

Knox Service Outline - Communion 01/04/26

Interim Moderator: The Rev. Daniel Martinez

Pastor: Cathy Victor

Music: Connie Dunwoody

Elder: Dennis Sutherland

Reader: Anne Krauss

Prelude

Welcome/Announcements/Land Acknowledgement (Unison)

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.

Celebrations, Joys & Concerns

Elder

Sung Response: God's Blessing on You

Gathering Song: As We Gather

Call to Worship (Responsive)

Pastor

In the silence of a lonely night, God calls to us.

We are here, God who is always with us, listening for Your words of life and love.

When we would decide to go it alone, when we think no good can be found anywhere, Jesus calls to us.

We are here, Friend who knows our longings, ready to come and see where You would lead us.

When we think we have license to do whatever we want, when we are convinced we need no map, the Spirit calls to us.

We are here, God of Peace, so that we might help others find the way to life.

First Hymn : # 170 What star is this?

Prayer of Approach & Confession

Come Spirit of gentleness, come and sweep your wind among us. Stir us, coax us, call us, goad us, open our eyes and ears. Draw us into your loving presence. God of power and mystery, heaven and earth are full of your glory. The galaxies sing your praises and reflect the infinity of your love and mercy. Ever present God, the greatness of your love is beyond our grasp. We thank you for your son, Jesus who came to us as a baby and lived among us. Too often we have lost sight of who you are, and who we are. We confess our brokenness and woundedness, Forgive us when we have fallen into traps of anger, or fear. Heal us and redeem us we pray. As we grumble about our aches and pains, and about how difficult it is to get out of the bed each day, we easily ignore the broken. Forgive us. Speak to us of healing, so we might bring help to others. Speak to us of grace, so hearing, we may share it with everyone we meet. Speak to us of love and life, so we may offer it as freely as Jesus Christ, our Lord

and Saviour, brought it to us. Renew and remake us, and set us free to worship and serve you in the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Sing a new song unto the Lord! Sing his praise throughout the world. And do not be afraid, for God says to us: I have redeemed you; you are mine. I have set you as a seal on my heart. I have carved you on the palm of my hand. In Jesus Christ we have seen the love of God, and we know that we are forgiven people. Thanks be to God for such grace.

Second Hymn: # 173 We three kings

Prayer of Illumination (Unison)

Reader

Lord of life we come to you, seeking the light of your face and the surprises of your grace. By the power of your Holy Spirit, open to us the treasures of your love and your wisdom. Encourage what you have begun in each of us through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

First Scripture Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6

Reader

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples, but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together; they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried in their nurses' arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you; the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

Second Scripture Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

Reader

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the east came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him, and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet:

'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'

Then Herod secretly called for the magi and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out, and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen in the east, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Scripture Response

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God!

Reader

Sermon: When There is no Star to Guide You

Pastor

Divine Lover of our souls, the sea is so large, and our boats are so small. Grant us the grace to trust the direction you set us in, whether there is calm or storm. Draw us closer to you, so that we may hear what you would say to us today. In Jesus' Holy name we pray. Amen

Matthew weaves ancient stories with what were then 'present day' stories. He makes bridges between the astrological world and the biblical one. He lifts the story of those wise gentiles –those outsiders 'from away', and converges it with, or at least calls to mind, the stories of God's promises to God's people: like the words of the prophet Isaiah who said, 'Arise, shine; for your light has come,' and he claimed that other nations would be drawn to the glory of our God too. Mathew sets the words of the prophet Micah as a backdrop. 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah. For from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.' We don't know much about those wise ones. We don't know who they were, or where they came from.

We don't know how many of them there were, even though tradition has come to suggest three, but that is only because three gifts are mentioned. In the Eastern church, tradition speaks of twelve of them. We don't know when they arrived or how old Jesus was when they got there.

We often refer to them by their Greek name Magi, which has nothing to do with being royalty, and everything to do with those who practiced eastern magical arts and astrology. Elsewhere in the bible those who practiced these arts are not viewed so positively. They were unexpected worshippers who brought gifts to offer Jesus.

