

Welcome/Announcements/Land Acknowledgement **Lilian Sutherland** (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.

□ *Come, Holy Spirit (Gaither)*

Call to Worship

Come let us worship.

**We come with stories of our faith, ready to share.**

Come let us give thanks.

**We come with our abundance, ready to share.**

Come let us praise God.

**We come with open hearts, ready to share.**

Come, let us worship God.

□ *Rain down*

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

Holy One, you have prepared for those who love you blessings beyond human understanding. Free our minds and hearts to love you with our whole selves. May we be ready to receive your generosity which exceeds all expectation.

Most loving God, because you see through us and understand us better than we know ourselves, we bow before you with a sense of relief. With you there is no need for pretence and no ground for excuse. You see as we really are – filled with light and darkness – love and fear – faith and folly.

We need your searching glance to uncover everything that is suspect and all that is blatantly corrupt. We need too your truth which will lead us to divine grace. You promise the blessing of new life – forgiveness that annuls past offences and assures a fruitful future. Hear our silent confession, O God and in your mercy set us free...

Thank you, gracious God, for not dealing with us according to our sin, nor rewarding us according to our deeds. We give thanks that you are a pardoning God – generous in all things. We offer our prayers in the name of Jesus, who encourages us to say together...

***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*

Siblings in Christ, don't merely say, but fully trust that Jesus is the one who puts away all sin and grants new beginnings. Live now as the forgiven family of God. Thanks be to God!

□ *With the Lord as my guide*

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□ Prayer for Understanding Dennis Sutherland

**God of wisdom, by your Spirit, open our minds to your truth, our hearts to your gospel, and our hands so that we can do your will, in the name of Jesus, your Living Word. Amen**

Scripture 2 Kings 2:1-2 and 6-14 (OT 332)

Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, *"Stay here; for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel."*

But Elisha said, *"As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you."* So they went down to Bethel.

Then Elijah said to him, *"Stay here; for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan."*

But he said, *"As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you."* So the two of them went on.

Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground. When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, *"Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you."*

Elisha said, *"Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit."*

He responded, *"You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not."*

As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, *"Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!"* But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, saying, *"Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?"* When he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.

**Galatians 5:1 and 13-25** (NT 190)

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

**Luke 9:51-62** (NT 70)

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.

When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "*Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?*" But he turned and rebuked them.

Then they went on to another village. As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "*I will follow you wherever you go.*"

And Jesus said to him, "*Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.*" To another he said, "*Follow me.*"

But he said, "*Lord, first let me go and bury my father.*"

But Jesus said to him, *"Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."*

Another said, *"I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home."*

Jesus said to him, *"No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*

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

### Message

When we pray the Lord's Prayer we say, *"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."* The most significant part of the petition is *lead us* – implying our commitment to follow. *Lead us O Lord, we are following you.* We say this every week, perhaps without giving it much thought.

In his letter to the Galatian church, Paul talks about what discipleship means. He tells the people that they have been set free – free from adherence to details of the law – free from slavery that says, *"Do this, don't do that."* He tells the people they are free – free from an empty life of fleshy desires – free to love neighbour as self – free to be led by the Spirit. Paul says, *"If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit."* Again, we are talking about being led – about being a disciple – one who follows. Paul reminds us of the freedom of discipleship but in that freedom is the commitment to be guided – to follow.

Elisha knows what it means to follow. Elisha is traveling with Elijah – he is following his master. Elijah tells Elisha to stay behind, that the journey is too difficult, but the disciple renews his commitment saying, *"I will not leave you."* They continue their trek and again the teacher tells his student to stay behind. Elisha promises not to leave, so long as Elijah lives – he will follow him to the bitter end. In the final scene, Elijah is taken up into heaven. Elisha, grief stricken and uncertain, picks up the mantle – the cloak and task of his master. He follows the path that has been set before him.

The demands of discipleship are great. For Elisha it includes picking up where his master leaves off and continuing the work to which the Lord has called him. The demands of discipleship are exactly the concern of the gospel lesson today. In it, we hear three sayings about what it means to follow Jesus.

In the beginning of his ministry when Jesus called disciples to follow him, they dropped everything and came right away – those were simpler times. Today we hear Jesus making sure that those who follow know how costly that decision will be. Perhaps Jesus exaggerates to jolt his listeners out of complacency or perhaps they really need to see that following the way of Christ will not be easy. Three people express their desire to follow Jesus and all three are discouraged – all three are told that discipleship is more than they bargained for.

