

Welcome/Announcements/Land Acknowledgement **Kittie Ure**

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 that we gather with gratitude on traditional and unceded Coast Salish Territory of Lkwungen people. We pray that past and present injustices can be reconciled as we commit ourselves again to just and respectful relationships.

➤ *Don't be afraid (repeat)*

Call to Worship [from Psalm 67]

May God be gracious to us and bless us;

May God's face shine upon us.

May your ways, O God, be known throughout all the earth, and your salvation experienced everywhere.

Let the peoples of the world praise you, O God; let all people praise you and worship you, O God.

May our worship be an offering of wonder and adoration for all of God's gifts.

➤ *Praise the Lord with the sound of trumpet* **466**

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

Gracious God, we praise you for blessing us. You have not only blessed our lives with Jesus, but you continue to pour blessings upon us and within us through the Holy Spirit. The gracious gift of your Spirit continues to teach and guide us. Today we rejoice over Jesus' gift of peace - his peace which is beyond our human understanding. We receive this gift with thanksgiving and pray that our lives may reflect divine peace and love.

Why is it that so often we prefer to hold on to our insecurities and fears rather than take hold of your gift of peace? You promise us so much, yet we put our faith in what we can see and touch, possess and control. We confess that our lives become so complicated that we forget what you have said and done and promised. When we seek our identity outside of you, forgive us, Lord.

Merciful God, out of love for us, you promise to knit together the wounded parts of our lives with your peace. When our anxieties and fears are stronger than our belief in your promises, forgive us.

Through the gift of your Spirit, O God, you give us the means to serve as Jesus served, to love as Jesus loved, to live as Jesus lived. When our insistence on doing our own thing stifles the promptings of your Spirit, forgive us. Help us to let go of all that hinders our acceptance of your peace, your love and your very life through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. This we pray in the name of Jesus who encourages 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***

God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. The good news is that in Jesus Christ we are forgiven – we receive his peace; a peace such as the world cannot give. Thanks be to God!

➤ ***God of mercy, God of grace***

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✠ Prayer for Understanding **Jim Jeatt**

Extravagant God pour out your love and mercy on us. Hear our prayers – open our eyes to see new things. Open our minds to think fresh thoughts. Open our spirits to follow your Spirit as we are led by scripture today. Amen

Scripture **Acts 16:9-15** [NT 136]

During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "*Come over to Macedonia and help us.*" When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days.

On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "*If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.*" And she prevailed upon us.

Revelation 21:10 and 21:22 – 22:5**[NT 259]**

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.

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

John 14:23-29 **[NT 109]**

Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me. I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe."

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

Message

In today's reading from the Gospel of John, Jesus is saying goodbye again – trying to leave his followers with something that will help them after he is gone. He wants to encourage and reassure them, to help them to realize that what he has taught them will live beyond his physical life and that they will never be alone in their discipleship. Jesus is saying goodbye, and, in his farewell, he gives his followers two gifts beyond measure. First, he promises the Holy Spirit who will teach and remind and comfort and nurture, then he offers peace.

The nature of Christian faith is that we are always being called to further maturity – it is a process, a way of being, a life's work. It is a relationship with God and because it is a relationship, it is alive – always changing, growing, forming and reforming. For the disciples, their relationship with God is alive in their relationship with Jesus. He is their focus from whom they draw insight and direction. Jesus tells them that this cannot last forever. He has been telling them all along that he will return to the Father. As the time for him to leave them draws closer, Jesus promises another focus, the Holy Spirit.

Unlike Jesus, who is other than themselves, the Holy Spirit will be found inside each disciple – inside each of us. The spiritual force of God who encourages, supports, teaches and intercedes is promised to the disciples so that their hearts will not be troubled. Although Jesus is going away, he is also coming to them in a new form – they need not be afraid but ought to rejoice and believe. This is what it means to be in relationship with a living God.

Jesus is going away and coming to them, coming to us. Jesus turns his goodbye upside down in promising the Holy Spirit, just as he has been turning many beliefs and practices on their head throughout his ministry. He modifies a common expression to remind the disciples that he is not of this world: *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.* Although this is an everyday saying of the time, more than the conventional meaning of shalom is intended. In our celebration of the Lord's Supper, we use bread and wine, ordinary things of the world, which Christ has made special. Here we are reminded that Jesus is the Prince of Peace – God's Messiah issuing a royal pronouncement – offering a divine choice. An ordinary greeting made special – its meaning changed forever as Christ speaks the words.

