

Knox Presbyterian Church Service

August 3 2025

Interim Minister: The Rev. Daniel Martinez

Minister: The Rev. Wes Denyer

Music: Connie Dunwoody

Elder: Lorianne Whiting

Reader: Fiona Gow

Welcome/Announcements/Land Acknowledgement (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 that we gather with gratitude on the 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.

First Hymn: Come, now is the time for worship

Call to Worship

Give thanks to the Lord, for God is good!

God's faithful love endures forever.

God has redeemed us from trouble and leads us on paths of justice and righteousness.

Let us praise the Lord! Let us worship God.

Second Hymn: 483 - Glorious things of thee are spoken

Gathering Prayer

God of justice and joy, as we gather to worship, we join your whole creation to offer you honour and praise. We sense your glory in the grandeur of open skies and the expanding horizon. We sense your power of new life in growing gardens and growing children. We trust that all life flows from your hand, yet we confess we often worry about how much life costs us. We like to have much more than enough, and we hesitate to share. Forgive us when our hearts long for the security of this world, not the security of your love. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Remember the words of Paul: “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.” Believe the good news of the gospel. In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven and set free by God’s generous grace.

Third Hymn: 472 - We are God's people

□ Prayer for Understanding (Worship Reader)

God of Truth, send your Holy Spirit to open our minds and hearts to receive your wisdom in the Scriptures. Transform us by the grace we hear proclaimed and empower us to live it out for the sake of Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Scripture

Philippians 1:3-11, 2:1-13 (NT 196)

³ I thank my God for every remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every one of my prayers for all of you, praying with joy ⁵ for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete^[a] it until the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I hold you in my heart,^[b] for all of you are my partners in God’s grace,^[c] both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the tender affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰ to help you to determine what really matters, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹ having produced the harvest^[d] of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Matthew 25:34-40 (NT 29)

³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and

visited you?’⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.’

Response

Let us hear what the spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God!

Sermon: When the Minister is in Jail

Sometimes something can happen in a congregation so noticeable - so significant - it changes the conversation in a church, and creates really just one conversation.

It can be something unusually positive. An elderly couple on a disability pension wins the lottery – 37 million dollars. Everybody’s talking about it ... “It couldn’t have happened to a nicer couple.”

“Yeah, but what are they going to do with it?”

“Do you think they’ll keep coming to church?”

“I wonder if they’ll help out with the deficit in this year’s budget?”

And all the relatives and friends they never knew they had, coming out of the woodwork, “Oh you remember me, I’m cousin Selma or your Dad’s Mom’s side. Thirty-seven million, hunh? We want to be a real close family, don’t we?”

Everybody talks about it ...

Or it can be something sad ...

“Did you hear, nine year old Amanda in the Sunday School has been diagnosed with cancer. It doesn’t look good.”

“Can you believe it? It’s terrible!”

The whole congregation is praying for her.

The parents are at the hospital all the time, one of them sleeps over in her room every night.

Everyone in the congregation just helps out in whatever way they can – dropping off casseroles, cakes and pies at their home; volunteering to look after Amanda’s little sister, what with the parents being at the hospital so much.

“Were you there on Sunday? The minister preached a sermon on courage. He brought in Amanda’s Bravery beads. She gets a bead on a necklace every time she has chemo or radiation, has another test or gets poked with a needle. There must have been hundreds of beads on that string! ... Whew ...”

“Are you coming on Saturday, the whole church is going to go down to the hospital and sing Christmas carols outside Amanda’s window. Poor little kid, having to be in the hospital over Christmas.”

Everybody talks about it.

Some things happen that just create a single mind in a community.

That’s the way it is in the scripture passage from the Letter to the Philippians we read today.

The little church at Philippi, which today would be located in northern Greece, has met for its Sunday worship and there’s only one conversation going around, “Our minister’s in jail.”

The Apostle Paul is in jail. That’s all there is to talk about.

They know where he’s in jail ... we don’t.

They know why he’s in jail ... we don’t.

But we know he’s somewhere being held by the Roman government, and awaiting trial. It might be Caesarea. It might be Ephesus. It might be Rome. But that’s all they can talk about.

They don’t have any lessons in the Bible Study group – they’re just talking about Paul. They don’t really listen to the sermon ... because they’re thinking about Paul. Paul’s in prison. Some of them start remembering ...

“You know, I was a part of this church from the beginning. I was one of those women at the prayer place down by the river. Paul came there when he first visited this town. And he came to where we were having prayer services, and he talked to us about Jesus Christ, and quite a number of us became believers. Lydia was there. You know we had our services in her home for quite a while before she moved. Now that we’ve grown, we have this place.”