Someone says to Jesus, *"I will follow you wherever you go"* and Jesus responds by telling the person that even wild birds and animals have places of shelter, in contrast to the Son of Man. The Son of Man is homeless, without even the basic security of a dwelling place. Not only that, but Jesus implies that those who follow him will share this fate. They too must give up their dependence on having a place in society – they must surrender their attachment to possessions – they must relinquish their sense of security. Those who follow Jesus will not have a resting place, a position to which they can resort. We are to launch continually into new ways of being Christian. *"I will follow you wherever you go"* costs more than we realize.

Jesus calls out, *"Follow me,"* and the individual says, *"Sure, just give me a few days to bury my father."* This seems a reasonable request to us – in addition to the human emotions involved, the person has a responsibility to his or her family – a solemn obligation to bury relatives – an honour and a duty. Yet Jesus responds with harsh words, denying the authority of any such cultural obligations and emotional ties. He suggests that those who are not following him are already among the dead so they might as well handle the burial chores. Family ties – highly valued though they might be – are superseded by the demands of following Jesus. Proclaiming the good news must have priority. We must answer a call to tell the good news immediately. *"Follow me,"* asks more than we imagine.

Another says, *"I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home. It will only take a minute. Elijah allowed Elisha to do the very same thing before he began his discipleship. I'm sure you understand Jesus, I can't just take off without saying good-bye."* But Jesus does not understand, does not acquiesce to the request. Instead, he draws a line in the sand and says, *"Look, you're either for me or against me. No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."* Granted, a Palestinian plow required constant attention; diverting one's attention even for a moment could lead to disaster. Jesus demands constancy and concentration in proclaiming his message; once committed to Christ, there is no going back. *"I will follow you, Lord"* sacrifices more than we dream.

Jesus comes down from the transfiguration experience on the mountain and turns toward Jerusalem – sets his face toward Jerusalem. This is a turning point in his ministry and may account for the increasing demands of discipleship. As he sets a new direction, Jesus makes plans to head through Samaria – hostile territory. He does not take the easier route – the less controversial path – the way most of us might choose. Instead, he journeys among strangers who are unwelcoming and potentially dangerous. The disciples want to teach the Samaritans a lesson for their discourtesy – for their unwillingness to recognize Jerusalem as the true temple and Jesus as Lord. Jesus, however, follows his own earlier instructions to the disciples, that when they are not received, they should simply move on. Later in the gospel, Samaritans serve as positive examples for Jesus' followers. Old animosities and past hostility cannot define life in the new community gathered around Jesus.

I have mixed feelings about following – about being a follower. Often, I am in a position of leadership, and I suppose I tend toward that naturally. There are times however, when I am happy to be led – relieved not to be the one in charge – satisfied to follow. I was thinking about that when I joined Sole Sisters – a large walk/run training group. I was nowhere near the beginning of the pack, and I didn't really know what I was doing – a follower in every sense of the word!

It wasn't always easy either – to keep up with the others – to run when told to run and walk when told to walk – to bend or stretch as directed – to do my homework and face the challenges posed by the leader. It wasn't easy but I signed up to be led and so I complied (for the most part) – to accede to all expectations as a follower in the process – and it served me well.

Jesus makes bold requests of those who wish to follow his path – expectations of each one of us as disciples. His words may seem unsympathetic, but they are words that invite us to consider our values and priorities. As followers of Jesus, we need to look ahead rather than back. We need to let go of familiar patterns – social requirements – and relational certainties to experience the greater joy of God's realm. Jesus' disciples need to let go of the need for vengeance. Everything that shrinks our world – imprisons us in the past – and ties us to habitual reactions must be jettisoned for the values God desires. I am not certain Jesus intends for us to forsake our families and obligations, but he does want us to see them in a new light – to love but love without possession – to own without greed – to save and yet to give generously – to care for loved ones but break out of patterns that stand in the way of God's vision for our life.

