

Knox Presbyterian Church
Rev. Emma Duncan
April 6, 2025

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT



Greetings

Call to worship (PWS&D Lenten Liturgy) Jackie Harrington

One: Anointed before his death by a faithful woman disciple,

All: but betrayed by a self-serving disciple, Jesus confronted death.

One: But through his death on the cross and the power of the resurrection,

All: in faith we believe that Christ has made us his own.

One: And so with shouts of joy we declare God's praise

All: for the Lord has done great things for us.

Music: O love, how deep, how broad, how high (#205, verses 1-3, 6)

Prayer of Lament (including The Lord's Prayer)

This week's lament is based on Psalm 77. Let us pray from wherever we are.

God, we call out to you! From the depths of our hearts, we cry, "Lord, hear our prayer!"

We are in distress and seek your presence. At night, unable to sleep, we stretch out our hands and we are not comforted. We groan as our spirits grow fainter and fainter. We ponder the days of old, wondering where you are in the midst of our troubles.

We are consumed by grief.

The events of this year overwhelm us—
it's hard to sleep,
it's hard to eat,
it's even hard to pray.

And so, we ask ourselves - where are you, God?
Will the Lord reject us forever?
Will you never show your favor again?
Has your unfailing love vanished forever?
Has your promise failed for all time?
Have you forgotten to be merciful?

As we ponder these questions, we remember that there have been many times this year when you have stretched out your hand to comfort us. We remember all of your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds. Your ways, O God, are holy. You are indeed the God who performs miracles and you display your power among the peoples. With your mighty arm, you redeemed your people and for that, we are eternally grateful.

O Holy One, in the depth of our despair, we pray that you will surround us with your unfailing love. Remind us that you alone are God and that you hold us in the palm of your hand. Anoint us with courage to face the days ahead and strengthen us in the knowledge that we do not face them alone.

We now pray the prayer of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, 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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Our Old Testament reading for today is from the Book of Isaiah, chapter 42. Hear what the Lord says through the prophet:

I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness;
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations.

People of God, God's covenant is this – that Jesus Christ is the Light of the world who offers us forgiveness, mercy, and grace. Receive this perfect gift and share it with the world. Amen.

Announcements

1. Welcome!
2. Join us in the Fellowship Hall after worship for refreshments and conversation.
3. Thank you to Jackie Harrington and Dave Crawford for participating in worship.
4. Welcome Victoria Chandler and Fafali Ahiahonu from Presbyterian World Service & Development. Both Victoria and Fafali serve on the national Governance Team for PWS&D which has been meeting at Crieff Hills Retreat Centre this past week. Victoria is from Halifax where she works an Occupational Therapist and Fafali is from Saskatoon where she manages English as a second language programs and employability skills initiatives for Newcomer Youth. Victoria will be making a presentation shortly about the work of PWS&D and both of them will be joining us for coffee fellowship before they have to make their way to the airport. If you would like to support the work of PWS&D, there are offering envelopes in the sanctuary.
5. Volunteers needed to host coffee fellowship. Sign-up sheet is in the Fellowship Hall.
6. Holy Week

Palm Sunday – April 13th at 10:30 a.m.

Worship service at **Knox**

Maundy Thursday – April 17th at 7:00 p.m.

Sacrament of Holy Communion at **Knox**

Joint service with Port Nelson United Church

Good Friday – April 18th at 11:00 a.m.

Worship service at **Port Nelson United Church**

3132 South Drive

Joint service with Port Nelson United and Burlington Baptist Churches

Easter Sunday – April 20th at 10:30 a.m.

Worship service at **Knox**

7. Upcoming Events

Saturday April 12, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Easter Eggstravaganza

Sunday May 4 after worship service

Annual General Meeting

Sunday May 25 in the afternoon

Concert - Circle of Harmony women's *A Capella* choir

Music: Give me oil in my lamp (#655, all verses)

PWS&D Presentation



Prayer of Illumination

Let us pray. Teach us, loving Father, by your Word and Spirit. Help us to hear, know, and live the gospel, so that we might grow to be more like Mary, who anointed the Lord with all that she had. We pray in the name of our risen Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Old Testament reading is taken from the Book of Isaiah and we will be reading Responsively Chapter 42, verses 1-9.

