

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: Come, all who desire to know God.

All: We come, for we want to see Jesus.

One: Come, all who thirst for the Spirit.

All: We come, for God is in our midst this day.

One: Let us praise God's holy name.

All: We will worship God with heart, mind, strength and soul, and declare God's goodness to us.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession [responsive]

Creating God, loving Christ, guiding Spirit, we praise you for the promise of spring as new life awakens all around us. You are faithful through every season of the year and every season of life. The hope of Jesus Christ draws us together, as your Spirit rises within our hearts. The courage and compassion of Jesus Christ brings renewal to us in the midst of all our challenges. We praise you, O God, for your love that will never let us go. We join our voices together in our prayer of confession.

Gracious and Loving God, as we draw closer to the Cross, we recognize ways we fall short of your hope for us. We get lost in our own concerns when we neglect to show love, even to those right beside us. We struggle to care for people we experience as difficult. Forgive us and renew your spirit within us, so that we find the courage and the compassion to reach out in your name. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Jesus said, Come to me all you who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Friends, trust that peace and forgiveness are God's gifts to you. Be renewed by the power of the Spirit that moves with you into each new day. May the peace of Jesus the Christ, which surpasses all understanding, be with you. **And also with you.**

Hymn Open our eyes, Lord #445

To Hear The Word Of God

Prayer For Illumination and Scripture

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*	Jeremiah 31:31-34	[B#735/W#817]
Psalms	Psalms 119:9-16 [responsive]	[B#566/W#627]
Epistle	Hebrews 5:5-10	[B#220/W#237]
Gospel	John 12:20-33	[B#106 /W#110]

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.

This is the 5th Sunday of Lent - traditionally this is a time of reflection as we prepare for the good news of Easter. An inspiring message of hope comes through the prophet Jeremiah from God, "I will put my law within them," says the Lord, "and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." In the gospel of John, Jesus spoke of the impact his death. The passages speak of hope in the midst of pain and upheaval.

There is a story about a farmer who was visiting his nephew in a big city. The young man took the his uncle on a tour. At one point as they walked down the street the old man suddenly stopped and asked, "Did you hear that?" The young man looked at the milling pedestrians and the traffic and replied, "Hear what?" "A cricket," his uncle said as he walked toward a little tuft of grass growing in an alley. Sure enough, there was a cricket. The younger man was amazed and asked, "How could you pick up the sound of a cricket in all this noise?" The farmer just reached into his pocket, pulled out a couple of coins and dropped them on the sidewalk. Immediately a number of people around them began to check in their pockets as they looked toward the sidewalk. The farmer observed, "We hear what our ears are trained to hear."

Jeremiah was able to hear and respond to God. There is strength and hope in Jeremiah's words, which were written as the prophet struggled with the consequences of Israel's disobedience to God. Their nation was overthrown...the walls of Jerusalem were torn down, their holy temple was destroyed, and many Israelites were banished to Babylon. In this harsh reality, the prophet realized that humanity did not have the capacity to heal itself. Human solutions and tools are necessary but not enough. They would need divine help. There were resources that only God could provide.

Jeremiah spoke to the communal sense of loss experienced when the temple was destroyed and he warned of the consequences for their actions and their lack of faith. Despite injustice and exploitation, despite idolatry, despite all the ways the people had broken faith with God—God did not break faith with them. God promised the covenant would be written on the hearts of the people. The temple would be part of them. Instead of judgment, the people received unexpected good news. God would bring newness out of destruction, where there was chaos and devastation God would bring hope. Jeremiah spoke of a time when it would no longer be necessary for the law to be engraved in stone and displayed within the temple. The days were coming when the law would be engraved on the hearts of the people. Jeremiah was able to hear and respond to God's call on his life in the midst of turbulent times.

In John's gospel, Christ is referred to as "high priest according to the order of Melchizedek", which links him to an Old Testament priest and king. Jesus, the anointed one, is intricately linked within the history of prophets, priests, and kings. When we understand Jesus in this way ... we can understand the Divine entering into the world, inter-connected within the fabric of life. Jesus as one with God and one with humanity.

When Jesus walked through the crowds at the Passover festival there were some who were eager to meet with him, to learn more about this miracle worker. When Philip and Andrew brought people to him, Jesus spoke to them about his death with a parable, saying, "Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

If you work in your garden or the fields...you recognize the deep meaning in this parable. Grains of wheat die in order to produce the new plant. The seeds cannot remain the same if they are to be fruitful. They must split and lose what they were ... in order to

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become the plant they are intended to be. People must lose their known way of being... we are to let go of our love for our cultural expectations and the sense of control in our own lives.

The parable urges us to look at how we choose to live. To reflect on and examine how we are living into the ways of Jesus. In recent years there have been multiple opportunities to reflect on how we experience life. It can be challenging to see the world through a different viewpoint. It is challenging when we feel our hearts responding to injustice in this world. It can be tempting to turn away in an effort to not see the problem. Yet, we are called to respond.

The ways in which we hear and respond to God's call will vary. Within this congregation there are many ways to serve. I hope you are considering the opportunities outlined with the Easter letter of Hope. The good work of many makes the work lighter within the community. The leaders of your congregation respond to God's call in many ways. Last week the elders led the Congregational meeting and then met on Monday with the Finance and Maintenance committee.

