

Welcome/Announcements/Land Acknowledgement Steve Sturgess (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.**

Celebrations/Joys & Concerns

*God's blessing on you. God's blessing on you.*

*God's blessing, dear friends. God's blessing on you.*

➤ *There is room for all*

Call to Worship (from Psalm 27)

The Lord is my light and my salvation

**whom shall I fear?**

The Lord is the strength of my life

**of whom shall I be afraid?**

✠ Gathering Prayer and Words of Hope

Holy God, with the first light of this new week upon us, we gather together here in this community as your people, to sing your praise. Your glory is ever above us, your mercy is ever with us, your everlasting arms are ever around us. You are God, and we are yours, and it is you we praise, Creator, Saviour, Sustainer.

In this time together, we lay before you the emotion and the activity, the satisfactions and regrets, of this past week. In this time together we seek your healing hand to bind the scattered forces of our souls. Holy One we pray, have mercy upon us.

We place our trust in you, O God. We pray for faith to believe that you govern with justice and truth – and will work your good out of this world's evil. We pray for faith to be calm and courageous in the face of the darkness that surrounds. We pray for faith to remain generous with those by our side and to entrust into your care the many at a distance. We pray for faith to receive the power of your love to melt our hardened hearts and

swallow up our sin. We pray for faith to consider anew the purpose and end of our days and commit ourselves anew to the way of Jesus Christ. Amen

When we call on the Lord we are answered, forgiven and our soul is strengthened. Thanks be to God for the gift of grace.

➤ *Christ be our light/Longing for light*

✠ Prayer for Understanding Heather Anderson (reader)

**God of wisdom, we long to hear your holy Word in new and fresh ways. Open our ears to hear your call. Open our minds to understand your truth. Open our eyes to the work of your kingdom and equip us to take our part. Amen**

Scripture **Isaiah 2:1-5** [OT 631]

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.

Many peoples shall come and say, *"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths."*

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore.

O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

*Two weeks ago we read about when Jesus stood up in the synagogue of his hometown and announced that 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor'. Today we hear of the immediate reaction, an incredulity that turned to anger and forced him to flee.*

**Luke 4:21-30** [NT 61]

Then he began to say to them, *"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, *"Is not this Joseph's son?"*

He said to them, *"Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'"*

And he said, *"Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian."*

When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

#### **Revelation 21:1-5a and 10-14** [NT 259]

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

*"See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and be their God; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."*

And the one who was seated on the throne said, *"See, I am making all things new."*

And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names that are the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites: on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Today, we are gathered for PWS&D Sunday, a time when we reflect on the ministry of Christ through the Church in response to development needs around the world.

In a world filled with acronyms, we can sometimes get a little lost. On our small smart phone screens, LOL (laugh out loud), FOMO (fear of missing out), YOLO (you only live once). This morning, we are talking about an acronym that has been with us now for several generations, one particular to us gathered here in the name of Christ... PWS&D (Presbyterian World Service and Development).

When the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of PWS&D was celebrated, I was invited to send in 75 words about why it is important to me and to the church. I took each letter of the acronym to make a list of words that describe PWS&D and then offered a closing statement. It looked like this...

<b>Presbyterian</b>	<b>World</b>	<b>Service</b>	<b>Development</b>
Proactive	Warmth	Sign	Desire
Personal	Wisdom	Symbol	Deeds
Partners	Wealth	Sincere	Doing
Poverty	Want	Soul	Despair
Positive	Will	Spirit	Delight
Productive	Wholesome	Scriptural	Determination
Passion	Worthy	Salvation	Diligence
Powerful	Wellbeing	Security	Duty
Prayerful	Welcome	Safety	Donations
Proclamation	Word	Sensible	Devotion
Praise	Worship	Something	Difference
Peace	Witness	Solidarity	Disaster

**PWS&D embodies the life and vocation of the church – it's our reason for being.  
The work of PWS&D expresses Christian love in action.**

PWS&D begins with us as congregations of Christ's people who organize ourselves in a particular way: as much as we participate in our own individual spiritual lives and family, we understand that we are stronger together, that we can do things and learn things together, that we could not do alone.

Part of being Presbyterian in Canada is our congregational commitment to *Presbyterians Sharing*, working to contribute 10% of what we dedicate to the work of Christ we do

together to build up the larger Church of Christ... in training new ministers, congregational development, supporting ministries with Indigenous people, mission work in Canada and with church partners around the world, the support of the church's work of discernment about what the church should do and say in the public square, and much more.