Leader: Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights;

People: I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

Leader: He will not cry out or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street;

People: A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.

Leader: He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth, and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

People: Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it:

Leader: I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness;
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;

People: I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

Leader: I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols.

All: See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them. Amen.

Our New Testament reading is taken from the Gospel of John and we will be reading chapter 12, verses 1-11.

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him.

Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.)

Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

So, the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Reflection: You do not always have me

I don't believe in luck. I don't believe in coincidence.

I finished the draft orders of service for Lent and Easter at the end of January. Then at the end of February, I received an email from the national office of the Presbyterian Church in Canada about having Victoria come to our worship service today to talk about the work of Presbyterian World Service & Development.



The poor you will always have with you.

I feel that Victoria has done an excellent job of communicating this message to you.

Because Jesus was absolutely right when he made this statement! In 2025, we are experiencing unprecedented poverty in the midst of plenty. A few weeks ago, many of you signed a petition regarding the rise of homelessness in Halton. With the trade war that is growing around the world, the cost of goods and services is only going to get higher. The future of the global economy is uncertain and this will affect millions of people around the world, especially the poor.

As we navigate our way into an uncertain future, the story that we just heard from John chapter 12 is still relevant. In 2025, the characters from this story still exist. Today, we have servants like Mary, who believe with every fibre of their being that Jesus Christ is Lord. She, like millions of Christians, are very generous. Mary was willing to use the equivalent of \$18,000 in Canadian funds for perfume to pour on Jesus' feet.¹ According to the Gospel of John, Jesus had just raised her brother, Lazarus, from the dead. Before

¹ <https://testamentpress.com/ancient-money-calculator.html> (calculator into USD, then converted into CAD)

he performed this incredible miracle, he said these words to Mary's sister, Martha – **I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who believes in me will never die.** (John 11:25-26) If you had just witnessed such a miracle – of your loved one being raised from the dead – wouldn't you be at Jesus' feet with an offering of great value? Wouldn't you do everything within your power to offer him worship and praise?

We give thanks to God for the witness of Mary who has inspired faithful believers around the world to offer so much of their time, talents, and treasures to helping others in the name of Jesus Christ. And Presbyterian World Service and Development – along with our ecumenical partners – are just an example of this type of service.

And along with people like Mary and Martha, sadly we also have people like Judas. Those who do not care about the poor. Those who criticize the work of Christians and would rather keep the money for themselves. We are seeing this in all levels of government and in many parts of our society – there are individuals and groups of individuals who are NOT worshipping our Triune God. Instead, they are worshipping that 'unholy Trinity' of me, myself, and I. They are the ones saying leave me alone. Let me live my life how I want without any care about the impact of their actions on others.

Now what I'm going to say next is something controversial...unfortunately, there are people like this within the Church today.² People who are more interested in pretty church buildings rather than helping the poor. People who are happy to wish you 'thoughts and prayers,' but aren't willing to do the hard work of dismantling the economic

² The writings of Professor Lindsey S. Jodrey challenged me this week. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fifth-sunday-in-lent-3/commentary-on-john-121-8-4>

and political systems that are in place preventing all members of society from living full and meaningful lives. And I'm going to be honest, we have struggled with this here at Knox, especially in the post-pandemic world. This week, I began working on my parts of the Annual Report in preparation for our Annual General Meeting in early May. I ended up writing TWO 'Minister's Messages' in less than 24 hours. One of the messages is pessimistic, the other is hopeful. And I was conflicted – which message do you need to hear from me right now? After consulting with our Elders, I will be writing 'version three' which is somewhere in the middle – hopeful yet realistic.

The truth is that many Christians struggle with this – finding balance between living in the world while serving Christ and His Church in hope and faith. I have struggled with this in my own life and I know that I am not the only one.