The Finance committee is led by Pieter and Teresa as co-conveners along with Jim, Jim, Marjory, and Jan. The session includes me, as your minister and the ruling elders. Currently there are 3 dedicated elders – Brenda, who also serves as the Clerk of Session; Deb, who also serves as the Presbytery Rep; and Jim Thompson, who serves as an assessor elder and liaison to the Finance and Maintenance committee. Jim retired from Session a few years ago. He agreed to go back on Session as a Presbytery appointed 'assessor elder' during the pandemic. He has been an immense help. We meet about 9 or 10 times a year to discuss the work of the church.

Early in 2024 it was decided to move forward with initial steps for an elder election. The decision to call an election arises from the need to have a reasonable number of elders to share the spiritual oversight of the church. This Session would be well served by 5 or 6 elders. There are many matters that come before Session including: responsibility for establishing good order, providing for the pastoral care of the congregation, maintaining oversight of groups, the policies and procedures including the use of church buildings and property. For example, you may recall the significant discussions on inclusive policies within the Presbyterian Church in Canada. The decision to be an inclusive faith community was an important decision for your congregation.

How does all of this relate to the readings this morning? The spiritual office of eldership consists of people who are committed to hearing and responding to the Spirit of God. Over the next couple of months you will learn more about elder elections so you can be better prepared to nominate members and consider whether you are being called to serve as an elder. In our denomination, elders are elected for life. There is no need for experience in this role ... you may have heard this before ... God doesn't call the prepared, God prepares the called. Elders bring many gifts and they acquire an understanding of their roles within the government of the church.

It is necessary to step outside our comfort zone in order to gain understanding, become informed and curious. We are encouraged to become aware of the ways in which God is calling us individually and as a community. There are diverse ways to take action that leads to resolving problems caused by the injustice of oppression, poverty, slavery, and war.

Charles Hoffacker shared his reflection on the parable relative to Lord of the Rings, by JRR Tolkien. Tolkien was many things: a university professor, a medieval scholar, a writer of fantasy, and a Christian. During the First World War, young Tolkien served in the trenches with the British army, which had a major impact on his fiction. During World War Two, Tolkien wrote to his son Christopher:

"I sometimes feel appalled at the thought of the sum total of human misery all over the world at the present moment: the millions parted, fretting, wasting in unprofitable days--quite apart from torture, pain, death, bereavement, injustice. If anguish were visible, almost the whole of this benighted planet would be enveloped in a dense dark vapor, shrouded from the amazed vision of the heavens! And the products of it all will be mainly evil--historically considered. But the historic vision is, of course, not the only one. All things and all deeds have a value in themselves, apart from their 'causes' and 'effects.' No man can estimate what is really happening in the light of eternity. All we do know, and that to a large extent by direct experience, is that evil labors with vast power and perpetual success--in vain: preparing the soil for unexpected good to sprout in."

Tolkien describes the powerful, successful work of evil as a preparation of soil where unexpected good will sprout. Tolkien talked about the soil from which the seed can sprout. From a solitary seed, Jesus tells us, much fruit will come forth. Unexpected good will sprout. Jesus teaches about suffering and the impact of taking action. When we become

informed, then we can take action to assist those who suffer. When issues are discussed and explored, then it is possible to pursue justice, healing, and reconciliation. Where is God enacting that new life within or around you? We are strengthened in faith as we remember that God has written the law on our hearts and we are God's people.

Praise be to God for visions and the movement of the Spirit among us.

Hymn In the bulb there is a flower #674

THE OFFERING OF OUR LIFE AND LABOUR TO THE LORD

Quote Stewardship is not something we can put on or take off as the seasons change. Stewardship, like faith, must be woven into the fabric of our lives. Gregory Coulter – professor of Philosophy

When we surrender to God our lives bear fruit in the world, for the sake of Christ. Our offerings sow seeds of God's love in this community and beyond.

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

God of new life and growth, we share our offerings with appreciation and praise for the promise of spring and the promise of resurrection in Christ Jesus. With these gifts, accomplish more than we can ask or imagine, as they bear fruit in the world you love, through Christ, our Lord.

Prayers of the People

Steadfast God, we are grateful for your presence through the many changes and challenges we experience. You understand our fears; you support and guide us; and you give us courage to face whatever lies ahead. Thank you for the gift of faith, a solid rock to support us. We trust that you are here among us in ways seen and unseen, and that your goodness will prevail.

Loving God, we pray for the world you love. Send your healing Spirit to bring peace with justice to all who are troubled. We lift up the peoples of many regions as they struggle to live with the presence of armed conflict. Bring care and comfort to those who have been hurt, wisdom to those who seek to end hostilities, and courage to those who advocate for the vulnerable. Send your healing Spirit to mend relationships between the groups who find themselves in tension or turmoil. We pray for the growth of mutual respect, the

healing of wounds, the softening of hearts and minds. Send your healing Spirit to your people and to the earth you love.

We pray for the continuing ministry of the Church in our neighbourhoods and throughout the world. May your healing Spirit raise our hearts and our hopes with the promise of new life in Christ.

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. Equip us to offer support for those who are near to us. Draw near to those who must confront illness, loss, and changing circumstances. We are thankful for healing and we are thankful for the end of suffering.

God of compassion, we lift up families who travel the long journey of grief. May their memories be a blessing. God of hope, we ask you to linger with all who are dealing with difficult challenges: Renee & Jim; Judith & Gerry; Rob, Valerie, Jim & Jane; Carl; Betty Lou; Ruth; Audrey & Grace; and, Courtney, Gayle & family. 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

Jesus bid us shine

#773

To Go Forth In God's Name

Commissioning and Benediction

As we soon journey through Lent, remember the words of Jesus: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." May the love of Jesus wash over your sorrows, the Spirit of God dwell in your hearts, and God's promise of new life lead you through each day ahead.

Postlude

Amen