“You know, Paul baptized me.”

“He did?”

“Yep ... Paul baptized me ...”

Some of them are getting emotional. Walking around through the building and everything they see reminds them of Paul. He left his hat on the rack in the hall. “That’s Paul’s hat.” He left a scroll of a letter back in the study. Everything they see reminds them. “There’s his shawl” – you know he got cold easily, since he had such a hard time with his health. And he wore that shawl, you know ... and he left it here before he went ... that’s his shawl ...”

Everything they see ... reminds them of Paul ...

The church at Philippi was just consumed with concern ... Paul is in jail.

Some of them became reflective, “You know, that’s the way it is for all of us. You never know. We’re just like birds that fly in from the dark into a patch of light ... and then back out into the dark. That’s the way it is. Paul was here for a while, started the church ... Now he’s gone. But isn’t that the way life is? Every year in the season of fall, I get to feeling this way. It seems a long, long time from May to September, but the days grow short when you reach October ... the days dwindle down to a precious few ... “

“I don’t know, I get to thinking about Paul, I get to thinking about myself ...”

Some tried to interpret a meaning to the whole thing, because some of the young people want to understand what’s happening, “Why did they put Paul in prison?” And they try to dissect the situation ... but ... how are you going to interpret it ... you can’t! Here is a man, whose whole life – night and day – is given to the work of God ... and he’s in jail, awaiting trial, and very likely death.

If anybody was faithful to the Gospel, it was Paul. And he’s in jail! This poor man who dragged his crippled, aching, beaten body across two continents to preach the Gospel, and now all of his locomotion is stopped ... and he sits there in his cell ...

Every time I think of Paul trapped in that prison – a man always on the move. He wrote to the church in Rome and said, “I’m coming to Rome, but I’m not stopping there. I want you people to help me go on to Spain. I’ve just run out of places over here to preach, and I’ve just got to keep going ... Now he’s stopped - locked in a prison cell!”

I think of him, and I think of Geronimo - that great First Nation’s chief was put in a cell at Fort Syl, Oklahoma.

I remember visiting that place one time on a summer vacation road trip. They let

you go in where they were holding Geronimo.

There's the cell - no flooring. It's just dirt. One little barred window way up high so that he can't reach it – can only see out towards the sky. And that great First Nations chief – an apostle of freedom for his tribe – in there ... In front of that little bitty window.

Just beneath it is a deep trench. I said, "Why the trench?" And they said, "Oh he paced back and forth. He wore a trench into the ground."

And I think ... there's the Apostle Paul ... I wonder if he's just banging his tin cup against the bars of the cell, "When can I get out of here? I'm restless for the Lord! I have places to go ... sermons to preach!"

Back and forth ... back and forth ... in that little cell ...

How are those Christians in Philippi going to interpret that? You can't interpret that ... Why did God let this happen?

Now, some of them in the church at Philippi were worried, "What's our church going to do? I don't think we're going to make it now with Paul gone. It's going to go down. We're never going to get anybody else like Paul. I don't know what's going to happen to our church. What do you think is going to happen to our church? I don't know ... Do you think ... I just can't believe it. I just don't know ... with Paul gone ..."

And while they're pondering and reflecting on this ... and crying and going through all of that ... a man comes in – a pale, sickly man. His name is Epaphroditus. He's a member of the Philippian church.

When they first heard Paul was in prison, they sent Epaphroditus over to see Paul.

They gave instructions to Epaphroditus ... "help Paul out any way you can."

But then Epaphroditus gets sick ... deathly sick. He almost dies.

And now Paul sends him back, saying, "I've got enough troubles now, I don't need a sick church elder around here. So, I'm sending him back, but thank him anyway ... because he tried."

And Epaphroditus comes in and they say, "What are you doing here?"

"I have a letter ... a letter from Paul! He wants you to read it in worship today."

And this is what Paul writes, “Get your mind off me! I am not the centre of the church. If you’re worried about how I’m doing – I am doing fine. I am prepared if I live. I am prepared if I die. Everything I have gone through with this aching body, I would be glad to be free of it, and have flights of angels take me to my rest. That’s no problem. In fact, if I had my choice, I’d rather die and be with Christ, but I think God has a lot more work for me to do, so I’ll probably ... In fact, I’m confident that someday I’ll be back there to work with you. But until that time comes, quit thinking about me! No church can survive that’s built around the preacher. Churches are built around Jesus Christ! I’m in prison. Christ is not in prison! He’s the centre of the church – the same yesterday, today and forever! Preachers will come and preachers will go. There’ll be young ones and old ones, and good ones and bad ones, but the church is the church is the church! You have Christ.”

