

Mission Awareness Sunday - 2025

NEPAL

Leaders' Notes

*An introductory paragraph explaining that today is Mission Awareness Sunday would be a great way to start the service. Something like, "Today we join churches across Canada to promote and celebrate mission work. **The service was written by the Rev. Theresa McDonald- Lee, Executive Director of Camp Kintail near Goderich, Ontario.**"*

- **Musical Prelude**
- **Welcome and Announcements**
- **Call to Worship:**

God welcomes us here!

And we welcome others!

God knows and loves us!

And we know and love others!

God seeks the lost and the outcast!

And we seek the lost and outcast!

In this place, we will praise God for God's care of us!

In this place, we will worship.

- **Opening Hymn #348 Tell me the stories of Jesus**

- **Prayer of Adoration and Confession**

O God; You search us and know us, You know us inside and out, You hem us in, behind and before, And we praise You for Your care. O God; You made the whole world, You created the birds and the fish, You imagined the animals and the growing plants, And we praise You for Your care.

O God; You came as a baby in a manger, You healed and blessed, ate and cried, You died, descended, and then rose again, And we praise You for Your care. O God; You came in flame and wind, You advocate and encourage, You speak and whisper and shout, And we praise You for Your care. O God; We give thanks and praise For Your care for the world and for us.

We give thanks for Your spark Both within and around us.

O God; We acknowledge that we often forget these good gifts.

We do not follow Jesus; we try our own way.

We fail to see Your spark in others.

We turn away from Your people.

We fail to love and be loved.

O God; Help us to turn towards You and Your people again.

Help us to receive and share love.

Help us to see Your grace at work in the world.

May we learn to praise You for Your care all the time.

We pray this is in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray saying,

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,
forever and ever. Amen.**

- **Assurance of Grace**

We are known and loved, forgiven and blessed, in the grace of Jesus Christ.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

- **Musical Ministry**

- **Hymn #631 Jesus' hands were kind hands**

- **Children's Story**

- **Scripture Passages**

Responsive Psalm 139: 1-18, 23-24

You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.

You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.

**You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.**

**Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.**

You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.

Where can I go from your Spirit?

Where can I flee from your presence?

**If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.**

If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.

**If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.**

For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.

**My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.**

**Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.**

How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them!

Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand—
when I awake, I am still with you.

Search me, God, and know my heart;

**test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.**

Matthew 8:1-4 Jesus Heals a Man With Leprosy

When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

The Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God

- **Sermon**
- **Hymn #635 Brother, sister, let me serve you**
- **Invitation to the Offering**

Jesus said to the man with leprosy, "I am willing." Jesus looked at the man and the world with compassion and grace. We too are able to respond to a call for help with, "I am willing." Our gifts go towards testing for leprosy in Nepal, providing treatment for those suffering, and supporting people with leprosy gain livelihoods. May we offer our gifts in the promise that they will offer compassion and grace in the world.

- **Doxology #661**

We give thee but thine own,
whate'er the gift may be;
all that we have is thine alone, a trust,
O Lord, from thee.

- **Prayer of Dedication**

O God; receive these gifts of our hands and hearts to make the world a more just and compassionate place for all. We pray especially this morning for the work of the WMS (Women's Missionary Society), PWS&D (Presbyterian World Service and Development), and our partner in Nepal – INF (International Nepal Fellowship). May their work in eradicating leprosy be furthered through our gifts. May we continue to respond with Jesus words, "I am willing." In his name we pray, Amen.

- **Prayers of the People**

O God; we pause this morning to give thanks for the divine spark found within all of creation. We thank you for the (weather that is happening on the Sunday morning of worship). We thank you for the work being done in the fields (specify with what is occurring on the farms near your church).

We thank you for our hospitals, schools, and mental health agencies (name them for your community) that work so hard to bring health and healing in our community.

We thank you for the ministries of our church (list some different missions, organizations, or programs at your congregation by name).

We thank you for the leaders of this congregation (again, if comfortable, pray for your minister, session, and board by name).

We thank you for the WMS of this congregation (add names, history, projects by name). We thank you for (name) Presbyterial, (name) Synodical, and the WMS National Council. We thank you for one hundred and ten years of mission and ministry in Canada and the world.

We give thanks for your care of us in this place.

We also pause to pray for our world.

We pray for countries and regions that are in conflict (add appropriate names).

We pray for places devastated by natural disaster (add appropriate names).

We pray for friends and neighbours who are struggling with illness (name if appropriate). We pray for congregation members who are not able to travel to church any longer (name if appropriate).

We pray for organizations who are working to feed and support people in our community who are struggling (name some local organizations).

We pray for ministries which stretch their care around the world (name ministries your congregation supports, which could include PWS&D and the WMS).

Today, we pause to pray for Nepal.

We pray for our global partner INF Nepal, in its work with the most marginalized people in the country.

We pray for safety and protection for all from earthquakes and landslides.

We pray for Shining Hospital and the patients who are being treated for leprosy.

We pray for physicians, nurses, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and health care workers who are joining Jesus in his healing work.

We pray for outpatient and support groups, who help those with leprosy gain new livelihoods and support their families.

We pray for our sisters and brothers in Nepal, that they would know life abundant.

O God, may we pause for prayer throughout the week ahead, until we are gathered again, and can pray together in Jesus' name. Amen.

- **Closing Hymn #645 Follow me, the Master said**

- **Commissioning and Benediction**

Jesus said, "I am willing." May we join our voices to his, in responding to a world that is hurting, with the words, "I am willing." Go into the world, seeking to find the spark of divinity in each encounter, ready to see and bow to the holy in each person. And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you, both now and forever more. Amen.

