

23 February 2025 (The Rev. Wes Denyer)

(Connie Dunwoody is the pianist/singer for the day select music)

Welcome/Announcements/Land Acknowledgement **Martha Anderson** (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*

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Call to Worship

Take delight in the Lord;

For God will give us the desires of our hearts.

Trust in the Lord;

For God will give us security and strength.

Come, let us commit our ways to the Lord.

Let us worship the One who is our refuge in any time of trouble.

□ *461 Be Thou My Vision*

□ Gathering Prayer / the Lord's Prayer / Words of Hope

Faithful God, you have gathered your people in faithfulness throughout many generations. You have offered your blessing to us through their examples, and led the Church through many changes and challenges by your Spirit. Draw near to us this day to guide us in these uncertain times. Root our faithfulness in the compassion and courage we meet in Jesus. Renew us through your steadfast love so that we may dare to trust our future to you.

Gracious God, you test the mind and search the heart, so you know the thoughts and intentions we keep hidden. Trusting in your wisdom and mercy, we confess the ways we have failed to love one another, the times we looked the other way when someone needed help, and the ways our actions betrayed your goodness. Forgive us for missing opportunities to share your love, and carrying grudges that keep us from offering the forgiveness we hope for. Renew us with your mercy to become more merciful to others we meet, in the example of Christ our Lord. Amen.

... 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

Hear and believe the good news: anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old life is gone, and new life has begun. Trust that you are forgiven by God's generous love, and have the courage to forgive one another for Christ's sake.

□ 638 Take Time to be Holy

□ Prayer for Understanding

God of wisdom, your Word brings life and hope. By the power of your Spirit, open our minds to understanding, teach our hearts to love, and strengthen our wills to follow Jesus, your Living Word. Amen.

Scripture

Psalm 138 - Responsive (OT 577)

I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted your name and your word above everything. On the day I called, you answered me; you increased my strength of soul.

All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O LORD, for they have heard the words of your mouth. They shall sing of the ways of the LORD, for great is the glory of the LORD. For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he perceives from far away.

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me. The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

Philippians 4:4-9 (NT 198)

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ As for the things that you have learned and received and heard and noticed in me, do them, and the God of peace will be with you.

Luke 11:1-13 (NT 72)

11 He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." ² So he said to them, "When you pray, say:

Father, may your name be revered as holy.

May your kingdom come.

³ Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴ And forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial."

⁵ And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' ⁷ And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' ⁸ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything out of friendship, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

⁹ "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹ Is there anyone among you who, if your child asked for a fish, would give a snake instead of a fish? ¹² Or if the child asked for an egg, would give a scorpion? ¹³ If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

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

Message

A few years ago, my wife, Judy and I took a road trip along the eastern seaboard of the United States. As part of that trip, we visited Washington DC.

I need to tell you, one of the most inspirational sites in that city is the Lincoln Memorial. On the north wall of that Memorial, some of you have probably seen it, is the speech Abraham Lincoln gave on the occasion of his second inauguration to the Presidency of the United States.

As I read those words chiselled in stone, I was amazed to see how much Lincoln's speech was grounded in a deep and profound sense of Christian faith.

The country was embroiled in a vicious and destructive civil war. I might have expected him to say, "God is on our side alone!" Given the nature of partisan politics today, I

wouldn't have been surprised if he'd invoked God as a terrible moral judge against the South. But it was not like that. In his speech, Abraham Lincoln recognized that all the people, North and South, prayed to and worshiped the same God. I had the sense of a man who walked with a caring and compassionate God that God was part of who Lincoln was as a person, permeating his being and never far from his thoughts. It was obvious he recognized his own dependence upon God - he leaned upon God for strength, wisdom and hope, and in the midst of his tumultuous presidency, prayer and *his experience of God*, sustained him, and was an integral part of his decision making process, and his leadership.

Perhaps that's what the disciples of Jesus were looking for two thousand years ago when they came to Jesus and said, "Lord, teach us to pray?"

I'm sure we can identify with that question, because all of us want to discover the answer ... *How do we have an experience of God* - all of us need to find the fulfillment of that quest because we know, if we don't find **that answer**, of what difference are all the other things we search for in life. It's a game we play. We can fool some people, but it's still a game. We can get applauded and admired, but it's still a game. We can wear false faces, but it's still a game. That's the heart of the matter – *an experience of God*.