We do know that when they got there, they were overwhelmed with joy. But those astrologers didn't just study and follow a star. The story of the star with its luminous splendour acts like a bridge too, connecting the Jewish biblical promises of the Messiah and pagan beliefs that existed side by side. Both of which associated a star or some great astrological phenomenon with a new ruler.

Even though they were gentiles, they were responding somehow to God's divine initiatives. They acted on what they did know. And God's grace preceded their human actions. God is somehow behind the scenes, even warning them in a dream later on to go home by another way. A divine beckoning draws them to worship the new infant king, the Son of God. And Matthew sets them against the biblical landscape of God's grace and promises. We too respond to God's initiatives and act on what we do know. God's grace has preceded us, and is always behind the scenes, guiding us into times of change - here at St. Andrew's, yes, but in all the Presbyterian churches around us.

And as they journey together over the valleys and plains, long ago, I find myself wondering what those wise ones left behind. Did they just drop what they were doing? Were there painful partings? Who did they leave behind? One's return was even less guaranteed then.

I imagine that those astrologers had no idea how God was working through them. They show up at Herod's home and have probably no idea of who they are really dealing with and the violence they are about to set in motion just by their very presence. I imagine that they trusted each other, and I wonder if they relied on each other's expertise or particular gifts.

Was someone more capable in the weather- predicting department? Or was someone better at planning ahead and making the reservations at the next motel? Did one cook better than the others? Did they carry each other's baggage, taking turns with the loads? Was there one who always checked the motel rooms one last time for stray items and laundry, before they checked out and got back on their uncharted course?

I imagine they had gifts besides gold, frankincense and myrrh that helped each other on their journey. I imagine there were a lot of late nights, as they traveled with the aid of a stellar compass. Many people have been keen to observe the astronomical events that occur. Perhaps you have watched eclipses, full moons, shooting stars, or the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter that was noted a few years ago.

Perhaps for some of these events you have tried to see these shining lights, but clouds got in the way. So I wonder what those wise folk did on those nights when the clouds concealed the stars of the heavens. I wonder if they doubted or felt lost. Did they ask each other over the light of a fire, 'What if we were wrong? What fools we will seem...' Did they stare into the golden flames and tell each other stories, while they waited for the clouds to disperse?

After their visit was all over, and the gifts had been given, and the faces of that holy family had been etched upon their memories forever...After the dreams had been discussed and their direction for home had been re-charted and agreed upon... I imagine that they told more stories to one another as they pondered, remembered, and rehearsed what they would tell everyone at home or those they met along the way back.

Perhaps there weren't a lot of details to tell about their encounter with Jesus. Gifts were given and received and they felt overwhelmed with joy as they worshipped the one they had sought out so carefully. Their 'Jesus stories' might have been very simple, but they must have told them. And I am left wondering what their 'take' would have been on their experience. And so I'd suggest that it is important for us to tell our Jesus stories to one another.

The collective stories of who you have been and are, as a congregation are important too. It will be important to reflect on them as you chart a new direction for the people of God here.

It is absolutely vital that we tell our individual stories too. Frederick Beuchner, the American Presbyterian, theologian and novelist said, "as insignificant as our stories sometimes seem or feel, they are still important vehicles of God's grace. God works in and through them."

Tell your Jesus stories. Not just the bright starry bits, and the times of thanksgiving, but the rough parts too. Include the stories of wrestling, the way Jacob did. Include the waiting, and the promises trusted, as Abraham and Sarah did. Include the wilderness times as other people who struggled with the living God included theirs.

'Jesus stories' don't have to be long or complicated or perfectly worked out before they are told. Even in their incompleteness there is a beauty, or maybe a sacredness to hold on to. And sometimes a fragment of Holy hindsight appears, reminding us that God's grace has yet again preceded our very human actions. The divine beckoning of Jesus Christ calls and brings our stories together, to intersect in this place. God's grace goes before us and has always been behind the scenes, in this congregation, among our families and friends, and among all the others who seek God's direction.

At that point of intersection between each of our stories, at the point where they cross; an epiphany happens, a revelatory light shines upon them. And so today is marked in our church calendar as Epiphany.

