



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 13, 2020

ELW Holy Communion, Setting Ten

In today's second reading Paul questions why we judge one another, since we all stand before the judgment of God. Yet we do sin against one another, and Jesus' challenge that we forgive seventy-seven times reveals God's boundless mercy. When we hear the words of forgiveness in worship and sign ourselves with the cross, we are renewed in baptism to be signs of reconciliation in the world.

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping on-line with us today! Here at Grace Lutheran we believe God is active in your life. Even you being here now is testament of God's calling and leading in your heart, which you have faithfully heeded. So we welcome you, and pray that today you will be nurtured and that the gifts that God has graciously given you will be stirred for the sake of God's mission in the world.

GATHERING

ANNOUNCEMENTS

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

We gather together even while apart in the name of our blessed God, who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Amen.

Scripture tells us that as loving parents have compassion for their children, so God has compassion for us. In that loving compassion, God invites us into God's kingdom, welcomes us into God's family, forgives us when we fall short, and redeems us with a grace that knows no bounds. And so God gives us the gift of baptism to remind us of all these promises and the sure and certain hope of our salvation. For like in the waters of baptism, we are made clean by God's love, our guilt and shame is washed away, and we are joined together by the pure and clear water, nourishing our souls and refreshing our hearts.

So I ask that you dip a finger in the water and use it to make a sign of the cross on your forehead or on the foreheads of those in your home worshipping with you. Feel the coolness on your skin and be reminded that we are loved, we are forgiven, and we are never alone for we will be surrounded by our community and all the saints forever, in the name of God, Sovereign, Saviour, and Spirit.

Amen.

GATHERING HYM: Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love (#708)

GREETING

The forgiving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the compassionate love of God, and the merciful fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

KYRIE (p. 203)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O Lord our God, our source and our salvation, in love you made us and by love you have redeemed us. Make this love you have for us, this unending and steadfast love, be evident in our lives through our forgiveness of others, that we might understand and recognize your all-embracing compassion and find hope in your promises, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Genesis 50:15-21

A reading from Genesis.

After Jacob's death the brothers of Joseph begged for forgiveness for the crime they had done against him. You intended to do me harm, Joseph said, but God used this as an opportunity to do good and save many lives.

¹⁵Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" ¹⁶So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, ¹⁷'Say to Joseph: I

beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.’ Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father.” Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, “We are here as your slaves.” ¹⁹But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? ²⁰Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. ²¹So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.” In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 103:8-13

⁸LORD, you are full of compassion and mercy,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love;
⁹**you will not always accuse us,
nor will you keep your anger forever.**
¹⁰You have not dealt with us according to our sins,
nor repaid us according to our iniquities.
¹¹**For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is your steadfast love for those who fear you.**
¹²As far as the east is from the west,
so far have you removed our transgressions from us.
¹³**As a father has compassion for his children,
so you have compassion for those who fear you, O LORD.**

SECOND READING: Romans 14:1-12

A reading from Romans.

This Christian community has significant struggles with diversity. Here Paul helps us understand that despite different practices in worship and personal piety, we do not judge one another. All Christians belong to the Lord Jesus Christ who died for all of us and will judge each of us.

¹Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions.
²Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. ³Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. ⁴Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.
⁵Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. ⁶Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.
⁷We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. ⁸If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.
¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹For it is written,
“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,

and every tongue shall give praise to God.”
¹²So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 205)

GOSPEL: Matthew 18:21-35

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

When Peter asks about the limits of forgiveness, Jesus responds with a parable that suggests human forgiveness should mirror the unlimited mercy of God.

²¹Peter came and said to [Jesus], “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” ²²Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

²³“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ ²⁷And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ ²⁹Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ ³⁰But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³²Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. ³⁵So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

O Lord by the power of your Spirit, may our ears minds, and hearts be open to receive the Word you have for us this day, that our lives be fuelled by your grace, mercy, and steadfast love, through Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

Every few months I update you all on how long this pandemic has been going, and today marks the 27th Sunday that we have been worshipping online. Twenty seven. That is pretty significant. Not just because 27 is a combination of 2 prime numbers, 2 and 7, and you all know that prime numbers make everything significant, but because we have just crossed the halfway mark of a year. It’s been exactly half a year since we’ve been at this. I know a lot of people out there would be like, well yeah, obviously it would go this long. But there are still a bunch others who would say “Still!?!?” and had expected the pandemic to have been over months ago.

But whatever your thoughts are on the length of this thing, one thing seems clear to me, and that is that no one is happy about it at all. There are varying degrees of unhappiness however. I mean there are those who are just displeased with the inconvenience. There are some who are sad and perhaps scared with how the economy has gone and where it is going. There are others who are depressed because their whole life was thrown on its head, having lost their job or worse. But I think the most extreme case of unhappiness throughout this pandemic is that anger, that indignation, that absolute livid “the whole world is against me” feeling that comes from those who don’t think we should wear masks.