In his book, *The Future of Faith*, theologian Harvey Cox talks about the three ages of the church. The first age which lasted until 300 AD was characterized by a deep sense of trust in God. The second age, which lasted until approximately 1900 was concerned with knowledge about God. And the third age, the one we find *ourselves* in, yearns for a deep and transforming *experience* of God.

So, what people in the 21st century really expect of their faith and their church is this ... *Help me to pray*. The people who come to worship each Sunday, I don't care what they're talking about, they really have only one question, it's not: How did Noah get all those animals on the ark? Is evolution true or false? What should we think about homosexuality?

The burning question for people of faith in 2025 is this: *Will God be here today?* That's the only question. That's all I really ask of my church to provide an occasion upon which I can experience the presence of God. That's what prayer is.

And I believe that's what people expect of a minister - is to help enable that meeting God, *here ... today* - this relationship to God. We ministers sometimes get sidetracked, going down all kinds of strange and wonderful paths, but in my lucid moments, I know I am here to encourage and enable the experience of God.

This is my first of two Sundays here at Knox, and I'm sure, as you prepared to come to

worship today, you may have been wondering, "What kind of minister is Wes Denyer? Is he going to be *any good*?"

People often wonder about their first experiences with a new minister, and that's something which is going to be **very** important to all of you in the coming year.

Laura, who has served you so well and faithfully for almost two decades, is retiring. You will have an Interim Moderator appointed to serve this congregation, and you will begin your search for a new minister.

Now, I've been interim moderator in several congregations over the last 40 years. I've listened to the discussions and the debates, "What kind of minister do we need here? What are we looking for in a minister?"

And I've heard all kinds of answers to those questions ... *different people want different things* ...

"Well, what we're looking for is an older minister, someone who's experienced. Someone who knows how, and is seasoned."

"Oh no we don't either. We had one of those seasoned older ministers, and he slept through all the meetings, just sat there and his head would always be slipping down. What we want is someone who can preach. I remember one minister - couldn't preach his way out of a wet paper bag! We need someone who can preach."

"I don't care whether they can preach or not, we need someone who can teach us the Bible. We're getting away from the Bible. We need a Bible teacher!"

"No we don't! I was in a church where we had one of those Bible scholars ... didn't last a year. We got so confused ... didn't know what in the world was going on. You know what we need. We need a minister who will call in the homes. Whatever happened to calling in the homes? Ministers used to call in the homes. We need someone who will come visit us."

"Oh no we don't! No sir, I don't want a minister calling in my home. When I get home from work I get comfortable, you know what I mean? ... real comfortable. And I don't want a reverend walking in after I get comfortable. I'll tell you what we need. We need a young minister. Listen, we don't have young people ... that's our future ... We need young people. Let's get a young minister in here to bring in the young people."

"No ... we don't want that. We had a young minister here once. Went off on a hayride with the youth group ... never came back!"

Well, as an interim moderator, I've listened to those heated discussions, but when you get through all that, I think what people really want in their minister is always just the same: *We need a minister who will help us to experience the presence of God.*

As the disciples said ... *Lord, teach us to pray.*

I really don't know why the disciples ask that at this particular time. We're in Luke chapter 11, you know. The ministry of Jesus is about over. He's on his way to Jerusalem. It's going to be over soon. Why now? Jesus has been praying all along. Why do they ask it now? I don't know ...

It might have been that the logic of this whole thing finally sank in upon these twelve brothers: "Jesus has been praying all along. And if our leader needs prayer, it might not hurt the rest of us." Maybe it's come home to them. Maybe ...

It might be because of their recent turmoil. Luke says they've been walking along the road fussing about who's number one, and who's number two, and who's number three, and who's the greatest? Absolutely inappropriate for ministers of the Gospel. "Who's the greatest?" Who do you think's the best preacher in the group? And they begin to feel this thing coming apart. The group is coming apart. And there may be a little panic set in, because *they don't know what Jesus is all about* ... but at least we're together in this. Nobody can make it all alone. Maybe ... maybe that's what they're thinking.

It might be their recent failure. Luke says about a chapter and a half back, they had a big, big mistake ... a big failure ... a total loss of power. Jesus was on the mountain praying with three of the disciples, the other nine were at the foot of the hill waiting. A man comes up with a child who has seizures – says to the nine, "He's just driving his mother and me mad. He's going to kill himself. He's in the fire. He's in the water. What can you do? Can you help?" And they try ... *and can't*. Jesus comes down the mountain and heals the boy. And the nine say, "Why couldn't we do that?" And Jesus says, "This kind comes out only by prayer."

