

20 July 2025 – Presbyterian Picnic Worship

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement

Laura Kavanagh

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.

➤ *Come, Holy Spirit (Gaither)*

Call to Worship

Colina Titus and **April Watt**

We know our need for everything that God provides and so we come seeking...

Forgiveness that restores and renews – grace that amazes and enables

Community that strengthens and supports – truth that informs and guides

Love that redeems and heals – and God is truly in our midst

➤ *Be still for the presence of the Lord*

† Gathering Prayer / Words of Hope

Ruth McCowan

Loving God, you bid us be all we can be and you accept us as we are. We pray that by your grace and power, those things that are stumbling blocks to our spiritual growth may be overcome. Show us the way in this time of worship. Teach us through the events of our lives.

When our capacity to sin binds us with tension, enable us to relax by trusting in your forgiveness. When our situation is one of peril or distress, enable us to discover in your love the resource of restoration. When our frailties get us down and keep us there, enable us to laugh at ourselves by relying on your strength. When our tendency to become burdened by our cares makes us anxious, enable us to respond to your invitation to participate freely in the grace and abundant life of Christ. Lead us, we pray, in the way of Jesus. Amen

There is no greater good than the goodness of God, no forgiveness more thorough, no love more attentive, no power more enabling. All thanks be to God!

† Prayer for Understanding

Colina Titus and **April Watt**

How do you find us, O God? How readily do we open ourselves to your Holy Word, to your Spirit, to your presence in our lives? Help us to trust in your abundant love. Open our senses. Open our lives. Open each one of us – to you. Amen

Scripture *with response between scripture texts*

➤ *Rise Up, Rise Up* **MV 130**

Genesis 32:22-30

Eleanor Shambrook or Kathy Planiden

The same night he (Jacob) got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, *"Let me go, for the day is breaking."*

But Jacob said, *"I will not let you go, unless you bless me."*

So he said to him, *"What is your name?"*

And he said, *"Jacob."*

Then the man said, *"You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans and have prevailed."*

Then Jacob asked him, *"Please tell me your name."*

But he said, *"Why is it that you ask my name?"* And there he blessed him.

So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, *"For I have seen God face to face, yet my life is preserved."*

➤ *Rise Up, Rise Up* **MV 130**

1 Kings 19:1-15a

Sheelagh Garson

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, *"So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow."*

Then he (Elijah) was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: *"It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors."*

Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, *"Get up and eat."*

He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and lay down again. The angel of the LORD came a second time, touched him, and said, *"Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you."*

He got up and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. At that place he came to a cave and spent the night there. Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, *"What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

He answered, *"I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."*

He (the angel?) said, *"Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by."*

Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.

When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, *"What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

He answered, *"I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."*

Then the LORD said to him, *"Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus."*

➤ *Rise Up, Rise Up* *MV 130*

Matthew 15:21-28

Nick Zhao

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, *"Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon."*

But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, *"Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us."*

He answered, *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*

But she came and knelt before him, saying, *"Lord, help me."*

He answered, *"It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."*

She said, *"Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."*

Then Jesus answered her, *"Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish."*

And her daughter was healed from that moment.

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

➤ *Rise Up, Rise Up* *MV 130*

Message ***Encountering God and Sharing our Stories***

Laura Kavanagh with Mary Dimech and others

There once was a little boy who wanted to meet God. He knew it was a long trip to where God lived, so he packed his suitcase with Twinkies and a six-pack of root beer and he started his journey.

When he had gone about three blocks, he met an old woman. She was sitting in the park just staring at some pigeons. The boy sat down next to her and opened his suitcase. He was about to take a drink from his root beer when he noticed that the old lady looked hungry, so he offered her a Twinkie. She gratefully accepted it and smiled at him. Her smile was so pretty that the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered her a root beer. Once again, she smiled at him. The boy was delighted! They sat there all afternoon eating and smiling, but they never said a word.

As it grew dark, the boy realized how tired he was and he got up to leave, but before he had gone more than a few steps, he turned around, ran back to the old woman and gave her a hug. She gave him her biggest smile ever. When the boy opened the door to his own house a short time later, his mother was surprised by the look of joy on his face. She asked him, "What did you do today that made you so happy?" He replied, "I had lunch with God." But before his mother could respond, he added, "You know what? She's got the most beautiful smile I've ever seen!"

Meanwhile, the old woman, also radiant with joy, returned to her home. Her son was stunned by the look of peace on her face and he asked, "Mother, what did you do today that made you so happy?" She replied, "I ate Twinkies in the park with God." But before her son responded, she added, "You know, he's much younger than I expected."

MOSES met God on a Tuesday afternoon... and it was very disturbing. He said this...
I was just doing my job the way I always do my job.

I'm not... or I wasn't... a public person. I didn't like talking to people because I had a speech defect... I stammered. So, because of that, and because of my past which I don't want to go into, I looked after animals... sheep mostly.

I was just doing my job, just minding my sheep, just looking at the same grass, the same hills I had looked at every day, when I noticed a tree... an ordinary tree.

And suddenly, the ordinary became special: the leaves became candles, the dull earth became holy ground... and that's where I met God... when the ordinary became special.