Seriously.

Do a quick search for “anti-mask” or “corona mask” or just “Karen covidiot” (which by the way, I don’t like the term nor do I like highlighting it, but just do the search and you’ll know what I mean). You’ll find story after story and video after video of people just absolutely out of their minds because they are so angry with being asked to wear a mask, or told to wear a mask, or as they put it, forced to wear a mask against their constitutional rights.

Many of us on this side of mask wearing might scoff and shake our heads and frankly would like to give their heads a shake. We might laugh and ridicule or in my case, actually feel physically sick with seeing how a human being can treat other human being for just doing their job. Or perhaps the worst case scenario, we might even secretly wish that the anti-maskers would get sick, catch this coronavirus and so maybe then they would finally get the seriousness of it all.

And I understand. I don’t agree, but I understand. Oh, actually I mean I understand the antimasker’s anger. Well, I understand the anti-antimasker’s anger too, but I’m just saying that I understand both sides of that angry coin, mostly because anger is anger is anger.

I mean really.

Anger is the same even though they have different roots. The feeling is the same even though they have different causes. The indignation of injustice is the same, even when they have very different rationales.

And what also is the same from this is the perhaps unrecognised need to forgive whatever it is that is angering you because really, that stuff will eat you alive.

“How often should I forgive,” Peter asks Jesus, “as many as seven times?” Embarrassingly enough, Peter was probably being generous here. He was probably inflating his max forgiveness count to make it sound like he was more gracious than the other disciples, also number dropping 7, that perfect number that is used in the bible so often (and also a prime number). And we might laugh at Peter’s short-sightedness, we might chuckle at how his question is made to look so silly by Jesus’ response, we might even think that we can totally forgive way more than that probably like 7 and a half to 8 times, if they were sorry enough.

The thing is that I think Peter’s very honest question here highlights something that is innate in many, if not all humans. I think that Peter’s question is only speaking honestly out of our human condition. Peter’s question here is a question that many of us are probably thinking but never had the guts to actually say out loud (because we’re probably embarrassed about it too). The truth is that deep down, we all like to be angry.

It's not that we look for reasons to be angry, but many of us get angry because there is a lot to be angry about, especially during this pandemic. Many of us were disallowed to go to work, school, and of course, church. Many of us haven't been able to travel, to visit family or friends, or even sit down at a restaurant for a bite to eat. Many of us had our summers ruined, travel plans cancelled or postponed, and even weddings had to be changed into something that the couple never would have imagined. And on top of it all, we have to wear this uncomfortable, dorky looking cloth over our mouths and noses that doesn't even really do anything for us?

So yeah, I understand the anger. To a broad extent, I share it. The world never has a shortage of things that make us angry, even outside of this pandemic. And so we want to stand up and fight. We want to protest. We want to make those who we feel have hurt us to pay and at very least feel that same hurt that we felt. And if we are honest, that feels right. It feels right to be angry to the point of action. It feels right to be angry and exact revenge and retribution. It feels right to be angry when someone wrongs us.

But that kind of anger grows and festers and like I said, eats us up inside. That kind of anger, that if left untreated, will eventually turn into hate.

Hate, unless we forgive.

See, Jesus knows that we like to be angry. Jesus knows that to us, it feels right to be angry in the face of things that anger us. Jesus knows that it is all too easy to justify our anger in the face of injustice, oppression, and evil. But Jesus says that it is also right, imperative even, to forgive.

Continuing with his instruction from last week's conflict resolution chat (which by the way, if you missed my sermon on it, you can just go back a week and check that bad boy out), Jesus tells his disciples and us that there shouldn't be a limit to our forgiveness. The parable he uses is a man forgiven of an insurmountable debt, something like a gazillion dollars, and in turn is unable to forgive like a few hundred bucks. That man of course is thrown into the prison of his own anger, hatred and inability to forgive. Or perhaps, that prison's walls are lined with the man's own inability to recognise the amount or lavishness of the forgiveness shown to him, which as we just heard, was a lot.

I mean it would make sense that if you are forgiven of much, that you'll be able to forgive much. But if you can't, then maybe you haven't seen how much you've been forgiven. Or perhaps even more sinister, you haven't learned how to forgive yourself.

See that is the lesson that I believe that Jesus is teaching his disciples and us over these past couple weeks. Often we think that forgiveness is for the other, that the other is getting a benefit because we are being the bigger person, that the other should at least do something to deserve the forgiveness that we so graciously give them. But while some of that might be true, I think Jesus is saying that forgiveness is actually a lot more for ourselves than it is for the other. Forgiving the other brings healing within yourself. Absolving the other from that hold they have on your mind and emotions gives you space to patch that wound up. Forgiving the other is being able to recognise that we all make mistakes, we all mess up, we all fall short in some way. And while some of us mess up a lot worse than others, we all still qualify for God's forgiveness, and thus should qualify for our own.