Gifts and treasures are given. Christ is worshipped, and in the illumination of our hearts, we become open to new and unexpected dreams. We find ourselves traveling home by another way, down roads we have never seen before. As the South African hymn puts it, 'We are marching in the light of God'. We march together in God's stellar radiance. At least as best we can. For as much as we Presbyterians like order and clear lines of direction, it's not always possible to travel 'as the crow flies' going straight from point A to point B.

None of us can make clear predictions of what will happen from one day to the next, except to say that we are always preceded by God's grace, even when the clouds cover our starry compasses. In the midst of our marching and despite our doubts, we stand within the larger landscape of the whole story of salvation. And against that backdrop, our own stories unfold together, intertwined and delicately woven. We each walk into the middle of each others sacred stories. I pray that as we begin a New Year, we will illumine each other –bringing awareness to each others gifts and treasures and an awareness of God's presence in each other's stories.

Tom Troeger is a preacher, poet and hymn writer. Listen to his poem:

When There is No Star to Guide You

When there is no star to guide you,
and you cannot wait for day
and your ancient maps provide you
only hints to find the way,
keep within each other's calling,
mark each time you make a turn,
shout for help if you are falling,
tell each other all you learn.

Be alert to shifts in weather:
if it turns to cold and frost
huddle closely all together,
check if any have been lost.

Listen for a river flowing,
feel for damper, moving air,
trace from where the wind is blowing,
move on bravely but with care.

If you think you have discovered
with your lantern in the night
some clear path the dark has covered
let the others bring their light.

Test your single lone perception
in their gathered shining beams,
what you saw may be projection
fed by shadows, fears and dreams.

You may sometimes trip and stumble
on a hidden root or stone
but remember as you grumble
that you do not fall alone.

And in risking dark expanses
never marked on map or chart
you will find that faith advances
through the landscape of your heart.

Third Hymn: # 376 Lord, the light of your love

Offering invitation

Pastor

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, so that others may grow in God's Spirit. Let us present our offerings that others may experience God's abundant love, with our gifts.

Offering Song: # 306 Praise God from whom all blessings flow

Prayer of Dedication

Pastor

Gracious God, may these gifts bring light to those who walk in darkness, hope to those who live in despair and justice to those who are oppressed. As your church we place these gifts into your hands, asking that your love will be revealed through them, and that others will be blessed in ways they had not imagined. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Apostles Creed # 539 (Unison)

(Remain standing if you are able.)

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

Fourth Hymn: # 474 The love of God comes close

Invitation to the Table

Pastor

When it is time to share in Holy Communion, you are invited to please come forward. Please hold your hand out to receive the bread. And remember that all are welcome at this table. If you are unable to come to the front, please signal an elder who will come and serve you. The bread is gluten and dairy-free. Both juice and wine are available.

God's Spirit is approaching through time, across continents, soaring over creation. God's Spirit is speaking; whispering and comforting, roaring and challenging. God's Spirit surrounds us; beyond touch, warmly embracing. God's Spirit transforms us; making our horizons wider, our faith stronger, our hopes possible. Here, now, God's Spirit is working. Through bread and wine, through our hands and our lips, all things are made new. And all are welcome. Come to the table, and be transformed. That we may fulfill our Lord's intention for us, we take these natural elements of bread and wine, setting them apart from all common use, to the Holy Mystery. And as Christ gave thanks, we present to God our prayers and thanksgivings.

Prayer of Thanksgiving (Responsive)

Pastor

God be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to God.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is good to give God thanks and praise.

Living God, we acclaim you, majestic in holiness, worthy of praise, worker of wonders. In the beginning you created the universe. You made the sun and stars above our heads, the earth beneath our feet. You fashioned life in all its myriad forms, and shaped from clay the wonder of the human frame. You spoke

your word to those whom you had chosen; in disobedience they turned from your commands. You came yourself in Christ, the Word made flesh. You still call your people to repentance to renew their covenant with you, and to prepare for the joyful feast of the Lamb who is slain. By Jesus' suffering and death he defeated the power of death, becoming for us -the source of eternal life.