How do we be hopeful and realistic at the same time?

I wish I could say that there is an easy answer to this question, but there isn't. Each of us has to find the right balance based on our personal life circumstances and our understanding of who Jesus calls us to be.

But what I will say is that finding this balance has to start by focusing on our Lord, Jesus Christ. In the Season of Lent, we have been journeying towards the cross through our exploration of the Gospel of John. And what have we been hearing in God's most holy Word? That Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God, who offers us love, forgiveness, healing, and new life in his name. **And** he knew what was coming. He stated this again in chapter 12 – [you will not always have me](#). (John 12:8) Jesus willingly and obediently went to die on the cross on our behalf. And because he was prepared to make this great sacrifice, he welcomed his dear friend, Mary, at his feet to prepare him for

burial. He welcomed her expensive gift of fine perfume as a thank offering for the promise of the resurrection and new life.

And so, my friends, as we race towards the cross, my question to you is this – what can you offer Christ as a thank offering that will

bring forth justice to the nations,
open the eyes that are blind,
bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
and lift up the poor, who are still with us today?

Amen.

Dedication of our Tithes and Offerings

We will now sing our song of thanks, - Holy, holy, holy (#303, verse 1)

Holy, holy, holy.

My heart, my heart adores you!

My heart is glad to say the words:

You are holy, Lord

Let us pray.

Gracious God, even as Mary poured out her love for Jesus, he was preparing to pour out his life on the cross for her and for us all. We are grateful for Christ's love and we pray that you will accept the gifts we bring. Anoint them with your Spirit so that they will flow into the world, refreshing others with your mercy and love. Amen.

Prayers of the People

This week, I will be leading you through a guided prayer. Throughout this prayer, I will leave space for silence so that we can all offer our prayers to the Lord.

Holy and loving God, as Christ received Mary's offering of devotion and expensive perfume, we come before you today from near and far to offer our devotion. Like Mary, we come with confidence knowing that you will receive our prayers in faithfulness and righteousness.

In these challenging days, we give you thanks for every unexpected kindness, every word of comfort or encouragement, every sign of courage in the face of injustice, every hopeful step towards reconciliation amid conflict, and every healing in the face of disease or danger. For family and friends, for faith and forgiveness, for life itself, we thank you for your presence in all things.

As your Son accepted the service of Martha, the friendship of Lazarus, and the devotion of Mary, bless believers everywhere who serve Christ in many ways:

for church leaders who proclaim the Good News of the Gospel

for those who work with the poor and marginalized

for those who welcome the stranger

for those who offer friendship and encouragement

for those working to end unjust economic and political systems

for those who give generously of their time and money

We thank you for them all.

As we offer you our thanks today, O Lord, there are many worries and fears that we are carrying.

In this unpredictable time in history, we pray for those who struggle to survive. We remember those whose lives are caught up in policies, systems, and trends that are beyond their control and affect their ability to buy food and find adequate housing.

In a time of silence, we lift up to you all who are poor...

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

O God, the stories of Jesus in the Gospel of John show us that he faced the clamour of many demands and the pressure of his critics. We pray for all those who are exhausted these days, juggling more and more demands with fewer and fewer resources.

In a time of silence, we pray for our nation and communities...

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

As the stories of Jesus turn us toward the cross, O God, we pray for those who also walk the road of suffering. We remember before you those whose lives have been plunged into sorrow or despair through death, illness, trauma, or conflicts at home or at work.

In a time of silence, we remember our family and friends...

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We remember your children who we name before you...

O Triune God, we need the embrace of your presence, each in our own way. Send your Spirit into our lives and our Church so that we may follow the teachings of Christ in faith and hope. Anoint us with a spirit of compassion and service, so that the sweet fragrance of your love may permeate the whole world. To you – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – be all honour and glory and praise. Now and always. Amen.

Music: I heard the voice of Jesus say (#671, all verses)

Blessing (1 John 3:16-18) // Sung Amen