the monsters of one's life – whatever they might be, whether we are nine or ninety.

Where the Wild Things Are is just a children's story, but there is a gem of truth embedded in Sendak's tale. Imagine dancing along in a 'wild rumpus' through the dark and frightening places of our lives.

Referring to the wild things, one movie reviewer observed; 'there is a wild thing in all of us.' I have to agree.

Perhaps for you, that kind of wild and untamed place is in a hospital room, or a classroom. Maybe it's in a line up to claim EI, or an empty spot at the table that feels as barren as any desert, or as intimidating as any monster. Perhaps it's a relationship filled with love and a serving of anger. Most of us will do anything to avoid having to walk a path like that or enter that room or pass through that unknown wilderness. But spending time in the wilderness is what we are all about sometimes. Perhaps the beginning of a new year is a good time to consider this. It can be the beginning of a new journey.

This journey of faith is not entirely safe. No true Pilgrimage ever has been. Pilgrimages are usually more wild than tame, with twists and turns and unexpected encounters. Ever since Abram and Sarai left home in search of the place God was calling them to, there have been pilgrimages, winding ways of discovery and faith. The psalms are filled with psalms of ascents: that were sung by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem.

The passage we heard from John this morning comes from a chapter that speaks about Jesus as the Good Shepherd. A debate has developed over who Jesus is. Some think he's insane, or perhaps even a demon, yet that wouldn't make sense having made a blind person see.

Pilgrims have made the long trek to the temple in Jerusalem to celebrate Hannukah-also known as the festival of Dedication in the passage. The events take place in a small alcove in the temple, when Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me."

The trek is never an easy one.

We are about to enter a new year, but new beginnings can happen at all kinds of times in our lives. We never know what is farther along on the journeys or pilgrimages that we are on.

Perhaps it is engaging in a bible study, or reading a certain book, but any pilgrimage of faith produces a rich opportunity to deepen our walk with our Lord. It is like spring cleaning for our souls. I think it's a good thing to remember that not only adults are on a pilgrimage of faith. Children can walk their own journeys of faith too, trying to hear the voice of Jesus. They may be family members, or friends. But no matter your age, we are all trying to find meaning and direction.

That is a large part of what the gospel passage is getting at. Jesus says to his friends who are having trouble 'getting it': **"My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me."**

The sheep of Jesus' day in particular and the sheep of today in part, were or are in danger of being snatched away by thieves, by wild animals or 'beasts.' It's not always safe 'out there.'

We too have external threats in our lives like illness, or lack of money, or complicated relationships that continue to tangle themselves up. I'm sure you can think of the threats, or the monsters in your lives. But the threats we experience are not from God. God knows us and loves us and leads us as a Good Shepherd on the path we are on. We may encounter other voices that frighten us or confuse us, but Jesus' voice is the one true voice that calls out to us and shows us the way.

Pilgrimages can be difficult. Going through the desert whether it's comprised of brush, sand, snow or a difficult place in your life, you can be left dragging, wondering, searching for relief and wholeness and rest. But sometimes though, a pilgrimage – that is – a journey with and toward Christ -- can be an enticing and revealing exploration of clarity, comfort and challenge.

When we immerse ourselves in the questions of our faith, through study, prayer, reflection and have the courage to look at ourselves unabashedly, we stand a pretty good chance of hearing that voice – that one true voice of Jesus, who promises to guard and guide us despite the Wild Things and the Wild Places that find us .

Jesus longs to walk alongside us, and to run ahead to lead us through the rocky and rough places where the wild things are.

It is a journey to the center of our faith. Some try to take a detour around it, settling for a two dimensional and 'nice' faith, never facing the demons that lurk around the corners in our lives. But we are emboldened to step out into that barren and unknown landscape because we know and believe that we do not walk that Holy path alone.

The good news is this: that God in Jesus Christ calls us to drag our demons and wild things along on this holy path of joy and hope, and grace in order for our lives to be transformed, and so that God can complete what has already been begun in us! We are called to look those wild things in the eye.

There are numerous ways and spiritual exercises that have been practiced over the centuries to enable Christ's friends to hear his voice and follow him. Study and prayer are ways to turn up the volume and hear what God is saying to us. But one other way that I have found to be rich and filled with blessing, is to walk the labyrinth. If you aren't familiar with labyrinths, I have placed one on the communion table today. I've shared this before, but it likely isn't new to you anyway.

It's not a maze. Mazes and labyrinths are very different from each other. Mazes drive you a bit crazy. They are filled with dead ends. But Labyrinths lead you to the center and then back out. In Victoria there are quite a few of them that are outdoors and large enough to walk, but there are many kinds. If you google it, or go to the library, you'll find endless writing on this tool.

