



## GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

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**Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
September 20, 2020  
ELW Holy Communion, Setting Ten**

Matthew narrates one of Jesus' controversial parables in which Jesus says that the reign of God is like that of a landowner who pays his workers the same wage no matter what time of day they began to work. When God changes God's mind about punishing Nineveh for their evil ways, Jonah is angry. Yet God is gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love. In baptism we receive the grace of God that is freely given to all. As Martin Luther wrote, in the presence of God's mercy we are all beggars.

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 in the name of Christ, to praise the Lord our God, who saves, forgives, and delivers us and who is worthy to be praised.

**Amen.**

Part of our worship is giving thanks to God for the gift of baptism, which represents our eternal welcome into God's kingdom and community, freely extended to all people regardless of gender, status, or ability. It is through these waters that we are refreshed. It is in these waters that we are purified. It is by these waters that we tangibly see and feel God present in our lives, lifting us up in grace, loving us in mercy, and blessing us out of an abundance that surpasses understanding.

And so I ask that you dip a finger in the water before you. Feel it. See it. Know that it is God's love as you use the water to be reminded of who you are and whose you are. Make the sign of the cross on your forehead or on the forehead of those in your homes and remember that you are marked and sealed with this symbol of humility, sacrifice, and forgiveness. Thanks be to God.

**Amen.**

**GATHERING HYM:** Gather Us In (#532)

#### GREETING

The unending grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the unfaltering love of God, and the unbridled fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**And also with you.**

**KYRIE** (p. 203)

#### PRAYER OF THE DAY

Generous God, you come to us again and again, appearing in and around our lives, wherever we might find ourselves. You call us, gather us in, and provide for us all we need and more than we could imagine, that we might live the life that truly is life in your name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## WORD

#### FIRST READING: Jonah 3:10-4:11

A reading from Jonah.

*After Jonah's short sermon in 3:4, the Ninevites all repented and God decided to spare the city. Jonah objected to this and became even more angry when God ordered a worm to destroy a plant that was providing shade. The book ends with a question that challenges any who are not ready to forgive: You, Jonah, are all worked up about a bush, but shouldn't I be concerned about a hundred and twenty thousand Ninevites?*

<sup>10</sup>When God saw what [the people of Ninevah] did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

<sup>4:1</sup>But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. <sup>2</sup>He prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. <sup>3</sup>And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." <sup>4</sup>And the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" <sup>5</sup>Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.

<sup>6</sup>The LORD God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. <sup>7</sup>But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. <sup>8</sup>When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

<sup>9</sup>But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" And he said, "Yes, angry enough to die." <sup>10</sup>Then the LORD said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night.

<sup>11</sup>And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?"

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

#### **PSALM: Psalm 145:1-8**

<sup>1</sup>I will exalt you, my God and king,  
and bless your name forever and ever.

<sup>2</sup>**Every day will I bless you  
and praise your name forever and ever.**

<sup>3</sup>Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised!  
There is no end to your greatness.

<sup>4</sup>**One generation shall praise your works to another  
and shall declare your power.**

<sup>5</sup>I will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty  
and all your marvelous works.

<sup>6</sup>**They shall tell of the might of your wondrous acts,  
and I will recount your greatness.**

<sup>7</sup>They shall publish the remembrance of your great goodness;  
they shall sing joyfully of your righteousness.

<sup>8</sup>**The LORD is gracious and full of compassion,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.**

## **SECOND READING: Philippians 1:21-30**

A reading from Philippians.

