

11 May 2025 (The Rev. Cathy Victor)

(Steve Sturgess and the Balm in Gilead Band are the musicians for the day)

Welcome/Announcements/Land Acknowledgement **Kittie Ure** (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 W̱SÁNEĆ. 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.

➤ ***Don't be afraid (repeat)***

Call to Worship

We gather today seeking the peace that Christ gives.

We gather, in spite of many a conflict, many a doubt, within our souls.

We gather longing for the breath of God's Spirit to give us courage and renewal.

Come, Christ Jesus, be our guest. Bless us through the power of your Spirit and give us the courage to live as your disciples day by day.

Let us worship God, our Good Shepherd.

Gathering Prayer / the Lord's Prayer / Words of Hope (Assurance of Forgiveness)

Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud, your love is at work in all of creation. The stars and the moon sing of your glory. The sun and the rain proclaim your constant care. The order and richness of nature whispers to us of your glory.

God of grace and truth, we come to worship and adore you Shepherd, Saviour, Servant, Lamb, Storm and Stillness, Breath and Dove, Thunder, Tempest, Whirlwind, Fire, Comfort, Counsellor, Presence, Love, come among us here. Nudge us, challenge us, restore and renew us to serve you in each of our particular ministries.

Loving God, whose ear is always ready to listen, who laughs with us and cries with us, who feeds us good things, and who guides us in the way we should go, come and be present with us, and show us how to be the disciples you would have us to be.

Holy Spirit, we need your encouragement and your comfort. We confess that at time we have pushed you away and refused your redemption in our lives. We want to face your new day with life and hope in our hearts, but the events of our own lives can weigh us down. In the silence help us to place our lives in your hands...

Shepherd of love; set us free - that we might walk your new pathways - alive with grace and certain of your infinite mercy. Be gracious to all who stray from your way. Pour your cleansing

waters of forgiveness and healing upon each one of us, flow through us to touch the world we live in, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray

... 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

People of God! Hear the Good news! Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ, and Christ died for us. Christ rose for us. Christ reigns in power – for us. Christ prays for us. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation! The old life is gone, a new life has begun! Friends in Christ, believe the gospel. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven people. Thanks be to God!

➤ ***Saviour like a shepherd lead us***

485

Prayer for Understanding **(Anne Krauss)**

Holy God, Word made flesh, let us come to this Word open to being surprised. Silence our agendas, banish our assumptions, cast out our casual detachment. Confound our expectations; clear the cobwebs of our hearts, penetrate the corners of our hearts with this Word. We know that you can. We pray that you will. And we wait with great anticipation. Amen

Scripture

Acts 9:36-43 (NT 128)

Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs.

Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, "Please come to us without delay."

So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them.

Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up." Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive.

This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

Psalms 23 (NRSV, 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

Revelation 7:9-17 (NT 249-250)

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, singing, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?"

I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows."

Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

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. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

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

Message - The Good Shepherd

One of the earliest images that Christians dared to make was an image of a shepherd. The Greeks were known to use a similar image in their art, so it could be passed off as such if needed, and wouldn't be a give away.

Christians had to be careful to not be detected, or they could be killed. So any type of art was very secretive, very symbolic and could be easily understood as just something pretty. For example some of the images often used were peacocks, doves, and a phoenix. Peacocks represented resurrection due to them getting new feathers every year. Doves represented the Holy Spirit and a phoenix dies and rises from the ashes again. An anchor - well, to go fishing is fine, and a fish, run of the mill image really. But it wasn't. In Greek, the first letters of Jesus Christ Son of God put together say ichthus which means fish. And an anchor, well if you look at one, you can see a cross shape in it. There were no depictions of the passion, of the cross or anything obvious until around the year 1,000.

The Catacombs were especially important in early Christian art.

The Roman's knew that Christians were buried in catacombs just like many others. It was no secret. One catacomb that I got to visit a couple of years ago was the Catacomb of Priscilla. It's on the Appian Way in Rome. It has several stories worth of passageways, that go on for miles and miles. In the passageways there aren't too many images, but in little tomb chambers - small rooms off to a side where a family could be laid to rest. -Those spaces were often decorated with some of the above symbols, or someone with hands lifted in prayer. Or a shepherd, and some sheep. The little paintings there, are some of the oldest pieces of Christian art.

So why, you might be wondering, do I tell you all of this? The Good Shepherd image is one of the oldest and most closely connected to the early church and is reflected in all of the scriptures that were read this morning. We heard the 23rd Psalm - a psalm many of us know by heart. The lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. Our good Shepherd is watching us, caring for us. Goodness

and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. A better translation for the word used in Hebrew for Follow is actually pursue. God the Good Shepherd pursues us with love all the days of our lives.

Every year in the assigned readings of scripture that we usually follow, this is Good Shepherd Sunday. It is a significant focus for us to hold on to. The window behind me depicts Jesus as the Good Shepherd, leading the sheep, holding a lamb in his arms. The Gospel of John that we heard is a very different kind of gospel than the other three. Matthew, Mark and Luke all rely on similar original texts and tell the story of Jesus' life in their own fashion. They are stories with history and often share similar events in Jesus' life.

But John is a book of theology. At the time that it was written believers were being persecuted, shut out of the synagogues. It was an anxious time. John's goal is to tell us just who Jesus is. And the Jewish authorities get specific with Jesus in the passage that we read. Come on Jesus, be straight with us. Just who are you? The timing of Jesus being in the Temple before his arrest is different than the other gospels. Jesus is there for the Festival of Dedication which basically is Hanukkah, when the oil in the temple lamp miraculously didn't run out. Jesus is the Light. Jesus says to them: You don't understand who I am because you are not my sheep. The Sheep know my voice. And no one can snatch them away from me.