Like this testimony from a well-known Biblical figure based on what we know of him from scripture, our readings this morning are connected by the theme of encounter with God. In Genesis we hear the story of Jacob as he journeys to be reunited with Esau. He is uncertain how he will be received – plotting and planning – praying that God will deliver him. In this troubled time, he is encountered by God...

JACOB met God on a Monday night... and it was very disturbing. He said...
I'm not a violent man, I don't even argue much, but I felt like a fright that night.

I had lain awake, a thousand things on my mind. And when, long after midnight, there was a knock at the door, I was up and downstairs like a bear with a sore paw.

A stranger, standing there, stretched out his hand. I took it, out of anger more than friendship... and he didn't let go.

He didn't let go – so I started to tug, to pull away, to push him, to wrestle.

We wrestled till daybreak, he never letting go, until finally he said I had won... and that I had met God... wrestling.

The reading from 1st Kings revolves around Elijah. The prophet is troubled – beside himself. He has temporarily lost control of his purpose and mission – he is floundering. Fleeing to the quiet seclusion and safety of the wilderness, he too is encountered by God...

ELIJAH met God on a Thursday night and it was very disturbing. He might tell it like this...
I had just won a competition, and I felt totally depressed. It wasn't a hollow victory... you might say it was divinely inspired, but I felt depressed. So, I went for a walk into the hills, where I felt I could be nearer to my Maker.

It was very beautiful, looking roundabout, but I didn't feel a bit closer to God.

Then the wind got up, and the ground started to shake. I thought it was the end of the world. I thought I'd see my Maker face to face before long. But the wind dropped, the shaking stopped, and nothing happened.

Then, from nowhere it seemed, a fire started, and I remembered a story about how someone first met God when faced with fire. But that didn't work for me.

It was afterwards... after the wind and the shaking and the fire... it was when I thought God had given up on me that I met God... in silence.

In Matthew's Gospel I can't decide who encounters God. Is it the woman who comes to Jesus with great faith and receives the blessing of healing for her daughter? Or is it Jesus who is challenged by the woman to understand that his divine mission extends far beyond what he initially imagined? What is clear is that God is present in their meeting.

There are consequences to these encounters. Jacob's name is changed to Israel as a constant reminder of the event. Elijah comes to the presence of God and though he has been traumatized by recent events, he is restored in the moment of sheer silence with the Lord. His motivation and strength return, and he continues his work for God. The Canaanite woman leaves with her daughter healed and her faith vindicated. Will she share her experience in her community? Jesus is also changed ready now to expand his ministry to the Gentiles. How are we changed by our encounters with the divine? Do we bring all our questions, doubts and fears to each encounter with God?

This theme of encountering God is not one that rests comfortably within the confines of scripture – we believe that God is present with us here and now. We affirm that Jesus continues to guide us as disciples and that the Holy Spirit is active in our lives every day. When I reflected on encountering God, I wrote my own story like those of the Bible characters we've heard today, and I asked others to do the same.

Here are our stories of meeting God...

LAURA... *I met God on a Friday morning in June... and it was disquieting.*

I just wanted to go for a walk – to visit a special school. I wasn't looking for God.

I invited another minister to walk with me – a friend. It was humid for Edmonton and my shoes hurt my feet. We walked through the outdoor classroom – I remembered reading aloud by the pond in the heat of another June day.

We entered through the back door – everything so familiar, tears stinging my eyes.

I drank in the art on the walls – the classroom murmurs. We knocked on doors – I hugged past colleagues – recognized faces, routines, books, changes. It must have seemed dull to my friend, to any passerby – just a trip down memory lane, but I awoke to the truth that God was very present in this place – in a secular school, with children, families, friends and coworkers.

I met God amid the chaos of an elementary school as I struggled to discern God's call.

I met God then in unexpected people – and I met God again as I remembered how God forms and prepares us through the people we encounter and the tasks we undertake.

ISAAC tells this story of meeting God...

I believe, for different reasons, that since I was a teenager, I was aware of the fact that we all die. Together with this conscience came also the questions of why are we here? What happens when we die? Purpose. Is there a God etc.? My exploration led me to a growing body of personal and spiritual indications.

But it was the year 1996, when I lived in Norway, that I had a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. After a very deep crisis and a broken heart, I cried to God for help... Strangely enough the words that my aunt Nereida shared with me at age 10 or 11 popped up in that moment. And they turned out to be what we call 'the sinner's prayer'.

It was an incredible and supernatural experience... I confess that the presence of God was there in my room. I told everyone about Jesus.

Unfortunately, because I pegged my conversion to a condition, my faithfulness to God disappeared when that relationship was lost. I returned to bad habits and with even worse consequences. I entered an even worse relationship. And it was only thru prayer that I asked God to help me be removed from that relationship.

God answered my prayer and I was finally set free... celebrating 13 years of sobriety in 2024 by God's sustaining mercy and grace. Obeying and trusting God – worshiping helps me grow as well.

"Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress." (Psalm 107:6) May God bless us, in Jesus mighty name, Amen!

Here is Jennie to share her story...

