

19 January 2025

Welcome/Announcements/Land Acknowledgement **Fiona Gow (worship elder)**

As followers of Jesus, we are compelled to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God. It is our love of God and neighbour that leads us to acknowledge the land where we gather. We honour God with gratitude for this land and the peoples who have fished, hunted, harvested and gathered here for generations. This is the Coast Salish Territory of Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ. It is traditional and unceded land. We pray that past and present injustices can be reconciled as we commit ourselves to just and respectful relationships.

➤ *There is room for all*

Call to Worship

We are gathered to celebrate as the body of Christ

One body with many members

Members blessed with diverse gifts

Called to share these gifts in a broken world

Let this time of sharing be a reminder of the Holy One who calls all of us to be together

Let us worship God!

➤ *Like the murmur of the dove's song*

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✠Gathering Prayer / Words of Hope

God of our ancestors, we praise you for you have sent many before us to lead the way in which we are to walk, to encourage us when we are having difficulties and to point us to you.

We praise you because in Jesus you became flesh and identified with us in our humanness. In taking the form of a baby, you hid yourself in our need for others, in our need to be part of a community in our need to rely on someone to care for us.

We praise you that you gave up your own power to show us how we might be strong. We praise you that you abandoned your own comfort to show us how we might comfort others. We praise you that you sacrificed your own identity to show us that we might have our identity in you.

Almighty God, thank you for the glimpses we catch of you in each other and in the unexpected. Thank you that you have given each one of us gifts to build up this

community of faith and contribute to your whole body, the Church. Thank you that your love stretches beyond the boundaries of our imagination and calls us to do the same.

We are thankful for the promise of your word which tells us that when we confess our sin you are faithful and just and will forgive us. So now, in silence, we confess to you...

[Silence]

With grateful hearts and a desire to live as Jesus lived, we offer thanks for your forgiveness and for restoring us to right relationship with you and each other. In the name of Jesus, the Christ we pray. Amen

God's Spirit is upon us – the Spirit of forgiveness, the Spirit of grace, the Spirit of oneness. Today, and in all the days to come, God's Spirit is with us. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Praise to the One who is our joy and our strength.

➤ *The Spirit breathes upon the word*

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✠ Prayer for Understanding Doug Bracken

Holy One, we seek your guidance as your Word is read and interpreted. Send your Spirit to move in us and among us that we might better understand your intention for us today, and act accordingly in Jesus' name. Amen

Scripture

Psalm 19 responsive/displayed

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork.

Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.

There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;

yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens God has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong runner pursues its course with joy.

Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;
the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple;

**the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes;**

the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever;
the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

**More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.**

Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.
But who can detect their errors?

Clear me from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from proud thoughts; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a [NT 174]

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”

On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

But strive for the greater gifts.

Luke 4:14-21 [NT 61]

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

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

Message

Have you ever needed to introduce yourself to a gathering of people or write a bio for some group you are joining? I've had to do it from time to time – I even have an introduction to myself on our website. Sometimes I have started like this... my name is Laura Kavanagh, Steve's wife, Tristan and Ian's mom, a minister or teaching elder, a Canadian liberal-thinking Christian, an assertive and active woman. That tells some of the story, but it leaves people wondering about the things I have not mentioned, so questions arise...

- *What part of the country are you from?*
- *Where do you live?*
- *That's an Irish name, isn't it?*
- *What church/denomination do you belong to?*
- *What do they believe? Is it the same as...?*

Not an exhaustive list...

I tell people that I was born in one part of Canada and have lived in several places, so I think of myself as living in Canada as a whole rather than focusing on a region or province or city. I guess you could say that I am a Canadian first and an Islander second. I tell them that the name is surely from an Irish root but that my family has a long history in this country – many generations in fact, so I identify with where I am more than where I am from. I explain that I serve at Knox Church – that I am a Presbyterian. I try to outline the distinctiveness of my tradition but what I want them to hear is that my identity is Christian first and Presbyterian second.