The movie *When Harry Met Sally* came out in 1989 – before Tristan was born! In that story, two people meet and have a relationship like many others with ups and downs over the course of several years. At first, they don't like each other much – gradually they become friends – and near the end of the movie they have a falling out. Sally is at a huge New Year's Eve party, filled with people she doesn't really want to be with and having a miserable time. Harry is alone, wandering the streets of New York, reflecting on his life and on his relationship with Sally. Suddenly his expression changes, he has decided something, and he breaks into a run. Harry sprints all the way to where Sally is just leaving the party – enthusiasm, excitement and pure joy light up his face. When Harry arrives, Sally plays it very cool, asking why he is there. Harry's words tumble out, *"When you finally decide who you want to spend the rest of your life with, you want the rest of your life to start as soon as possible."*

When we decide to follow Jesus, we are called to drop everything – to leave our longing for stuff and safety – to break with tradition and family roles – to look with hope into the future. When we decide that we want to spend the rest of our life with Jesus, we want the rest of our life to start as soon as possible. And, unlike the Hollywood tale, that journey may not be an easy one. As followers of Jesus, we are often called to take risks – to drop everything we expect out of life and follow a path

we could never have imagined. Discipleship involves major changes in behaviour and understanding – putting aside common wisdom and societal norms – to adopt the path that Jesus treads.

In these three encounters, Jesus calls us to leave behind one set of obligations and duties in order to take on a different set. Jesus calls us to unpack and leave behind nationalism and racism and social propriety in order to embrace a kingdom that includes everyone.

He invites us to leave behind selfish, narrow, localized devotion in order to put in our pack a sense of love and duty for the salvation of our broken world.

When Jesus set his face to Jerusalem, he turned his back on Nazareth – on the land around the Sea of Galilee – on his life as a carpenter – as a small-town teacher and preacher.

When Jesus set his face for Jerusalem, he knew he was going to his death – knew he was walking to the cross. And he invites us to go with him. He invites us – calls us to follow. He invites us to unpack all the small but heavy and burdensome things that keep us from loving God and each other completely and fully and passionately.

Jesus invites us to drop the burdens that weigh us down – to throw aside the cares and concerns that hold us back – to cast away the judgments and hatreds that turn us away from God.

Jesus invites us to empty our hands of everything so that we can take up our cross and gladly follow him. When we have empty hands – we can reach out to others. When we remove the hate from our hearts – we have room for love. When we take the judgment out of our eyes – we can see others as God sees us all: precious children in need of love and forgiveness.

We pray, *“Lead us, O Lord,”* – we have decided to spend the rest of our life with Jesus, and we are anxious and excited to get started! We are willing to follow – despite the cost – not an easy path – the way of the cross – but it is our path as disciples. **Amen**

*□ I have decided to follow Jesus*

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□ Offering and Prayer

The fruit of the Spirit includes kindness and generosity, gifts of God we enjoy. As we present our offering, may the Spirit fill us with generosity and multiply our kindness for the sake of Jesus Christ.

*□ Praise God from whom all blessings flow*

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O God, we know you to be kind and generous, so we bring our gifts in gratitude and joy. Pour out your Spirit on these gifts and on our lives, so that we may bear the fruit of your Spirit in every situation and relationship. Amen

□ Pastoral Prayers

**Response:** *God of purpose and promise... **receive our prayers.***

God of mystery and mercy – God of our past and our future – we come before you today carrying all the hopes and dreams – all the burdens and blessings of our lives. We bring what is on our hearts and minds, grateful for your kindness – seeking comfort and strength – listening for your guidance.

*God of purpose and promise... **receive our prayers.***

God of life and love, you engage us in the midst of our lives when we need you. We pray today for all those who feel fearful about their future and for all who wrestle with challenges at work or at home. We remember before you those weighed down by illness or worry, and all who provide care for those in need of support...

Help each one of us face our fears and our challenges supported by your love.

*God of purpose and promise... **receive our prayers.***

God of courage and comfort, whenever we wrestle with burdens your Spirit prays within us with sighs too deep for words. Today we pray for any whose burdens seem too heavy to bear. For the victims of violence or disaster, and for their friends and families... For refugees at risk in so many places in the world... We pray for those caught in despair and poverty in our own community and in the forgotten corners of your world...

Renew the strength of all those challenged by realities beyond their control and equip leaders to support those in the deepest need.

*God of purpose and promise... **receive our prayers.***

God of all creation we pray for our country and our leaders as we prepare to mark Canada Day. Equip Canada to be a force for justice and well-being in your world. Give our leaders wisdom and integrity to make decisions that provide for a good future for all who call this nation home. Open our eyes and our hearts to the opportunities we have to serve you in serving one another. Make us alert to cries for justice in our midst and guide us in repairing relationships strained by differences and indifference.

*God of purpose and promise... **receive our prayers. Amen***

□ *Lord of all power*

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Blessing



Now our service begins. Go forth in the knowledge that God is with you and that with God all things are possible. May the grace of Jesus, the abundance of God and the presence of the Spirit embrace us all.

*□ Go now in peace*

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