Growing up in a dysfunctional home at age 6, with parents who argued all the time, left me each day with a feeling that gave me fear and no peace. I never knew what to expect living that way. I was always afraid of my father. Sometimes I did not even want to be in my own home, so I stayed at my best friend's home every chance I could.

One afternoon my mom told my sisters and I that she was going to be sending us to Sunday School each Sunday, because it will teach us a new way of living and bring us happiness. So, we went.

When I listened to what our teacher taught us at Sunday School, I was so interested in who Jesus was. I looked forward to going to church each Sunday. I loved learning about Jesus and all the Bible Stories, and we had fun doing art. One Sunday the teacher let us know what we needed to do to be Christian. She said, "You have to ask Jesus to come into your heart and be your saviour." She said, "If any of you make this decision, please call me and tell me." 😊 She gave us her phone number.

All that day I thought about what she taught. So that evening in the quietness of my room, I knelt on my knees at my bed and asked Jesus to come into my heart. I felt such happiness after! I was so excited. I went to our phone and called her. She was so happy for me. 😊 The following Sunday, she asked me to please share my story with the congregation.

I have remembered that experience all my life, like it was yesterday. Thank you for letting me share.

April was wondering about meeting God and shares these two short encounters with children/youth at church...

A grandmother brought her two grandchildren (girl, 6 and boy, 4) for their first visit to church one Sunday. When she dropped the girl off at the Sunday School class where we were teaching that day, the boy started crying since he didn't want to leave his sister. I said that he was welcome to stay with his sister, he settled down and we proceeded with the lesson.

A girl brought a friend to VBS. I said hello and welcomed her to the class and proceeded with the activities for the day/week.

I barely remembered either incident until a year or two afterwards when the grandmother told me that she decided to bring her grandchildren to church on a regular basis due to my interaction with her grandchildren that day. In the other case, the girl's mother was explaining to a group of us that their family started attending our church due to her daughter's experience at VBS and how she liked her teacher unaware that I had been the teacher.

So, who encountered God?

- ✓ The children for having the chance to experience the love of God
- ✓ The grandmother and the parents for being open to God's call
- ✓ Me, for finally realizing that God is always with me in big and small ways and that a warm welcome can make someone's day

Jacqueline has meet God often and in a variety of places. Here is her story... I met God when I swam into church in amniotic fluids. It was a constant comforting presence. I met God amidst my chemistry master's research when my goal to be a chemist was in reach and God redirected my hands. I met God in the faces and hands of all the constantly loving people in my home congregation of St. Andrews. I met the spirit dancing in others in a notice I had a call 3 times in one day after lay preaching as an Interim moderator, head of ladies guild and atheist separately all recognized my call in one day. I met God when I stopped accidentally saying no to God's quiet call and decided to listen. I walked with Jesus to seminary at the Vancouver School of Theology. I met the Trinity in unexpected ways and it carried me all the way across Canada to Sooke BC to try and help them see God on their journey as Christ already walks with them and the Spirit breath with in them.

Marianne met God on a women's weekend retreat. Here she is to tell you what she remembers...

We all were singing one of our favorite hymns and I was overcome by emotion – with a lump in my throat and tears in my eyes. I was not able to continue to sing and I am certain the holy spirit had touched me. God was with us all in that room. It makes me think of the Gospel story of the feeding of the multitudes and how the crowds must have felt when Jesus performed a miracle. For me, I was excited to have that experience – that encounter with God.

What is your story? When and where and through whom have you encountered God – walked with Jesus? How have you been changed by an encounter with the divine?

Ministry of Music Anthem

How great Thou art

Elise Kennedy and singers

Offering and Prayer

Eleanor Shambrook

With deep gratitude for the healing and freedom that Jesus offers, we present our offerings to God. Through our gifts, may God's healing and freedom be generously shared.

O God, we place our hope and trust in your loving kindness. Because we want to praise you with more than just words, we offer our gifts to support Christ's mission of justice and care in the world. Bless these gifts and use our energy for your good purposes, so that the world will know your loving kindness. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

Wes Denyer

Loving God, we offer thanks this day for the church – body of Christ, vessel of the Spirit, family of faith, witness in the world.

Help us to consider Christ in all we do, letting our decisions be made as with his mind, our relationships be formed as with his heart, our deeds be done as with his hands.

Encourage us to go where the Spirit moves us, individually, as congregations, and as Presbyterians together, opening ourselves to the possibilities of service that you imagine for us and equip us to accomplish.

Strengthen each of us and our congregations as families of faith, bonding together in mutual support, keeping ever close to you.

Enable each one here to be bold witnesses, for we know that the world needs good news, and we sense in our spirits the importance of conveying your love to all.

*Hear our prayer – words offered in gratitude and praise, confidence, and trust, all in the name of Jesus the Christ in whose name we pray 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***

➤ *Wherever I may wander*

Blessing

Vincent Tan

Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do God's will, working among us that which is pleasing in God's sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever. Amen (Hebrews 13:20-21)

Receive God's love and relay it to others through word and deed. And may the grace of the risen Christ, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Spirit embrace us all.

➤ *Go now in peace*