How is the peace that Jesus offers different from the peace that the world offers? Worldly peace so frequently comes through coercion. In fact, what we call peace is often little more than security – a pale and meager replacement for the fullness Jesus bestows. Dorothee Sölle is a theologian whose writing always challenges me. In one of her books, she writes that *to be alive is to be vulnerable. To be faithful is to resist the temptation of*

security. It is appealing to be secure, to be in control – even to have the illusion of it, to be untouchable and unmoved by the forces around but Jesus does not offer security, he offers peace. We tend to settle for security because it is safe, but Jesus calls us to something riskier and more hopeful – Jesus calls us to peace.

It is natural to desire security – it satisfies a basic human need. In our world today, we are desperate for a sense of security, a sense that our well-being and safety are guaranteed. We see political instability all around and wonder if *one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth* is just a foolish pipe dream. Security seems difficult enough to achieve – why even bother to seek peace. Peace requires so much more – imagines something that ventures more because of our confident hope in the divine. And we cannot receive and share the peace of Christ unless we resist the temptation of security – cannot engage in the loving web of God's desire for peace and wholeness without being changed by it.

Think of Paul and his conversion on the road – a blinding light – a man brought to his knees and sent in a new direction by the power of the Holy Spirit. The one who was an enemy becomes God's instrument. Think of Peter who meets Simon, the tanner – a Gentile who handled animal carcasses every day – physically and ritually unclean. Peter is changed through a vision of what God deems possible. Peter no longer sought to hinder divine inclusiveness – inspired by the Holy Spirit to a new way of peace and wholeness.

Today we hear again of Paul's adventures as he is sent in a new direction – unencumbered and ready for whatever is given by God. Paul receives his vision, his call, and sets sail immediately – his ministry in Europe prompted by the Holy Spirit continues to push him across boundaries in the name of the risen Lord. There are no limits. Paul continues with the passion of Christ – the Holy Spirit within him – to be as radical as ever, taking the message wherever God calls.

This morning Paul comes to the gate by the river – a place of prayer. It is a quiet Sabbath day when routines are suspended – people are perhaps more open and available to visitors. The women have gathered at the river. Here, with Paul, we meet Lydia...

Who is she?

Lydia was a Gentile businesswoman and *God-fearer* (that is – someone curious about Judaism, committed to learning more, but not a believer in Jesus Christ) from the Greek city of Thyatira, which was famous for its reddish-purple dye. She was on a business trip nearly 500 kilometers from home in the Roman colony of Philippi. We don't know whether Lydia sold purple dye or purple textiles, or whether she was an owner, importer, retailer, producer or laborer. But a *purple seller* was definitely somebody who was

marketing a luxury product to the wealthy elite. In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, for example, the rich man was *dressed in purple and lived in luxury every day*.

In general terms, Lydia is not unlike many people we might meet any day of the week in Victoria: by the ocean, on the street, even gathered at the river – people who live in an affluent community – many of whom are involved in thriving businesses. People who believe in God – even worship God – often without truly coming to faith in Christ.

On that Sabbath morning something special happened – something that preachers and teachers yearn for. *The Lord opened her heart to listen....* Whenever the gospel is spoken, we wonder if anyone is listening – can anyone hear – are any hearts open to the word of God? In our churches these days we are for the most part doing what is called *preaching to the choir* – to the already converted. And yet, one never knows who might be seated there when the Spirit moves a listening heart. Our task, like Paul's, is to proclaim the message with all the warmth and freshness and passion of Christ knowing that it is the Holy Spirit who brings it to flower and fruit.

God opens her heart, and Lydia listens eagerly to the news Paul shares – the good news of Jesus Christ. This is God's amazing work into which Paul is invited – into which we also are invited. How are we participating in sharing the peace of Christ which is beyond the limited scope of *this world*?

Lydia was clearly a woman of means, agency and authority. There are no men in this story – no husband, father, son, or brother. Maybe she was divorced or widowed. When the good news is shared with her that day by the river Lydia listens, believes and responds. She is baptized and embraces new life. Not only does she believe, but her whole household with her. Think of the influence she has on her family, servants, employees and friends. She shares her faith with her entire household and then opens her home to fellow believers.

Lydia *prevailed upon* Paul and his companions to stay with her – a large group of foreign men. Lydia's house was large enough to accommodate Paul's entourage, which at a minimum included Paul, Silas, Timothy, Luke, and *the brothers*. Luke says that they stayed in Philippi for *some days*. That's a lot of logistics – a lot of beds and breakfasts to provide!