The Apostle Paul goes on, “I want you people to prove all the prophets of doom wrong. Prove that they’re wrong when they say, “Oh ... the attendance will go down now that Paul’s not here.” Prove that they’re wrong when they say, “The offerings are going to drop off now that Paul’s not here.” Prove them wrong when they say, “Well I think some members will kind of drift off now that Paul’s not here.”

“Prove them wrong! Stand together –side by side! Be fervent in what you do! You have two things absolutely essential for the church. You have Jesus Christ, and you have needs!”

Paul reminds them, “In that city where you live – Philippi ...

- you have the rich and the poor;
- the have’s and the have not’s;
- there are the powerful and the powerless;
- there are those who are educated and there are those who are ignorant;
- you have those who believe, you have those who don’t believe;
- you have the high and the mighty, and you have the lowly and nobody knows them.

“And you stand in between as the church of Jesus Christ, and you are to help both ... the have’s and the have not’s, the powerful and the powerless. You are to be the Gospel for all these people. As long as you have Christ, and as long as you have needs, then you have a reason to be the church.”

If the Apostle Paul knew Knox Presbyterian Church – this church! - he might

have said, “You have Our Place, supporting it with meals and donations and “warm toes” in the winter, and you provide paid workers for their clients. You host a meal and provide emergency space for Artemis Place. You provide meals and host dinners for the University of Victoria Inclusive Christians group. You strongly support Presbyterian World Service and Development both with money and education

You have Christ ... you have people with needs ... you have a reason to be the church! “So, the real proof of my ministry,” Paul says, “is how you conduct yourself, in my absence. Oh sure, when I’m there, sure everything’s going well ... but when I’m gone, how will it be when I’m not there? The real proof of my ministry ... will be in my absence ... in my absence ...”

Paul said, “You have Christ ... and you have all those needs ... get your mind off me!”

Now, I know, I haven’t been preaching to you today ... and I haven’t been talking to you about this being the first Sunday after Laura has retired from the pulpit of Knox. I’ve just been telling you about the Apostle Paul ... about what he was thinking and feeling when he was no longer going to be with a congregation ... a congregation that he loved ...

Fourth Hymn: 766 - Lord, speak to me

Note: The offering is collected at the door as people enter and brought forward during the singing of the doxology. It is placed by the brass cross to the side of the pulpit.

Invitation to Offering

God has blessed us with abundant love in Christ and in creation. Let us share this abundance in our offering today so that others may also rejoice in God’s goodness.

Fifth Hymn: 306 - Praise God from whom all blessings flow

Prayer of Dedication

Abundant God, we bring you our gifts in gratitude for your generosity. Bless and multiply these gifts, so that they may spread your goodness in the world and touch the lives of those in need, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

□ Pastoral Prayers

Eternal God, in whom we live and move and have our being, we come to you in prayer in midsummer, thankful for the occasions we have enjoyed so far to catch up with family and friends; to travel for recreation and restoration; to enjoy the beauty of nature in landscapes we love. Thank you for every moment of joy we treasure.

Today we remember those for whom this summer is difficult: for communities cleaning up after storms or worried about wildfire; for areas facing drought or the effects of flooding; for those worried about uncertainty in the economy and the impact of the climate crisis. May each one find courage to face tomorrow in your company.

God of Compassion, in Jesus Christ you walk the road of suffering with us, reaching out to those in pain and in grief We remember those whose lives have faced crises this summer: Through tragic death and unexpected loss; Through critical illness or injury; Through pain or problems that seem to have no end. Surround them with your comfort and compassion

Understanding God, Jesus faced demanding crowds as he traveled, and the pressure of critics, whatever he did. We pray for all those who have not found rest this summer: those juggling more demands and fewer resources at work or at home; those whose work or plans for the future are uncertain; those fleeing conflict and seeking new homes in despair and hope. May they know your strength and assurance day by day,

Loving God, we need the embrace of your presence, each in our own way. Bring healing and peace to our lives and to this world you love. Open our eyes and our hearts so that we may offer healing and peace to others in the name of Christ Jesus. Amen.

Sixth Hymn: 477 - Your hand, O God, has guided

Blessing

As you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all this day, and always. Amen.

Seventh Hymn: 622 - Go now in peace