

06 April 2025 – Lent 5/Communion/Annual Meeting

Welcome, Announcements, and Land Acknowledgement Dennis Sutherland (worship elder)

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. We recommit ourselves to just and respectful relationships within our congregation and our neighborhood.

Celebrations / Joys and Concerns *God's blessing on you. God's blessing on you.
God's blessing, dear friends. God's blessing on you.*

➤ *Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary (repeat)*

Call to Worship – Lenten Liturgy

Anointed before his death by a faithful woman disciple,

but betrayed by a self-serving disciple, Jesus confronted death.

But through his death on the cross and the power of the resurrection,

in faith we believe that Christ has made us his own.

And so with shouts of joy we declare God's praise

for the Lord has done great things for us.

✠Gathering Prayer and Words of Hope

O God, you are the giver of wonderful things. You gave us life. You have filled our lives with family and friends. You lavish us with your grace. You have given us this day to add to the many we have shared. You have given us Jesus. Help us grow in our understanding and appreciation of just how much you love us.

Open our hearts that our worship today might be an act of praise and thanksgiving for all you have done, O God and all you are doing.

Almighty God, forgive us for resigning ourselves to the evils around and within us, for throwing up our hands and saying, *"There is nothing I can do."*

Forgive us for giving in to discouragement and compromise, for doubting the power of your resurrection. Grant us wisdom – grant us courage – grant us hope – as we seek to live lives of faithfulness, confidence and resurrection joy. Amen

Thanks be to our loving God who has mercy upon us, pardons and delivers us from all our sins and gives us time to amend our life.

➤ *Bless the Lord (seated – repeat)*

PWS&D Sharing **Lilawati Stands Against Child Marriage**

Sixteen-year-old Lilawati Kumari is an active participant in the Adolescent Girls Group classes in her village. Facilitated by the Duncan Hospital in northern India, these sessions explore crucial gender justice issues. In one class, Lilawati learned about early marriage, its effects, prevention, and the helpline number people could call for help.

At the same time, her parents were considering arranging her marriage. When Lilawati found out, she stood her ground, *"I aspire to pursue my education and fulfill my dreams, not to have my life predetermined in this way."*

Through conversations with her parents about child marriage, the laws against it, and its effects on girls, Lilawati helped them understand the negative impact of early marriage on a child's life, and on the broader society. They are now supportive of Lilawati as she pursues her education.

"I have taken the first step in my family and will be a role model to other girls so that they can take a stand against child marriage in their homes and work towards fulfilling their dreams," she shares.

Thank you for faithfully responding to Christ's call to raise awareness on gender issues and create a more equitable and just world for girls.

➤ ***We lay our broken world in sorrow at your feet*** **202**

✠Prayer for Understanding **Kathy Bracken**

Extravagant God pour out your love and mercy on us this day. Hear our prayers – open our hearts and minds to know the joy of your presence revealed in scripture today. Prepare us by the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen

Scripture

Isaiah 43:16-21 [OT 672]

Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: *Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. 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. The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.*

Psalm 126 responsive / displayed

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy;

then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them."

The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb.

May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

Philippians 3:4b-14 [NT 198]

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ.

More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.

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 make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

John 12:1-8 [NT 106]

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the

money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.)

Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

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

Message

Today's message from Isaiah reminds the Babylonian exiles that God is with them and that God is doing *something*. But what exactly? We know that God is with us in Christ Jesus – our faith affirms this, however we have difficulty seeing what God is thinking, what God is up to, what God is doing – we do not always perceive it.

"Thus says the LORD," intones the poet-prophet, relating God's words to the people, as he names God: *Redeemer, Creator, and King*. *The Redeemer* who brought the people out of slavery, redeeming them from their captors. *The Creator* who formed Israel as a people through the act of redemption; a people whose purpose is to declare God's praise. *The King* who demonstrates power by ruling the waters of the Reed Sea and crushing the empire. The mighty actions of God in the past are called upon and remembered as the basis for the people's confidence in God's new promise. The people are reminded of their ongoing relationship with God. God is constantly acting on their behalf. God speaks words and does deeds and brings about events – active all the time. The people can be secure in knowing that God is with them and they can be certain that God is doing something among them.

The titles that the poet-prophet in the book of Isaiah uses are ones we use as well. Jesus is our *Redeemer* – the one who delivers us from our slavery to sin and death. God is our *Creator*, not only because we are made by God, but also because we are a new creation in Christ and become Christ's church through his redemption of us. We also name Christ as our *King*, not an ordinary king, but one who seeks relationship with us, who reaches out, who is more interested in saving others than in saving himself. Jesus Christ is a king who changes everything.