After the apostles were imprisoned, and then released with strict orders to leave town, they *returned to Lydia's house*. A brave and risky decision on her part, given that the apostles had just been stripped, beaten, and jailed by a violent mob because of their preaching about a strange sect that Lydia herself had joined. She was effectively harbouring criminals.

Lydia has an open heart – a heart opened by the power of God. She receives the freedom to be God's child. Lydia – like Peter and Paul and so many others – received the peace that Jesus offers – peace that is not like that of the world – peace that is far beyond security – peace that changes the direction of her life. Lydia – like Peter and Paul – is encountered by Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. Now she is truly in relationship with the living God.

When Lydia gathered at the river on that quiet morning to worship and pray, I wonder if she had any idea or any hope of what God had in store for her. When we gather for worship do we come ready to listen to what scripture will reveal – ready to receive in our hearts the peace that Jesus offers? Are we eagerly anticipating the power of the Holy Spirit at work? Are you excited about the possibility of God opening your heart? And when it happens how will we – how do we – react?

Jesus says Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. When we stop to appreciate the power of the Holy Spirit to change lives it is no wonder his offer of peace is then followed by words of reassurance: *Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.* The peace of Christ is a risk. Yet Jesus tells us that it need not trouble us too much since he is with us – God is with us – the Holy Spirit is with us. We can share in Christ's peace unafraid – rejoice and believe. Amen

➤ *Spirit of the living God*

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✠ Offering and Prayer

God has created a world of great diversity, full of wonder and potential. Let us honour God's gifts to us in Jesus and in each other as we present our offering in support of God's purposes in the world.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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O God, we bring our gifts to you. We present the work of our hands and our desire to serve. Let this sharing honour your vision of the Easter world. We pray in Christ's name. Amen

✠ Pastoral Prayers *God of mercy... **Hear our cry.***

Holy One, the earth and all creation belong to you. As we come before you in prayer, we are painfully aware that the earth itself is at risk, from the ways people live on it, and the conflicts we provoke among each other. We seek your healing and hope for the earth and all its creatures – for people of every nation.

God of healing and hope, we pray for peace with justice to emerge in war torn lands – in every place of conflict where power struggles put innocents at risk. We name in our hearts the people and places of greatest concern to us today...

Send your Spirit of wisdom and compassion to inspire leaders to work with each other to protect the innocent and restore order for the wellbeing of all. May your ways of truth and justice prevail in every heart and in every land.

*God of mercy... **Hear our cry.***

God of healing and hope, we pray for Presbyterian World Service and Development and its partners, and all groups offering aid and renewal in places where disaster or conflict have left people at risk. Support those who have lost homes, families and livelihoods to find the courage to go on. May those in safety have the compassion to share with those in need.

*God of mercy... **Hear our cry.***

God of healing and hope, we know that this land we call home faces conflict and pain, and that communities are divided by deep disagreements. We pray for healing and understanding to deepen between Indigenous people and those who settled this land with no thought for those who already called it home. Protect those who face racist attitudes and actions in daily life. Restore dignity and hope to those who have suffered injustice. Open our eyes to appreciate the creativity and courage in communities that feel unfamiliar to us. Open our hearts to build new relationships with each other and grow closer as neighbours and friends.

*God of mercy... **Hear our cry.***

God of healing and hope, we pray for the renewal of your creation and for the protection of species at risk. By your Spirit, teach us to change our ways when they are harmful to the earth, and inspire the ingenuity needed to find solutions to problems that seem so vast.

*God of mercy... **Hear our cry.***

God of healing and hope, we pray for those who know sickness or pain – all who live in grief, loneliness or anxiety – any who find these uncertain times overwhelming. In silence, we remember those for whom we have special concern...

By your Spirit, surround us with strength and love, equipping us to offer support for those whose lives are woven into ours. Knowing that Jesus walks with us day by day to see us through every challenge, we claim the healing and hope he offers in this time of prayer.

*God of mercy... **Hear our cry. Amen***

➤ ***Amigos de Cristo***

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Blessing

Take into the world – not an easy peace – not an insignificant peace – not a half-hearted peace – but the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ which you have received. And may the help of the Risen Christ, the wisdom of God, and the support of the Holy Spirit embrace us all. Amen

➤ ***Go now in peace***

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