Another part of being Presbyterian in Canada is PWS&D, which we celebrate this morning – the work of Christ in the world beyond the local church... the work of development, relief, and refugee sponsorship that goes beyond our congregation and denomination and nation.

We take up this work together as Presbyterian World Service & Development according to particular principles. Our work is inclusive in principle: whatever is done through PWS&D is in service of all peoples, regardless of their culture or religion, based on needs only. Our work is efficient in principle: administrative costs are kept to a minimum to maximize funds for programs. Furthermore, PWS&D seeks to get matching funds from other sources and through ecumenical collaborations to maximize reach and impact.

PWS&D also operates according to a particular approach. We focus up communities. We support a school or well or health worker that benefits all. And we work with local partner organizations. PWS&D does not send staff from Canada, but works through local people who know their own context best and are already at work in their own communities for good, many of whom are local Christians and their agencies... projects in 9 countries across Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Asia, like working with the *Fraternidad de Presbiteriales Mayas* to support Indigenous women and men in the western highlands of Guatemala, with the *Canadian Foodgrains Bank* to provide humanitarian aid and long-term food security solutions in the food-insecure Sindh province of Pakistan, and with the *Church of Central Africa Presbyterian* in Malawi to address agriculture and medical care needs. (All of which I have been privileged to witness firsthand.)

As The Presbyterian Church in Canada, we are a modest denomination in size but our support for PWS&D is impressive. Many across Canada support the work of PWS&D with their time, talent and treasures. Support comes from congregations, monthly donors, special fundraising initiatives, legacy gifts, the list goes on.

And yet you may ask: *What difference does our support, and this work, make compared to the magnitude of needs of the world?* So great is the suffering and injustice, so oppressive are the powers economic and political – the crises are overwhelming, the issues seem intractable. It might be easy to slip into cynicism – withdrawing, becoming immobilized, and feeling our own humanity suffering. It is at times like this that we need to hear anew the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In times of anxiety and depression, Martin Luther would place his hand on his forehead, symbolically recalling the waters of his baptism, and whisper to himself *'I am a child of God'*. And now we lift our hands, and we remember *whose* we are.

When we feel like night is creeping in, we may recall the words of Charles Beard (historian, social reformer, Quaker of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) *'When it is dark enough, you can see the stars'*, and we can lift our eyes again to see Christ and his coming kingdom of peace and justice. This is a theme running all through the season of Epiphany... Jesus, the Light of the World.

Jesus is our light in darkness, and the darker it is, the more we see and understand the light Jesus is. He reveals the Holy and Eternal One who enters our darkness for us and our salvation, the love of God made real as Jesus teaches, embraces, feeds, and heals.

In his life among us, Jesus shows how God responds to suffering and tragedy – entering and addressing it. And in his resurrection Jesus confirms that evil and death are real but not ultimate – that the will of God is fullness of life, now and eternally.

As Christians, we acknowledge that the light Jesus provides for comes not only from his life among us two millennia ago, or his Spirit with us now, but also and equally from the future. In the book of Revelation, we receive a vision of the light that shines from the Risen Jesus and the end of history.

One point made in Revelation 21 is that in the resurrection of Jesus, God grants life beyond life not only to each of us individually but to us all together. The wonderful image that shines upon us is that of the Holy City, a declaration that God will renew our humanity completely.

The final image in scripture of the life to come is not some ethereal existence, nor an individual existence – not even a pastoral paradise. The life to come is portrayed as a community – the Holy City, lively and full. This is an image of humanity re-created – of human society reordered.

And in the reading from Revelation we heard this morning, we are reminded that as the Holy City comes down from above, on its foundation stones are engraved the names of the apostles. It is quite remarkable, the image of heaven founded upon the witness of these ordinary, oft-failing individuals. This notion, that the foundations of the Holy City are located in the very human lives of Christians, is an assurance that these relationships of ours now really do matter – that there is something in the way we live now that may be of eternal significance and consequence.

Those first Christians who took up the way of Christ in their lives – healing, teaching, feeding, and embracing those in need – did not see much response in their lifetimes. They experienced great uncertainty and even persecution. They were up against empires and evil that were as overwhelming as any that exist today, but their witness was of enduring significance, and what they began is revealed to be completed by God in the new beginning for humanity, conveyed in this image of the Holy City.