"Oh yeah, we knew we'd left something out of the Order of Service."

Maybe it's coming home.

It could be, they're asking for prayer because they've just tasted success. You know, back in chapter ten, big success ... such big success that Jesus said, "I saw Satan fall from Heaven like lightning." Boy, the healings, the souls saved, the sermons preached, the lessons taught, the demons exorcised ... What a report. Great report. Now the shadow falls.

There is no shadow falling across your life like the shadow of success. When we're working and striving to make it, we have a purpose and a meaning in our lives. But sometimes it's when we **arrive**, when we get to where we want to be in life, when we get everything we want, then the depression and despondency and doubt arrives. What next? Where do we go from here? "Lord, teach us to pray ..." Maybe ...

And why? Why is it so hard? I don't know. It just may be that those disciples are beginning to experience the immensity of what Jesus is about. Do you think they're beginning to get the size of it? They start out as twelve Galileans just following Jesus, and pretty soon he's embracing lepers, babies, unclean people, sinners, poor, lame, blind, deaf, rich people, Roman soldiers ... he reaches out ... tax collectors. **This thing is getting too big!**

When we keep it small I know how to pray: "Lord bless me, my family, and all that are in this church. Amen."

This thing is getting big. It's not too long before the church is stretching out its arms to encompass the whole world ... the whole created order ... the whole universe. There's not a thing that exists, not a star, not a squirrel, not an apple tree, that will not be finally embraced in the love of God.

Lord teach us to pray?

Well, as far as I'm concerned, whether you're the President of Microsoft, or leaning out the door saying to the letter carrier, "Are the welfare cheques in?"; whether you're standing on the Olympic Podium, or just having trouble getting out of bed in the morning; whether you're Donald Trump, or Justin Trudeau, the needs the same: We need a relationship to God – an experience of God. We need to be in touch with a power that lifts us up out of ourselves, so we can see further, reach higher, touch other lives and have the courage to be touched by them.

Teach us to pray ... Why?!

Because we cannot do this thing called "life" alone. We cannot, all alone, lead and nurture the communities within which we live. Is it possible, *without God*, we cannot go forward with real integrity, hope and discernment?

Lord, teach us to pray ... so in the power, wisdom and love of the risen Christ, we may be enabled to serve God, to serve others, and to learn to live in the fullness of life God has promised.

□ Offering and Prayer

God is the source of all goodness. Through our offering, we express our thanks for every good thing we enjoy, and we share good things with those in need. Be generous, as God is generous, so that the world may know that God is good.

□ 306 *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

God of generous love, we bring our gifts with grateful hearts, for we have received so much through your kindness. Bless our gifts, and use them to touch lives in situations we cannot even imagine with your love. Make us a blessing in our community for the sake of Christ, our Friend and Saviour. Amen.

□ Pastoral Prayers

God of all life and each life: you created us and set us in relationship with each other in families and neighbourhoods, in communities and countries, in cultures and nations. Today we give you thanks for all the gifts of home life and community celebration that bring meaning and encouragement to our lives. Thank you for the blessings we know through the contributions of those who have gone before us. Help us offer what we can

to sustain the wellbeing of our community and country, so that all who make it their home will find security and dignity.

God of our faith and our future, there are so many pressures we face today, so many problems without simple solutions. Draw near to anyone who is struggling in economic difficulty, and all those burdened by challenges to their health and happiness. Ease any conflict in homes and workplaces and inspire solutions that express mutual respect and deeper understanding. Help us share with others the hope we find in your presence.

God of mercy and forgiveness, You call us to live together in peace and unity. We pray for our neighbourhoods and the nations of this world. Where people are divided and bitterness turns into resentment, show us how to work for reconciliation. Where violence and fear turn neighbour against neighbour, or nation against nation. equip leaders to work for justice that will bring peace. Help us build a world where children enjoy a future filled with good health and happiness.

God, our hope and our help, send your Spirit to equip our congregation with skill and resilience to weather whatever challenges and opportunities lie before us. Strengthen friendships, new and old, and make us a source of encouragement and connection to each other. Help each one find a place and a purpose in our mission and ministry, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

□ 726 *May the God of Hope*

Blessing

May we go into the world with courage and insight so that in the power of the Risen Christ, we may nurture and foster our communities to become places of justice for all. And now may the love and peace of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you all, this day and always. Amen.

□ Go now in peace

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