And so, with every generation before us, with all who will come after us, we lift our voices and sing in joyful praise:

*O holy, holy, holy God, O God of time and space.
All earth and sea and sky above bear witness to your grace.
Hosanna in the highest heav'n, creation sings your praise.
And blessed is the one who comes and bears your name always!*

Holy and merciful God: In the fullness of time You gave your Son for the life of the world, who, being truly and eternal God, Took flesh and became human for us - and for our salvation. Sharing our joy and our sorrow, he healed the sick, and was friend of sinners. Obeying you – he took up his cross and died that we might live. We praise you that he overcame death and is risen to rule the world. He is still the friend of sinners. We trust him to overcome every power that can hurt or divide us and believe that when he comes in Glory, we will celebrate victory with Him.

And so we proclaim together the mystery of our faith:

*Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again!
Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again!*

Gracious God, Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us and upon this bread and wine, that the bread which we break may be to us a communion in the body of Christ, and the cup of blessing which we bless may be a communion in the blood of Christ. In union with Christ, and the whole church in heaven and on earth We present ourselves to you, O God, to be a living and holy sacrifice.

Through Christ, by Christ, with Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honour and glory is yours, now and forever, and so we sing:

*Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen!
Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen!*

The Words of Institution

On the night that Jesus was betrayed and arrested, he took bread, and after giving thanks to God, He broke it, and said, "This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, he took the cup after supper and said, 'This is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' This is the bread of life and the cup of joy! Come - for the table is ready! The gifts of God, for the people of God.

Sharing the Cup & Bread

Pastor

(When it is time to share in Holy Communion, you are invited to please come forward. Please hold your hand out to receive the bread. And remember that all are welcome at this table. If you are unable to come to the front, please signal an elder who will come and serve you. The bread is gluten and dairy-free. Both juice and wine are available.)

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Prayer after Communion

Lord Jesus Christ, you have nourished us with bread broken and wine poured out to strengthen us for our journey. And you have put your Spirit into our hands to take your peace with us wherever we go. You rise in us in spite of all that challenges us within our own lives and in the world you love. You rise in us to mend our broken hearts and put us back together again so that we can befriend the world, and make peace for all God's people in your name. Set us free from our fears, our anxieties, our misdirected concerns for our rights, and the burdens we need not carry. Teach us to hear the questions that we have but are afraid to voice or even consider. Show us the outcast within ourselves. Holy Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness, in words and silence, receive our prayers for others. In your love and in your power, bring healing; bring peace.

We bring to you those who need your healing touch: for those whose illness is long, painful or difficult to cure. In your love and in your power, bring healing; bring peace. We name before you those who are troubled in mind, those who feel trapped, those who have lost hope, and those who are burdened with grief. We pray for your church in all places; in troubled and broken countries as well as peaceful ones. We remember those who are running from war and violence and ask that you will protect them. We remember our families and friends and ask you to enfold them with your love. Bless those we name in our hearts before you.

Send us out as your witnesses to share your peace and your grace with hope and humility and for your sake. God of life and wholeness, hear these, our prayers for others and for ourselves. Open our eyes to see the radiance of your glory, and bring us at last to your everlasting kingdom, where in light undimmed and unending, you are worshipped and adored, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Hear us now as we pray in the words that Jesus taught his friends: as we sing together...

The Lord's Prayer (Sung) : # 469 Our Father in Heaven

Commission & Benediction

Pastor

Whatever is before us, is no match for the One who goes before us! God sends us out, so that grace will not be rare in our time. It is time to go and share love and mercy with those around us. Jesus calls us to go out, so that justice will not be rare in our time. Here we are, ready to speak truth to power, walking with those on oppression's mean streets. The Spirit fills us with compassion, so that peace will not be rare in our time. Here we are, offering hope to those living in fear, working for reconciliation in brokenness.

May the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, shine in your hearts, transform your lives, and brighten the world. And now – may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, abide with you, this day and always. Amen.

Dispersal Song: # 145 Draw the circle wide (verse 2)

Postlude