It is this commitment to persevere in the way of Christ now that is heard in the words of the Palestinian Christian, the Rev. Mitri Raheb, pastor of the protestant *Christmas Church* in Bethlehem for some decades now. Over five years ago, noting that almost a third of that city's population was Christian and detailing the suffering of the Palestinian people in so many ways, even then, he *said "Am I optimistic? Not at all. I have hope. Hope is different."* Hope for us is in Christ. And based upon that hope, the pastor said, *"Even if I thought the world was to end tomorrow, I would plant an olive tree today."* There is both a humility and a perseverance in seeing the light and walking in it, even when darkness is all around us, even when it is within us, in preparation for God's coming completion.

Looking to our Living Lord, and his example of a life that God can use and bless eternally, and his resurrection as an assurance of God's coming reign of peace and justice for humanity, we continue to plant olive trees and care for neighbour and stranger... in faith.

Even as we are blessed to live in one of the most secure and prosperous nations of the world, our offerings and bequests to support those in need both near and far is becoming more and more clearly a Christian distinctive – a Christian witness.

This witness – known as PWS&D – is about our integrity as Christians, and we entrust its outcomes to God to complete. But this witness can have a very immediate and personal impact.

We think about PWS&D's work in Gaza, which is having one such impact. Amidst violence and destruction, many people, including children, are without the normal carefree life they would otherwise enjoy. They have had to flee their homes amidst devastating sights. PWS&D partners, including DSPR (the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees, part of the Near East Council of Churches) and Catholic Relief Services (through Canadian Foodgrains Bank), continue to provide food, health care, and psychological assistance to as many people as possible.

One way that PWS&D is "planting olive trees" is by responding to the psychological impact of the trauma children and families have faced in Gaza. Rafif is a 6-year-old who escaped the bombing along with her parents and her four siblings. When her mother returned to their home, all she could find was Rafif's favorite toy. For Rafif, playing with this beloved toy gives a sense of normalcy.

PWS&D's partner supports children and mothers through small groups and large play sessions, in addition to psychological first aid care. Mental health staff work with schools and shelters to support children to restore some normalcy, provide hope and optimism through psychological and recreational support, connect parents and children through the activities, and use art and play-based activities to provide relief.

PWS&D – Presbyterian World Service & Development – is what we do in the way of Christ, as an act of faith, witnessing to and preparing for the great promises of peace and justice from the One who is faithful. We respond to the life we have received in Christ, by sharing it. We acknowledge the sovereignty of God, by living towards the new beginning God has shown us in Christ.

#### ✠ Prayer after Sermon

Holy One, we believe that beyond the dark skies a star shines, we believe that we are not alone, we believe that people and this world can change.

Holy One, our faith is founded up Jesus – his birth, life, death and resurrection – our faith is in knowing Jesus and his promise of life in all its fullness for all humanity. So now, O God, help us to live as a people who believe – a people of faith – who stand and act now in the light of the days Christ is bringing – who take up Christ's work toward his world of peace and justice. Amen

➤ *Jesus bids us shine*

773

#### ✠ Offering and Prayer

Psalm 71 says, *"You, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth. My praise is continually of you."* With our tithes and offerings, we continue in our praise.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

306

**Whatever we face this coming week, O God, we begin now in gratitude for all the life and love with which you fill our lives. We begin now in thanksgiving for all you offer us in your promises of bringing human history together in a way that will honour all that is good and true and beautiful. Receive these offerings for your work in this time through the ministry of this congregation – the work of Christian mission through Presbyterians Sharing – through projects of development, relief and refugee sponsorship of PWS&D amongst peoples around the world. With these offerings and our lives, we praise you, Holy One, Father Son and Spirit. Amen**



Celebrating Our Common Faith (A New Creed)

***We are not alone, we live in God's world.***

***We believe in God: who has created and is creating,  
who has come in Jesus – the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new,  
who works in us and others by the Spirit.***

***We trust in God.***

***We are called to be the Church:  
to celebrate God's presence, to live with respect in Creation,  
to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil,  
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.***

***In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us.***

***We are not alone. Thanks be to God.***

Gathering at the Lord's Table

We have heard about God, who loved confusion into order and gave each creature a divine image, making the world.

We have heard about Jesus, a poor man whose banquet feeds the world, a healer whose wounds give life, a teacher whose wisdom traces love's order in the world, finding the divine in each of us.

We have heard how Jesus died, and how, for those who loved him, he rose again.

We have heard about the Holy Spirit, who breaks the bonds of race and class, of gender and creed, to show God's love for everyone.

And we have heard that love makes all things new. We come to this table asking for the bread of such blessings.