We remember the amazing actions of God in the past – actions of redemption and justification in the lives of the people of Israel as they escaped from Egyptian slavery and Babylonian exile. We remember the life of Jesus – the teaching, the healing, the forgiveness. We remember the sacrifice of Jesus and the Easter morning victory of resurrection. We need to remember these foundational acts of God as the basis of our faith. Without the past to assure us, the future would seem uncertain indeed! Yet the

words of the prophet ring out: *"Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old."*

That can't be right, can it? What is the prophet talking about? What can God mean in delivering those words through his servant, Isaiah? What former things are to be forgotten? Should the people interpret the former things as those horrifying events before the destruction of Jerusalem and the time at the beginning of the exile? Can they forget the preaching of judgment that was spoken? Should they instead think farther back and seek to wipe from memory the great salvation events of their past – the Exodus from Egypt? Surely no one could expect them to forget such a central feature in Israel's symbolic world. Yet the words hang in the air – confusing, forceful, disturbing.

The same words ring in our ears this morning causing just as much confusion. We remember fondly what we know of the history of this community of faith – a humble beginning on Stanley Street – Church School classes in the basement of the manse – the building of the church hall – the arsonist's fire that, while frightening and destructive, also became an opportunity for rallying together – and memories continue to be formed. We cannot live in the past. We are not only a church with history. God is not static or stuck in some moment in time. We are disturbed perhaps because one thing we often feel safe about is *the past* – the former things give us confidence, but they can also hold us back – replacing faith with a false sense of control and privilege. Dwelling on the things of old can be paralyzing and destructive.

The words that follow God's message about the former things tell us to look at today, since God is *about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?* And Paul, knowing and admitting to his own fragile faith, commits to *forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead...*

I think this reminds us that the glory days of the past were not really our accomplishment but God's. Recalling the history of the church is not recalling our action but reminds us of how we have been privileged to participate in God's work in the world. Don't look to the past with longing because nothing we do can bring that time back – God demands our participation in this time – in this place. *"God is doing a new thing, now it springs forth..."*

For the people in exile, God promises a new act of deliverance. God is now announcing that something new is happening, perhaps more amazing than the mighty deeds of the past. God proclaims release from captivity that will also involve a new wandering through the wilderness – a wilderness that will be transformed into a place of abundance because of God's presence with the people. All of this will be done by God, not because of the faithfulness of the people – on the contrary, the people have forgotten to pray – have

failed to participate in appropriate rituals to acknowledge God's power and importance in their lives. They have come to God with their problems until God is overwhelmed with their despair. Yet God promises that a new thing springs forth in their midst.

Can we believe that God's promise is also for us – for me as an individual setting forth into the wilderness of retirement – for you as a congregation anticipating a future that is as yet not fully imagined? What new thing is God promising in your midst? How can we continue to share and encourage the gospel in uncertain times? How can we continue to participate in God's hopeful actions among the poor and marginalized in Victoria – in Haiti – in Malawi – in so many places we could name? What vision of the future of the church will we be asked to cultivate and cherish as much as we love the church of our memory? As I look around me, I continually see new things springing forth – I don't always know exactly what fruit they will bear – how to proceed – how it all works for good in the kingdom of God, but they spring forth none the less!

Much of our experience in the world is uncertain and our faith is perhaps aptly described by Martin Buber as *holy insecurity* since we do not know all that God is and often fail to perceive what God does and is doing. We are relatively confident of all the *holy* stuff: that God loves us; that God has done miraculous things; that Jesus teaches and heals us; that the power of God's spirit is always with us. We are, however, *insecure* about many concerns: what does God's love mean for me? What about miracles today and what does it mean to be healed? How do I understand the teachings of Christ? Where is the evidence of God's spirit? Insecurity and uncertainty are all about what we cannot know for sure, what we cannot see – do not perceive.

We can, however, be securely confident that God is with us and that God is acting in the world among us. Today's messages from Isaiah and Paul encourage us to confidently move away from *the former things – straining forward to what lies ahead* – knowing that God is doing a new thing. Despite our uncertainty, let us hear and perceive with hope the good news that the Holy One, is *doing a new thing; now it springs forth.... Amen*

➤ *When God restored our common life*

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✠ Offering and Prayer

At the dinner party for Jesus in Bethany, Mary anointed Christ with expensive perfume, pouring out her love and devotion. Jesus accepted Mary's gift gladly and graciously. Trust that Christ will never reject our gifts, offered with love and devotion, so let us present our offering with glad and generous hearts.

