

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, BAYFIELD  
2024

May the grace of Jesus Christ be with you ... **and also with you.** Welcome to worship at  
Knox Presbyterian Bayfield

**Announcements**

**HYMN Praise God #306**

**CALL TO WORSHIP [responsive]**

One: How shall we come before our God?

**All: We come to celebrate God's goodness & grace**

One: What does the Lord require of us?

**All: God calls us to seek justice & love kindness**

One: As we serve, what does the Lord require of us?

**All: We seek to walk humbly with God.**

Prayer of Adoration and Confession **[Responsive]**

Creator God, you speak words of life to us. In you we find our hearts' desire; by your grace we are saved. When the way forward is unclear, you shed light. When times are difficult, you stir courage and hope. We yearn to know you and to be known by you. Draw near to us in our time of worship, O God, and open the way before us, so that we may follow Jesus, trusting him to lead us.

**Forgiving God, we do not readily open our hearts to others. We want to follow the ways of Jesus, yet, we are scared of the unknown and scared that we might lose ourselves. We fumble in our efforts to share your unconditional love with others. Forgive us, Lord. Remind us of the sacrificial love offered by Jesus to all humanity. Strengthen us that we may faithfully respond to your call to love one another as you love us. Guide us to be channels of your peace within your kingdom of love and justice. Amen.**

**Assurance of Pardon**

By grace we are forgiven and set free to find new life in Christ. Thanks be to God! May the peace of Jesus the Christ, which surpasses all understanding, be with you. **And also with you.**

**Hymn This is my Father's World #328**

**To Hear The Word Of God**

**Prayer For Illumination and Scripture**

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Your Word, O God, comes to us in the translation of ancient scripture. Send your Holy Spirit to open our minds with understanding and our hearts with wisdom in the name of Jesus Christ, your Living Word. Amen.

**Scripture**

Tanakh*	Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16	[B#13/W#14]
Psalms	22:23-31	[B#500/W#552]
Epistle	Romans 4:13-25	[B#155/W#161]
Gospel	Mark 8:31-38	[B#44 /W#44]

May God bless our understanding of this, God's holy word. **The word of the Lord.**

**Message**

O holy One, by the power of your Holy Spirit at work in the word read and proclaimed, may the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you. Amen.

The promise of spring has already become evident with the warmth of the sun and the growth of spring bulbs on this second Sunday of Lent. In this time we are encouraged to be still, to shift perspective, to allow ourselves to be vulnerable to the Spirit of God. Our scripture readings focus on shifts that took place within Abraham and Sarah, Jesus, and the disciples.

The reading from Genesis tells of God's covenant with Abram and Sarai. A covenant that shifted how their world was experienced and how they saw themselves. The promise God made to Abraham and Sarah remains with us today. God is our God, and we are God's people. In Jesus we develop a deeper understanding this covenant.

Abraham and Sarah developed their trust in God while not knowing for sure how things would turn out. Their trust led them to leave their homeland and family on a journey into the unknown. The scriptures describe the couple with their strengths and their challenges. They, like all of us, were flawed and made poor decisions at times. Yet they remained faithful to God. Barbara Brown Taylor writes, "In years to come, three distinct religions will spring from this trust, claiming Abraham as their grandfather in faith. Their grandmothers will be different, but not their covenant with God. God will be their God, and they will be God's people." She goes on to write, "Like his forebear in faith, Jesus walked toward God's promise with steady trust, leading God to give him a new name too: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

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In today's gospel reading Jesus was teaching the disciples about the complex events about to unfold. As I read this passage I was reminded of the term "elevator pitch?" Are you familiar with this term? Think about the time it takes to go several floors in an elevator. Now, consider how you might introduce yourself to a stranger in the elevator - beyond your name and where you live - the essence of who you are in a minute or two. I find this brief summary is particularly useful when I attend conferences. It allows me to have a few ideas on what to share when I meet people. It is very helpful when working on a project and you want to share an overview of information without getting into the details. It seems the apostle Mark may have been a pioneer in the elevator pitch. His gift for brevity packs a lot in a few short sentences. Creating an accurate description with very few words can be very challenging. The short description will create an impression without much detail. The challenge involves including brief accurate details - not too much or too little. For example, if I tell you that we are creating a Speaker Series here at Knox it would likely be too vague. But, more about that later.

In this passage Jesus spoke of how he would be rejected, suffer, be killed, and rise again. Imagine trying to process that information. Most of us have had the experience of learning something difficult to take in. A doctor sharing a medical diagnosis or perhaps when relationship change. The overwhelming emotional response can block the actual information from settling in. We can only imagine the impact of what Jesus said with the disciples.

Peter reacted strongly to the prospect of a suffering and dying messiah. His response was to argue with Jesus. Jesus went on to teach that followers are to take up their cross, lose themselves for the sake of the gospel, and be prepared to lose their life. We continue to struggle with this teaching, with the immensity of this message. Today we will focus on what it means to take up our cross.

Martin Luther provides insight with a contrasting perspective between what he called the theology of glory and the theology of the cross. In an elevator pitch, the theology of glory looks back on the scripture with the perspective that events were determined by the will of God and confirms what people want in God. The theology of the cross sees the revelation of God in weakness, vulnerability, suffering, and death which seems to contradict what people imagine God should be. Luther asserts the theology of glory

"looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those

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things which have actually happened"<sup>1</sup>. The theology of the cross "comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross" <sup>2</sup>. For Luther, to know God truly is to know God in Christ, which means to know God is found in the suffering<sup>3</sup>.