I imagine you've seen depictions of Jesus the Good Shepherd with a lamb around his neck and he is holding tightly onto the legs of that lamb. Think of yourself as that lamb. Jesus is saying 'I've got you.' He will not let you go.

Jesus doesn't answer them explicitly. There's an idiom in their question to him, that basically means, how long will you annoy us? Just who are you? But he cannot say that he is the messiah, the son of God. That would be blasphemous and he would immediately be stoned to death. The beginning of John tells us that that is just who Jesus is. Jesus does say that he and the Father are connected, and work together. They are united. And the Jewish leaders are still angry. Jesus manages to escape.

The incarnation of God in Jesus means that God is with us and palpably available to us. We have access to God, not experienced before Jesus. Jesus heals, gives life and offers us grace upon grace. John is all about telling us who Jesus is: He is the good shepherd, he is the livingwater and the light of the world. He is manna from heaven- that is - he will always provide. And we belong to him. We are the sheep of his pasture.

In the Acts reading, we heard about Tabitha being brought back to life. Jesus equips us to bring new life to others too. It's actually a notable fact that the story about Tabitha (Or in Greek, Dorcas) is the only place in the New Testament where a woman is explicitly called a disciple using a female noun for disciple in Greek. I just had to include that fact. - I'll move on :-)

Last week we heard John 21 read where Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him. And Peter says yes 3 times. And each time Jesus responds saying. Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my

sheep. And that is precisely what we are called to do too. That is why we are here. Ministers are often called Pastors. Do you know what the word pastor means?

Pastor means shepherd. And we are all called to care for the sheep. I am a pastor. Laura is a pastor. You are all pastors. Each one of you. Tend my sheep, Jesus tells us. The window to my right behind the piano shows Jesus knocking on the door. It is based on a painting by Holman Hunt that hangs in the Keble chapel at Oxford University in England, And refers to the Revelation passage that says "Behold I stand at the door and knock." There are other versions of it but the idea is to let Jesus come in to your life. But I've read another way to understand it.

Maybe Jesus is standing at the door asking you to come and help him take care of the sheep, the flock that has wandered off. Not all of Jesus' sheep are sitting within these church walls. Some are out there in distress, lost and alone.

I will leave you with two stories. In one of my first churches near Ottawa my clerk of session was a sheep farmer. One time I went to a sheep auction with him to see how it all worked and to see all the sheep. He eventually realized how much I love them. Each farmer's sheep were enclosed within a fenced in area together. They were each brought out one at a time to be sold. But when one sheep was left in one fenced in area alone it couldn't stand it, and from a standing position, it jumped high over the fence to be with another flock. Sheep cannot stand being alone like that. They need each other. They are frightened easily.

The other story is about what happens when a sheep falls over, say - in a field . Maybe it tripped over a rock or there was hole in the ground. If it lands on its back it cannot get up by itself (I've fallen and I can't get up ha!) When that happens the sheep is called a cast sheep. You remember the phrase be not cast down? It's from Psalm 37 and tells us 'Do not be cast down.' It doesn't mean don't be sad. To be a cast sheep means that in order to get back up you need the shepherd to massage your legs and belly to get the blood circulation going and then the shepherd lifts you slowly to an upright position so that it won't get killed by a wolf. In the psalm it says that the Lord upholds you with his hand. The good shepherd keeps a close watch. We need shepherds - pastors - to feed, to lead, lift up and keep watch over one another - the sheep of his flock. - here and out there.

Jesus says, 'My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me. No one can snatch them from me.' And Jesus asks us too: Do you love me? Feed my sheep. Feed my lambs.

➤ *What wondrous love is this?*

242

Offering and Prayer

There are some who have much and some who have little. We are called to serve one another. In compassion we are called to share what we have, that others may know God's grace, new life, and joy. Let us continue to worship God as we present our offerings.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

306

Living God, in Jesus Christ you make all things new. You transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace. Receive these gifts that we humbly lay before you. Transform them into instruments of your healing, of your generous grace and abundance - but most of all - of your love. Through Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Pastoral Prayers

Shepherding God, we thank you for your tender and reassuring care for us. Teach us to be good shepherds in the places you have called us to: in our homes, our places of work, in all our relationships. Help us to work with you, to restore those who have lost their balance in their lives. Help us to serve you and care for the world that you love.

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. 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.

This Mother's Day we pray for your comfort and healing for those mothers who have lost a child, whether from disease, accident or other traumatic events. We pray for those who are estranged from a child as well.

Divine healer, repair the wounds and sorrows. Those who are faced with difficult situations and heavy burdens. For travellers, leaders of churches and nations. For those whose lives and dreams have been shattered. Those who live in the midst of violence and long for peace. May the angels in their beauty, bless them.

Loving and Holy God, we pray for ourselves as well. In the silence we offer you our own needs and listen for your voice...

Unravel the tangles into peace so that we may be more tightly fastened to you. 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 breath – and all our acts are prayer. Amen

➤ *My shepherd is the king of love*

691

Blessing

Door of the sheepfold, open to your people! Light of the world, shine before us! Bread of life, feed us! Good Shepherd, show us the way! May the Holy One bless and guide you. May the Holy One shine in you and be known through you. May the Holy One open the way before you, and journey with you. Amen

➤ *Go now in peace*

622