Gracious God, even as Mary poured out her love for Jesus, he was preparing to pour out his life on the cross for her and for us all. We are grateful for such love, given and received, then given again. Accept the gifts we bring and anoint them with your Spirit so that they will flow into the world, refreshing others with your mercy and love. Amen

Celebrating Our Common Faith (The Apostles' Creed 539)

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

Gathering at the Lord's Table

The celebration of communion is always a festival of friends – where we gather around the table with all our hopes and dreams, longing for a glimpse of the holy. It is here, where bread is broken and the cup is shared, that we can be most truly ourselves – seeing ourselves and others as children of the living God. Here, that which is earthly becomes divine and that which is human becomes more than has ever been dreamed. Come to the table – all are welcome. Christ invites us to meet him here.

✠ 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 our Creator God.

It is good to give God thanks and praise.

Gracious and loving God, we praise and thank you – you are the creator of all goodness and the source of abundance... In the beginning, your Spirit danced on the waters and brought us life. In your generosity, you created a garden of delights and nourishment – you called us to live with respect in creation and to care for one another.

You brought your people out of slavery into a land of milk and honey – flowing with streams of living water and planted with groves of olive trees.

When we turned away from you – living in greed and violence – you sent us prophets to call us back and remind us to live for a day when no one would be hungry, and we would live together in justice and peace.

And so, with every generation before us, with 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.*

Generous God, we give you thanks for Jesus, who came to live with us... We remember how he called his disciples to follow him and become fishers of all people. He told stories and taught us to pray. We thank you that he loved eating and drinking around tables where strangers became friends and where outcasts were included.

Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried, but you raised him from the dead – and like his disciples we meet him again in the breaking of bread as we gather around his table.

We remember and give you thanks, O God, that as he sat at the table with friends – sharing the fruit of the vine and the harvest of the fields – he took bread, blessed it, broke it and shared it, saying: "Take – eat – this is my body which is for you. Do this to remember me."

When supper was over, 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."

As we gather in the promise of Christ, we proclaim 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.*

Pour out your grace upon us, O God, and upon the simple gifts of this meal. Send your Spirit on us and on what we do here as we gather at the Lord's Table to eat and drink of the living Word. May we be one in Christ and one with your vision of peace and plenty. In Christ, with Christ, through Christ – by the power of the Holy Spirit – all glory is yours, now and forever.

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 who suffered for our injustices is now present to us in this bread.

The one whose body was hung on a cross is now offered to 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, as we rise from your table we listen for your voice in the silence of our hearts and offer our prayers to you...

We think of those people in our lives who have loved us with a generous love. We think of those who, like Mary, have not counted the cost of what they have given – of those who given all of themselves as Christ gave himself for the world and we thank you for them. We ask you to bless them – we pray that you will make us like them...

Into the days ahead, O God, help us to have a focus – a purpose that is beyond that of just getting by – beyond that of just trying to make it through another week. Show us we pray what you would have us do – reveal to us our own personal and unique ministry and help us to do it graciously...

As we move from our time of worship to our congregational meeting may we welcome the gifts of all among us and dedicate our own gifts to your glory without regard to the amount or measure by which others serve. May we see in each face the reflection of God's glory and hear from each voice the good news of God's love.

Generous God, you gather us together as a church. May we be the church at its finest – with fond and caring friendships, creative conversations, and decisions that bear witness to divine presence in our midst – to the Holy Spirit's promise for our future. We join our voices to sing in prayer...

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

Annual Congregational Meeting

Call to Order

- Recording Secretary
- Adoption of Minutes:
17 March 2024, 15 September 2024, 22 December 2024
- Business Arising from Minutes
- Review of Mission Statement, Congregational Statement, and Welcome
- Presentation of Ministries
- Finance
 - ~ Auditors Report for 2023
 - ~ Presentation of 2025 Budget
 - ~ Treasurer, Trustees and Signing Officers
- Report from Interim Moderator
- New Business
 - ~ financial statements for 2024 will be shared/reviewed when available

Adjournment

Blessing

In the days ahead attempt to love others, and should Christ call you, then even dare to go tenderly but firmly where angels fear to tread. Try loving yourself more, even as God has loved you. By God's grace, you are much more than you think you are. And may the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the nurturing community of the Spirit embrace us all. Amen

➤ *Go now in peace*