This isn't to say that we should leave crimes unpunished or there is no place for law and order, but it is to say that we needn't punish others with our grudges and public rants and meltdowns. It's to say that forgiveness is the beginning of our own healing and the healing of our relationships. It's to say that it isn't just a benefit for them but also for us, and thus for all of society and community. For we are all connected and part of this mosaic of life and our actions will, in turn, affect others. And when we forgive, when we reconcile, when we make amends with those who have harmed us, the community is restored all we are all better for it.

What an incredible insight that Jesus gives us. What an incredible gift that has been given to us by God. What an incredible love, one that is abounding and steadfast, slow to anger and full of compassion and mercy, that has been shown to us and empowers us to reflect it on all whom we meet.

This season after Pentecost, may we continue to love and forgive our neighbours, friends, and even enemies, just as God has chosen to graciously love and forgive and welcome us, shortcomings and all, as God's own beloved children. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (#631)

CREED

With God's dearly forgiven, let's confess the Christian faith with the Apostle's Creed:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Called into loving forgiveness, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with "God of grace" and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. God of grace, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you are full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. You look upon us with favour and redeem us into your kingdom and community. May we

reflect this love onto the world, that all might know of the joy and peace in your name. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you do not accuse us or keep your anger forever, even though we fail to answer your calling for our lives and communities. We pray for all communities of faith, that we all be strengthened to do your will and proclaim your love. Especially we pray for our partner Anglican Church of Canada; our bishop Greg, assistant to the bishop Kathy, and our national bishop Susan; and our companion churches of the BC Synod. In particular, we pray for Faith Lutheran Church in Powell River and the leaders and pastors that serve that ministry; and for Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Prince George and their pastor Fleming Blishen. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you have not dealt with us according to our failures and shortcomings, but you continue to bless us with this creation in which we live, work, and play. May our stewardship of this planet be a reflection of your grace upon us, that it might thrive and be restored in beauty and resources. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, your steadfast love is great and immeasurable, and you give it freely without condition or cost to us. May the leaders and politicians of the world learn of your love and grace, that they might govern with fairness and bring a sense of peace and security to their constituents. We especially pray for Solyana Amanuel, that her journey into our country and safety be swift. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you remove our transgressions from us and free us from guilt. We humbly ask for more of that blessing upon those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your love always be apparent in and around us. Especially we pray for Bev and family; Paula; Henry; Diana; Beulah; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Linda; Cindy; Chris; all those who have contracted or been affected by COVID-19; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...

God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, your compassion for us is without limit and your love has no bounds. You welcome us into your eternal kingdom with you and all the saints, and you remind us of our inclusion in your unending mercy. May this truth serve as our hope and give us the strength to live faithfully as your children in the world. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your compassionate mercy and steadfast love, shown to us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

MEAL

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

PICTURE CHALLENGE SLIDESHOW

DIALOGUE

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

PREFACE

It is indeed right, our duty, and our joy, that we should at all times and places give thanks and praise to you, O holy and almighty God, through Jesus Christ, who reveals to us the grace and mercy in your name, that we might be joined with the choirs of angels, the hosts of heaven, and the church on earth in praising your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 207)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

O Lord you are full of compassion and mercy, always slow to anger but abounding in steadfast love. Although you have all reason to do so, you don't accuse us or shame us for our faults, you don't deal with us according to our sins or seek retribution against our iniquities. Instead, you show us how great your love is for us through the ministry of your Son, Jesus, who came to us as one of us to reveal your will and the hope of your salvation.

For on the night that he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus sat with his friends for a meal, taking bread and giving thanks for it, he broke and shared it saying, "take and eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

Then after they ate, he took the cup, gave thanks, and shared that saying, "this cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me."

It is in this food before us, representing that same meal that Jesus shared, that we are reminded of God's compassion, grace, and love, even as we declare this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

Holy are you, O God, and great are your promises and blessing. All honour and praise be to you, for all that you have done, are doing, and will continue to do through Jesus your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered into one love by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.

LAMB OF GOD (p. 208)

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Eat, drink, know the grace of God.
Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

Gracious God, again we have felt your presence among us through your Word, your blessing, and your love. May we be empowered by your forgiveness, that we might reflect that grace and compassion upon all whom we encounter, especially during this pandemic, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

SENDING

BLESSING

The blessing of God be with you, the love of Jesus fill you, and the power of the Holy Spirit sustain you, now and always.
Amen.

SENDING HYMN: God of Grace and God of Glory (#705)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, practice forgiveness.
Thanks be to God.