This is what frames my understanding of Christian unity and what I was reflecting on as the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity – an annual ecumenical celebration – approached. It is traditionally held between January 18th (the Feast of the Confession of Saint Peter) and January 25th (the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul). So, this week Christians around the world are invited to pray for the unity of all Christians, to reflect on scripture together, to participate in ecumenical services, and to share fellowship, praying that we may be more fully united in the one Christ.

In the Gospel of John, Christ prays for his disciples before going to the cross. He asks that his followers *may all be one, as he and the Father are one, so that the world may believe and have life in his name*. Christian unity is here made central to the very being of the church and to its mission and witness.

Today, we live with divisions even as we yearn for the unity promised and commissioned by Christ. The long and often painful history of Christianity has sundered our churches for theological, liturgical, and political reasons. Many Christians now strive to heal these divisions, yet honour our diversity, through ecumenical dialogue, common action, and relationship-building. They also come together to pray for unity, joining Christ in his prayer to God.

The worldwide celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is both the seed and the fruit of this striving for 'unity in diversity'. This time of shared prayer, reflection, and fellowship invites Christians of different traditions to deepen our relationships and to live and witness together throughout the year – to wrestle, as I have been doing, with the question: ***What is Christian Unity for?***

Thankfully, our New Testament texts from this morning shed light on that very question. The Gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus comes to fulfil the scripture. The passage that Jesus quotes from Isaiah says that the Spirit of the Lord anoints Jesus – and therefore those of

us who claim to follow him – to respond to human need, to make a real difference in the world – to share the good news that Christ redeems the broken world.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians reminds us that we are all filled with gifts of the Holy Spirit to help one another – that as one suffers, we all suffer together. He also spends much of his energy clarifying his views on how varied we are. We need to acknowledge our diversity and uniqueness as part of God's plan. We are not all the same and I am not convinced that it is God's desire for us to become "all the same". The apostle Paul talks to the Corinthians about their differences, their individuality and how that contributes to the whole. He encourages the people to embrace the gifts they have received and use them for the common good. Paul specifically warns against the idea of everyone seeking to be the same: "Think about yourselves as a body," says Paul, "wouldn't it look foolish to have the whole body be an eye? How would we hear anything? Would it be awkward to get around if we were all thumbs?"

If we accept the teaching of Paul regarding diversity, and the significance of being one body, we understand that prayer for Christian unity is embracing what is most important to our identity – that we are Christians first. When we come together in worship to celebrate that which unites us, we take a step in the direction of healing the body of Christ.

This is what we pray for – that the sin and brokenness that mars our relationships may be healed. We hope and pray for Christian unity not only because it is God's desire that we function as one healthy body, but also because when we work purposefully together, we are able to accomplish the work in which God has called us all to participate – sharing the good news: introducing others to Christ and responding to human need.

Think about the healing of the deaf and mute man from chapter seven of the Gospel of Mark. In this story Jesus is among Greeks but heals a Jew. He is in a city of widely divergent people and ideas, though his identity is not questioned. He unstops the ears and loosens the tongue of one person yet touches the lives of many in the process.

There is an individual in that story who is broken – he is deaf, and he has a speech impediment. Not everything about the person's life is damaged though – many people care enough about the man to bring him to a famous healer – are concerned enough to beg Jesus to touch and make a difference.

What if we see the church as the person in that healing story? How is the church broken? How is the church hearing and speech impaired? Sometimes we are deaf to the concerns of another community of faith because we have enough to contend with in our own circumstance. Sometimes we talk to one another as though our tongues were thick and crippled – failing to express our true hopes and fears, struggling to find the right words.

Yet, like the man in the scripture, we are not totally lost – not completely without potential. Many of us – many of you – have meaningful connections and readily provide support in times of crisis. Many of us – many of you – recognize that we are called first to live the gospel and that we do so best when we focus on Jesus and his healing power.