God shows strength in vulnerability. We discover God's wisdom in parables and paradox. God comes to life through death. Jesus said, those who want to save their life will lose it. The disciples discovered there was great risk in being a follower of the Way. They were told that his followers would need to take up their own cross to follow him. It is in letting go of our own expectations, when we embrace the ways of Christ that we live fully. One question that lingers, especially during Lent, is "What does it mean to carry our cross? Frederick Buechner, an American Presbyterian minister and author, writes that Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness asking himself the question of what it meant to be Jesus the Messiah and that during Lent we ask what it means to be Christian.<sup>4</sup> The prevalent belief was that the Messiah would deliver the Jews from oppression. The idea of a suffering and dying Messiah was difficult to comprehend. Peter, blinded by his conviction of how and who the Messiah would be, reacted strongly. This sounds so familiar. How often do we presume to know what will or will not be the best way to proceed? How often are we caught short in our understanding of the Ways of Christ? We can be blinded by ways of seeing and it can be difficult to shift our perspectives.

What did you hear when we read 'Take up your cross'. Taking up your cross involves choosing to follow Jesus, to live a life that chooses to stand against the powers of oppression. To take up your cross involves taking a stand against suffering, to care for the least, to care for the hungry, to relieve the suffering. We tend to turn away from suffering, violence, and abuse because it is difficult to be aware. Yet, our faith encourages us to be aware, to become resistant to the acceptance of suffering in the world, to take action that leads to change.

In closing, there is an old story about two young brothers who were caught stealing sheep. The punishment back then was to brand the thief's forehead with the letters ST

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<sup>1</sup> thesis 19

<sup>2</sup> thesis 20

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. 1:18-31

<sup>4</sup> Carl Frederick Buechner is an American writer, novelist, poet, autobiographer, essayist, preacher, and theologian. He is an ordained Presbyterian minister and the author of more than thirty published books.

which stood for sheep thief. As a result of this, one brother left the village and spent his life wandering from place to place marked by disgrace. The other remained in the village, made restitution for the stolen sheep, and became a caring friend and neighbor. He lived out his life in the village--an old man loved by all. One day a stranger in town asked about the ST on the old man's forehead. "I'm not sure what it means," they told him. "It happened so long ago, but I think the letters must stand for saint." We have a choice. We can lay down the cross we have been given to bear and passively live life with no challenge to change or we can take it up and be transformed, living for something greater than ourselves.<sup>5</sup>

In this time of Lent we are encouraged to be open and vulnerable to the Spirit of God. Consider the ways in which you are being called to live fully into your purpose within God's creation. Praise be to God for visions and the movement of the Spirit among us.

**Hymn                                        Guide Me, O Thou Great Redeemer #651**

**THE OFFERING OF OUR LIFE AND LABOUR TO THE LORD**

**Quote** Jesus knew that the place of money in our lives is a spiritual issue far more than it is an economic issue. Canon Harold Percy – Anglican Rector

Jesus challenged his followers to deny themselves in order to follow him. Our offerings express to God our willingness to commit resources we could have used in other ways for God's purposes instead. We are blessed to be able to give.

**Doxology** We give Thee but Thine own, What e'er the gift may be; All that we have is Thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from Thee.

**Blessing of Gifts**

O Holy One, grant us courage so that our lives speak to others of our love for you and for them. We ask your blessing on our offerings. May these gifts offer hope in these challenging times. Amen.

**Prayers of the People**

Loving God, we thank you for guiding us to the purpose of our lives, for the promises you have made to us, and for the journey you open before us. Today we remember with gratitude our trust in you during uncertain times.

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<sup>5</sup> Brett Blair

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*We are thankful for moments that make us laugh and smile and the moments when we experience your gifts of courage and patience supporting us. We are thankful for the times when you helped us overcome temptation. We are thankful for the people who love us and give us encouragement. Gracious God, we are grateful for all these signs of your love in our lives. Embolden us to share this hope and love with those who face struggles. Faithful God, we pray for healing and restoration in the world that is our home. We lift up those who precariously live with violence and destruction. We lift up those who are struggling in these uncertain economic times, especially those who worry about the future for their children and grandchildren; those who are weak and vulnerable, and those who lack dignity and respect in our community.*

*We pray for your creation and all its creatures; for places in conflict will find ways to build peace with justice; and for those in leadership as they grapple with complex problems and increasing demands. By the power of your Spirit, O God, work in us and through us.*

*Before we call, you answer, God. Before we speak, you know our voices. Hear our prayers. Loving God, by your Spirit, surround us with strength and love. God of hope, we ask you to linger with all who are dealing with challenges: Renee & Jim; Judith & Gerry; Rob, Valerie, Jim & Jane; Carl; Betty Lou; Ruth; Audrey & Grace; Courtney, Gayle & family; and, Don, Phyllis, and Shawn. We lift up all who are on our hearts as they face immense challenges.*

*O God of hope and new possibility, in Christ you opened the way into the future for us through the power of your redeeming love. Give us the courage we need to face our future, assured of your presence and power to sustain us. We offer all that we are and all that we hope for through Jesus Christ who taught us to pray together as his people: Our Father who art in heaven, hallow'ed 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 trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.*

**Hymn**

**Brother, Sister, Let me Serve You #635**

**To Go Forth In God's Name**

**Commissioning and Benediction**

As we continue our Lenten journey, remember the words of the Psalmist:

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"The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forever more." So go now, trusting that your help comes from God. May God's presence strengthen you, may Jesus' faithfulness guide you, may the wind of the Spirit energize you to serve with love. This day and forevermore. Amen

**Postlude            Amen**