These miracles begin with simple human gestures, bits of bread in a basket, tongues that talk, souls that yearn. And so we bring bread and wine, prayers and our own yearning, that the miraculous may begin in us today.

➤ ***Brother, sister, let me serve you***

***635***

✠ Celebrating Together with Thanksgiving

God be with you.

**And also, with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to God.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give God thanks and praise.**

Gracious God, we praise your holy name, giving thanks with our lips and our lives...  
For the power and mystery of your Word by which you created us and called us to yourself, we give you thanks. For the power and mystery of your Word by which you took flesh and lived among us through your Son, Jesus Christ, we give you thanks.  
...Therefore, with all the *company of heaven* and all who will come after us, we lift our voices in joyful praise...

- **829** *Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest, hosanna in the highest.*

Faithful God, we offer you our praise and thanks as we return to you these holy gifts of bread and wine...

Remembering that on the night of his arrest Jesus sat down to eat with friends. During the meal, he took the bread, said a prayer, broke the bread and shared it with everyone at the table, saying: *"This is my body which is for you. Do this to remember me."*

At the end of the meal, he took a cup of wine and raised it, saying: *"This is God's new covenant, made possible because of my death. Drink this all of you, to remember me."*

We ponder, O God, the mystery of his promise that in this meal we are joined to him and to one another as a holy people. We offer you our praise and thanks for Jesus, who took flesh and lived among us, was baptized for our sins, taught us your way of truth, loved us in our lovelessness and died that we may have life.

...We celebrate with great joy the resurrection of our Lord, his presence with us in this feast, and his promise of a new creation as we affirm the mystery of faith...

- **523** *Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.  
Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.*

God of grace and power, you invite us to share in mysteries that are beyond our understanding...

...in simple trust we seek the transforming power of your Spirit upon us and upon this bread and wine. By the miracle of your grace may they be for us your body – vibrant with your life, renewing and making us whole. And as the bread and wine which we now eat and drink are changed into us, may we be changed again into you – bone of your bone – flesh of your flesh, loving and caring in the world.

...In Christ, with Christ, through Christ – by the power of the Holy Spirit – all glory is yours, now and forever. Amen

### Sharing Bread and Cup

*Please come forward to receive Holy Communion – everyone is welcome at this table.  
If you are unable to come to the front, please signal an elder who will come and serve you.  
We use gluten and dairy-free bread. You may choose either juice or wine.*

The one whom the universe could not contain is present to us in this bread.

The one who redeems us and calls us by name now meets us in this cup.

The bread of life – the cup of grace – we remember and share with thanksgiving these gifts in which God comes to us so that we may come to God.

### ✠ Prayer after Communion

Holy God, you lead us in the ways of life: you have gathered us, now touch us with healing and new hope. When we are anxious about the affairs of our world, remind us that you are not indifferent to either our joys or concerns.

We lay before you the many of our world who this day suffer in a world gone wrong – whose days are shaped by famine, poverty, and war – all whose lives are diminished by the injustice of governments or economies.

Let the harvests of our world be neither hoarded nor squandered. Let the nations of our world pursue what makes for peace and for mutual up-building.

We thank you for all who are at work for good. We thank you especially today for our community of faith across this nation, and for those around the world whom we, through Presbyterian World Service and Development, are privileged to know as partners, at work among their own people, in places like Guatemala, Nicaragua, Malawi, India or Afghanistan.

We give thanks for those who have fed us and cared for us. We remember all who have shown compassion and tenderness to us. Bless our loved ones, our homes and our communities we pray. Fill our deep longing for reconciliation and new beginnings in our relationships and in the world.

Hear us as we lift up our prayers, for ourselves, for others, for your kingdom to come, in this time of silence...

Receive our prayers – breathe your Spirit on us – renew us and use us to your glory and for the good of all.

Loving God, we praise you for the food received at your table. We give thanks for your faithfulness and abundance that fills all creation. We celebrate the gift of your presence among us in Jesus. May we go from here, strengthened, refreshed, and empowered by your Spirit to be true and joyful witnesses to Jesus Christ – living to your glory in all we do. We sing our prayer together...

➤ ***Our Father in heaven*** (*The Lord's Prayer – no repeats*)      **469**

➤ ***Arise, your light is come***      **712**

### Blessing

Go into this week knowing that your life has been touched by grace – convinced that you are connected to a larger world – filled with the love of the Gospel of Christ. 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***

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<sup>i</sup> Based on the PWS&D Sunday 2025 Worship Resource written by the Rev. Dr. Andrew Johnston