

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL TO WORSHIP:

*You, God, are my God;
earnestly I seek you.
I thirst for you;
my whole being longs for you,
as in a dry and parched land
where there is no water.*

(Psalm 63.1)

Let us worship God.

HYMN: Lord, thee my God, I'll early seek

PRAYER OF APPROACH AND CONFESSION:

Eternal, almighty, and holy God:

We come into your presence once again to worship you. We give you thanks for this technology that allows us to come together virtually, at least; and we look forward to being able to come together in person again, beginning next week. In spite of the limitations of this technology, may we each have a sense of your presence with us; and, through the words that are spoken in this service, may we also hear you speaking to us.

As we begin our worship, we confess our sin to you, and ask you to forgive and restore us. Even so, we confess that we see the faults and shortcomings of others more easily than we see our own. Although others see us as we are, we see ourselves as we would like to be; and so we tend to have an overly optimistic view of our goodness.

Enable us then, in this season of Lent, to gain a more realistic view of ourselves; and with the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, enable us to change the things in our attitudes and actions that are unfair, lacking in compassion, and hurtful.

We pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior; and we pray together, now, as he taught us:

*Our Father, which art in heaven:
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done in 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.*

(Matthew 6.9-13, KJV)

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:

Hear this good news from the scriptures:

*God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Jesus,
and, through him, to reconcile all people to himself,
by making peace through his blood,
shed on the cross.*

(Colossians 1.19-20, ad.)

So, if we have confessed our sin to God sincerely,
let us be assured that God will forgive us.

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

- **Old Testament Reading:** Numbers 13.26-33 - Moses' scouts report on the land of Canaan
In this chapter of Numbers, Moses sends a group of twelve scouts into the land of Canaan, to explore it, and report back.
In this reading, then, the scouts return from their mission, and report to the Israelites, who are camped in the desert, to the south of Canaan.
- **Psalm:** Psalm 146 - "Praise the LORD, my soul!"
Psalm 146 is a psalm of praise, in which the writer celebrates God's power, compassion, and faithfulness.
Notice that the psalm begins and ends with the words "Praise the LORD!", which in Hebrew is "Hallelu Yah!"
- **Letter Reading:** Philippians 1.3-6 - Paul's thanksgiving for the Philippians
In this reading, Paul begins the letter the way he begins most of his letters — with words of thanks for the people to whom he is writing.
- **Gospel Reading:** Luke 4.1-13 - The temptation of Jesus
This is Luke's account of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness.

SERMON: "Wilderness Journey" *[see separate document]*

HYMN: He's got the whole world in his hands

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:

Gracious and faithful God:

We give you thanks and praise that you are never far away from us; and that, even in our “wilderness” experiences, you are with us to guide, sustain, and encourage us. As we think of Israel’s experience in the wilderness, may we be inspired to renew our faith and trust in you, as well as our willingness to depend on you. As we think of Jesus’ experience in the wilderness, may we be motivated to renew our loyalty and commitment to you. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, may our wilderness experiences serve to strengthen our relationship with you, rather than to undermine it.

As we think of wilderness experiences, we can’t help but think of the current pandemic, which has been with us for about a year, now, and has caused all kinds of disruption, hardship, suffering, and sorrow. We are keenly aware of the physical separations from family members and friends that we all have had to endure; of economic hardships experienced by individuals, small businesses, and even large corporations; of strains on our health care system and our long-term care system; and of thousands who have died prematurely across the country, and many more around the world. We give you thanks that in this situation also, you have been with us to sustain and encourage us. We’re particularly grateful that more and more vaccines are now becoming available, and that the time when each of us may receive a vaccination is drawing ever closer. We thank you that vaccines are already making a positive difference for those who have received them; and we look forward to the time a few months from now when most people will have received one, and will be able to return to normal activities without having to fear the possibility of severe sickness or death. Grant your blessing to those who develop, produce, and administer vaccines, we pray, so that as many people as possible may receive vaccinations as soon as possible. Help us in the meantime to continue to be disciplined in following the various rules and protocols, and to be patient.

We thank you for the blessing of belonging to your church, the worldwide fellowship of those who love you and believe in Jesus; and we pray for its faithfulness and well-being. Today we pray in particular for the Pope’s visit to Iraq — that it may serve to encourage Iraqi Christians, and help to improve relations between communities of various faiths. We pray also for the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees, in the Middle East: that you would bless its work, especially as it struggles to assist Palestinians coping with the pandemic.

We thank you for your blessings to us day by day; and we pray for members of our congregation, and others close to us, who are dealing with challenges and difficulties today. We pray in particular for Cheryl McPherson’s son Frank, in hospital in Toronto; as well as for others whom we name before you now: _____ . Gracious God: We pray for your special blessing on each one: that they may experience your strength, healing, and encouragement.

Hear our prayers for the wider world as well. We continue to pray for people in positions of authority; and today we pray in particular for the leaders of the countries of the world as they

respond to the coup in Burma, and to the violence with which protesters there are being treated. Guide the world's leaders to respond more robustly to this crisis, and to increase the pressure on the Burmese military to restore the democratically-elected government.

On this day before International Women's Day, we give you thanks for advances that have been made in recognizing the equality of women and men; but we realize that we still have a long way to go. We pray therefore for your blessing on the struggle to achieve equal pay for equal work, on the struggle to eliminate sexual harassment and abuse in the workplace, and on the struggle to eliminate violence against women in the home.

We thank you that you hear our prayers, gracious God, and we offer them up to you in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

HYMN: I hunger and I thirst

COMMISSIONING AND BLESSING:

Sisters and brothers in Christ:
Go into the week ahead, now,
in peace,
and in the strength of the Holy Spirit,
confident that God is with you
in *difficult* circumstances as well as in *pleasant* ones.
And may God bless you:
May he continue to strengthen and sustain you,
and to equip you to live faithfully in his ways;
in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.