- **Benediction Song**

- **Musical Postlude**

Children's Story:

Ask the children if they know how to say "Hello" in a different language. They may need encouragement if they are uncertain, most will know French and another language spoken at home. Then ask the congregation members if they know any other words for "Hello" in different languages, and there will likely be quite a few options. (Consider learning a few greeting words from other languages – some examples are Aloha, Akawaaba, Shalom.)

In Nepal, the word that is used to say hello is "Namaste". Ask the children, "Has anyone ever heard or said this word before?" (It is often used in yoga classes and in greetings throughout southern Asia.) Show the children how to hold their hands in a prayer position and bow when saying "Namaste." Explain to the children that it means "Hello" but also, "I see God in you". So every time you say "Namaste" you are remembering that God made the person in front of you, so they are special, unique, and wonderful.

You can have a conversation that might begin with some of these questions. Would it be easy to say "Namaste" to your family? to your friends? to a stranger on the street? to someone around the world? Is it hard to remember that God loves everyone? Would saying "Namaste" help you to remember?

After the conversation, encourage the children and the members of the congregation to turn to three different people and say, "Namaste!"

Sermon:

Namaste. This is the word I heard most frequently when I travelled to Nepal with Presbyterian World Service and Development (PWS&D) staff to visit projects. It is a word of greeting, of leaving, of thanksgiving, and of welcome. Although Hindu in origin, the word is used by people of every religion in Nepal (and throughout the whole Indian sub- continent). It can simply mean, "I bow to you." It can also mean, "The divine in me bows to the divine in you," or "The sacred in me recognizes the sacred in you." "Namaste" is said with hands at prayer position at heart or forehead, and a slight bow is offered as the word is spoken.

Every room entered, every meeting begun, every arrival at a home begins with "Namaste." I am not certain that there is a true English equivalent – it is more thoughtful than "hello", more meaningful than a quick "good morning," more generous than "How are you?" As someone from North America who was new to the practice, it was a beautiful way to begin every interaction. There was great kindness in offering Namaste. The people who were greeting me were strangers and I was a stranger to them, but the first priority was always establishing our common humanity.

Sharing in the practice of greeting with the word "namaste" was one of the most meaningful parts of the journey to Nepal. I expect that people in Nepal don't get as excited about the practice as visitors do. But as an outsider, it was a practice that was noteworthy in its possibility and promise.

John Calvin wrote that we are all engraved with the marks of God's glory. In sharing Namaste, we were taking a moment to glimpse God's glory in each human body, each neighbour, friend, and stranger. We were remembering that each person is fearfully and wonderfully made, a child of God and a beloved sibling in Christ. When we heard Psalm 139 this morning, we are reminded that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. God knows us inside and out. God hems us in, behind and before, and knows the words on our tongue before they are said. This is true of us, and it is also true of our neighbours.

In offering Namaste, we were allowing our common humanity and our divine spark to bring us together. Before we do or say or offer anything, we are being greeted as sacred. Before we receive or hear or act, we are extending peace and grace, the same peace and grace that Christ extended to us.

One of my most significant moments of Namaste came when I was touring the Shining Hospital in Banke. This is a hospital for patients with leprosy, many who have lived with the disease for many years. A life with leprosy is not easy. It is one of the earliest documented human conditions, and it appears in both the Old and New Testament. Those who suffered from leprosy in ancient times were considered unclean and often cast out of their families and communities. In fact, the word leper is now often used to mean someone who is a social outcast, rather than someone who has the medical condition.

In our scripture reading today, Jesus heals a man with leprosy. The man makes a bold statement of faith to Jesus, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus replies that he is willing, and replies, "Be made clean!" Being clean means that the man would be able to rejoin his family, have work, participate in the religious life, and become a member of the community again.

This remains the dream and the wish of those who have leprosy today. In the Shining Hospital, we met both young and old, men and women, who also want to rejoin their communities and find life abundant. And that dream is within reach for people with leprosy today. There is now medication that both halts the progression of the disease and the ability to infect others. But the tremendous stigma attached to leprosy means that people are often hesitant to get tested, as they fear rejection and illness.

But at the Shining Hospital, through the work of International Nepal Fellowship, supported by PWS&D and WMS, these patients are receiving exceptional care under very challenging circumstances. Each patient, with great dignity and warmth, greeted the guests from North America with Namaste. In turn, we bowed to them, recognizing the spark of God's glory. In that hospital with few resources, there is great love. And in that great love, there is healing. There is medicine, there is physical therapy, there is treatment, but most of all, there is the recognition of God's handiwork in every patient.

Jesus responded to the man with leprosy by saying, "I am willing." He saw through the disease to the heart of the man in front of him. He recognized the divine spark of God, the same one that is in each person. Jesus did this over and over again, with those considered outcasts and lepers. Jesus would be at home in the hospital room in Shining Hospital, saying over and over again, "I am willing." The nurses, physicians, physical therapists, cleaners, and health care workers at Shining Hospital are echoing Jesus's words and actions by offering healing and love to those who need it most.

Visit after visit in Nepal began and ended with Namaste. Each bow was an opportunity to return grace with grace; to see God's goodness in others and to extend the same generosity of Spirit back to new friends. The work of Presbyterian partners in Nepal is helping patients with leprosy regain dignity, health, and community. With Jesus, let us say, "I am willing." With our neighbours, friends, and strangers, let us search for the divine spark of God and speak Namaste to one another. Amen.

***Written by the Rev. Theresa McDonald-Lee, Executive Director,
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