In Victoria there is one outside of Christ Church Cathedral and one in James Bay across from the United Church. There's one in the grass outside of St. Matthias Anglican

church farther down Richmond Ave. Some have been carved into wood, or stone, or made of grass, or drawn on a parking lot. (Or is moveable like the one brought here from UVic) The one I've brought is one that is called a 'finger labyrinth', meant for sitting with and letting your fingers do the walking. It's a small kind of pilgrimage.

During the Middle Ages, pilgrimage was thought more of, as an act of penance. Walking was often done barefoot. Or one might ride a horse. It could be dangerous, difficult and complicated. There were many wild things to encounter. And many were not in a position to be able to make one as treacherous as that. It was no sightseeing tour, no holiday, there were no tour guides, and no direct flights.

Instead of journeying to Jerusalem, people would often undertake a trip to a shrine or Cathedral. Places like Santiago del Compostela in NW Spain were popular destinations. And for those who couldn't go that far, labyrinths were inlaid into the floors of some of the cathedrals, like Chartres (newly renovated!) to enable a walking - prayerful meditation to be undertaken as a mini pilgrimage.

I was fascinated to discover that to build a bridge or a road at that time became seen as an act of piety, because they enabled pilgrims to travel. In fact, bridges were under the protection of a local church.

The exercise of walking a labyrinth is always a unique experience, for it relies so much on what we bring to it. Like Max, in 'Where the Wild things are,' we need to let our imaginations take flight in order to enter fully into the meaning. You might enter the labyrinth with a scripture on your mind: *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, he leads me...* Or you might pray a Psalm. You might sing or be silent.

Psalm 107 says that God turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land in to springs of water. – an oasis. Enter with an open heart and mind, waiting, listening, reflecting, praying. You might skip through it, pause along the way or even just stand outside of it. You might walk it with someone.

Consider the labyrinth pilgrimage a reflection of your walk with Christ, who is at the center. Use your imagination. Be an explorer like Max. Along the way, you may be surprised by the twists and turns you take. You may feel mystified, bewildered, or you may feel expectant.

When you come to the outside path, consider yourself as living on the edge, or on the outskirts of faith, where it is so silent that even the slight breeze of hope is barely audible. Have you ever experienced that? It is a mini adventure of trust – self-discovery. Think of it as a dance with the Holy Spirit – or as a time of being on the threshold of an exciting new beginning. Or 'A wild rumpus!'

The prophet Isaiah wrote: *"I am about to do a new thing. Now it springs forth. Do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."*

Perhaps this season you will make friends with the Wild things in your wilderness. May your new year's pilgrimage be filled with hope and grace, and the joy of revelation. And may you be guided by the One True Shepherd.

Or as Max would say – Let the wild rumpus start!

□ Sing a new song unto the Lord

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Offering and Prayer

Jesus says - "you did not choose me. I chose you - to love one another as I have loved you." We are called to love with an abundant love. May the gifts we offer transform lives and make God's love flourish and bless those in need in our broken world.

□ Praise God from whom all blessings flow

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God of life and love, receive the gifts of our love that we in turn offer to you. These are difficult days. May what we bring to you, answer the voices who cry out in need. May our gifts sustain your body the church. And may they bring healing and wholeness to feed the bodies, minds and souls of those who cry out for your help. Bless our money, our time, our talents that the world will know your renewing and transforming love through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Pastoral Prayers

Holy and loving God, when we feel like we are burning out may your light burn deep with in us and give us strength. Ignite us. Blaze within us – help us to see your presence near us. Open our ears. Open our hearts to know where you are calling us.

God of new life, we thank you for your presence in our lives. Continue to hover over us and your creation, breathing your life into us. Flood our hearts and minds, our eyes and ears with your renewing grace. Wash us clean and new, that we may pour out your love to others.

Jesus Christ, light in our darkness, we thank you that you pray for us and all your people. Take us by the hand and lead us through the winding valleys as well as the mountain views. Lead us through the wildernesses and hustle and bustle of our lives. Teach us the joys of being your children and help us to receive your comfort and your renewing touch.

Holy Comforter, we bring you our needs and concerns this day. We pray for those who are sad or afraid. ...For those who are sick or recovering. For those who grieve and long for loved ones who are now with you. For those who have no homes, or whose lives are worn out from poverty and hunger, for those who have lost jobs. Those who are faced with difficult and disastrous situations... For those who are in the midst of wars and

violence. For those whose dreams have all been shattered. For those leaders trying to bring peace and justice in our world.

Loving and Holy God, we pray for ourselves as well. Shepherd of our souls, send us out into this week, nourished and strengthened by you, reliant upon, and trusting in your constant love and care. In the silence we offer you our own needs and listen for your voice...

God of abundant life, we give you thanks for the joys and blessings you have given us and those we have prayed for. Continue to shape us day by day through the cross of Christ your Son until we pray as continually as we breathe, and all our acts are prayer. Amen

□ With the Lord as my guide

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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

➤ Go now in peace

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