We haven't always done such a good job of that. Much of church history is cluttered with defending one point of view against another or standing in judgment rather than singing in unison. We haven't done so well when it comes to responding to human suffering either. We tend to get caught up in religious politics and ignore the work of laying on hands. We hang back saying, "No, no – you go," instead of putting our fingers into the heart of the world's problems and touching the root of another's pain.

Think about the gifts with which you have been blessed as "The Spirit of the Lord" that comes upon you for a reason. According to what we have read today our task is clear: share the gospel, set people free from oppression, work for justice in the world, get involved in healing causes, tell the world that God's desire is that we serve one another in love. That is not a literal interpretation of Luke's message, but it is the heart of it. And when we have read and understood the heart of the gospel message we sit with the gathered faithful and hear Jesus tell us that when we truly hear what he has to say, the scripture is brought to life.

When we work in harmony with one another it is possible to look up to heaven together, to sigh with relief that we have partners in serving God and the divine creation. When Christian unity is what we seek we are open to God's heavenly purpose – we hear and clearly speak the good news. This is how we become instruments of God's compassion and justice in the world – how we begin to do all things well and fulfil the scripture as Jesus intends.

In seeking to serve Christ together, The Presbyterian Church in Canada embraces the spirit of the slogan born in the heat of the 16th century Reformation debates: "*in essential things unity, in non-essential things freedom, and in all things charity*". What are the essential things – the non-essential things and how do we show charity – love – in all things?

If there are many gifts, many ways to serve, many opportunities to work for God's divine purpose in the world we need to honour that diversity even as we continue to wrestle with what is essential in our faith. For me the essentials are an attitude of thoughtful inclusiveness, care for creation, and confidence that working for social justice is the call of the Gospel.

What is essential for you?

My prayer for the coming week is that the church can focus on the task of healing – on response to human suffering – on our common identity as the hands and feet of Christ in the world. This is what Isaiah proclaimed so many centuries ago – what Jesus came to live out in the flesh – and what the Holy Spirit equips us to undertake in the name of Christ. We are given the body of Christ – the church – to do something, to participate in God’s loving desire for creation. My prayer is that we can embrace diversity, pray for unity and most importantly work together for healing in our broken world. **Amen**

➤ *To show by touch and word*

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†Offering and Prayer

Paul reminds us that we are part of one body – each of us and all of us. The gifts we offer in Jesus’ name are all needed – each of them and all of them. Together, the body of Christ accomplishes many things through the gifts we share.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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Creator God, you made each of us in our uniqueness, and together, you made all of us to bear your image in the world. Accept our gifts, unique as they are, and bless them so they may bear Christ’s grace and mercy into the world you love, fulfilling your purposes. Amen

†Pastoral Prayers and the Lord’s Prayer

Holy One we thank for your presence in all aspects of our lives, that there is no place where your love is unable to reach. Especially we thank you that you love the unlovable and the unlovely and that you call us to do the same.

We give you thanks for our identity – that in you we are empowered to be fully and completely ourselves. Especially we thank you that we are invited to accept others as you accept us.

Hear us now O Lord, as we bring the needs of others before you. We pray for those whose hearts are aching today...

- for those who do not know where their next meal will come from...
- for those whose cries of pain and sorrow fall on deaf ears...
- for those who are afraid – those who are lonely
- for those who are confused...

We remember the leaders of the world – give them wisdom and courage. We remember those who are working for peace in the world – give them hope and protect them as they journey. We remember the people who are suffering in places where violence reigns. Loving God assure them of your constant presence.

Now we pray for ourselves, your church, agents of your love in the world – may we reflect your care and kindness in all we do and say. We join our voices, praying 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**

➤ *Help us to help each other, Lord*

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Blessing

Go into the world renewed by the creative word of God, inspired by the Spirit-filled witness of Jesus, and bound together by the power of the Holy Spirit. And may the grace of the Living Lord, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all.

➤ *Go now in peace*