*Paul writes to the Philippians from prison. Though he is uncertain about the outcome of his imprisonment, he is committed to the ministry of the gospel and calls on the Philippians to live lives that reflect and enhance the gospel mission.*

<sup>21</sup>For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. <sup>22</sup>If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. <sup>23</sup>I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; <sup>24</sup>but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. <sup>25</sup>Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, <sup>26</sup>so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

<sup>27</sup>Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, <sup>28</sup>and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. <sup>29</sup>For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—<sup>30</sup>since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

## **GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 205)**

### **GOSPEL: Matthew 20:1-16**

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

*Jesus tells a parable about God's generosity, challenging the common assumption that God rewards people according to what they have earned or deserve.*

[Jesus said to the disciples:] <sup>1</sup>"The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup>After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. <sup>3</sup>When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; <sup>4</sup>and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. <sup>5</sup>When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. <sup>6</sup>And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' <sup>7</sup>They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' <sup>8</sup>When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' <sup>9</sup>When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. <sup>10</sup>Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. <sup>11</sup>And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, <sup>12</sup>saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' <sup>13</sup>But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? <sup>14</sup>Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. <sup>15</sup>Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to

me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' <sup>16</sup>So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

The gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

### **SERMON**

Gracious God, your Word surprises us. It challenges us, upsets us, overturns our way of seeing and thinking. Come and find us today, that by the power of your Spirit we may see as you see and catch a glimpse of your coming kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

What on earth is going on, on earth? It's like the modern day version of the 10 Plagues, we have fires, a pandemic that has gone on way too long, social uprising, more fires that are now still lingering in the air, and to top it all off, this mothpocalypse that has these nasty things flying around everywhere. Things are so bad right now that I almost feel guilty complaining about the car troubles that I've had in the past couple weeks. Well, it's actually just car trouble, there is just one problem but it's been a couple weeks and I still can't figure it out. And since our being at home most of the time negated the need for two cars, my car being the less family-orientated got its insurance cancelled, so I can't even take the thing to the shop to get it fixed. So it's up to me and my internet wizardry to figure out the problem, and it's been weighing on me quite a bit.

Now, if you aren't shaking your head at me right at this moment, let me introduce to you the term, "first world problems". Perhaps you've heard of it, perhaps you've used it, perhaps you recognised my car issues as exactly that, a first world problem. In that it isn't really a problem. It's just some spoiled and privileged clued out dork like myself complaining about something that I'm quite privileged to have, like a second vehicle, while ignoring the real problems of the world, like these plagues that are plaguing us right now. So basically they are called first world problems because only in the first world would it be deemed as a problem whereas everywhere else they'd be calling us lucky.

Problems like "my second car that we really don't need right now is making a funny noise" or "my Amazon Prime order arrived at my door a little later than they promised" or "I forgot I was wearing my new Jordans and I crouched down and left a crease in the leather". These aren't even made up either, these are actual complaints that I've experienced.

Or what could be classified as first world problems could be a bit more subtle and go under the radar. Things like "my kid didn't make valedictorian out of the 5 students they considered" or "my doctor made me wait for 30 minutes for my no apparent-cost-to-me appointment" or "these immigrants are taking all our jobs and now I can't seem to find one that I'm not overqualified for and will pay me what I'm worth". Don't get me wrong, these can be real problems, but each one of them comes from a place of privilege.

This is what happened in the parable that Jesus tells his disciples in today's gospel reading. If I'm being honest here, I never really liked this parable whenever I heard it when I was growing up, because I always sided with those who worked the whole day. To me, it made sense that they should be paid more because they worked more. To me, it was only fair to pay what is fair. To me, those who were chosen last were super lucky and those lazy butts would probably take advantage of the situation and never learn the value of hard work.

And perhaps you feel the same way when you hear the parable. Perhaps you feel like the landowner has wronged those who worked hard for him for longest hours. Perhaps you would complain as well, if this had happened to you. I know I would. In fact, I know I do (not at this job of course, I am very happy with my salary and would very much like to keep my job, thank you).

But really, this story really is unfair. I mean, it's unfair if all things were equal, which they aren't. If this story were comparing apples to apples with the first workers and the last, then it would definitely be unjust, but it isn't. If this story were to take place today then the union and labour board or whatever would be contacted and we would get what is right, but it didn't. See, if we put this story in context and understand the landscape in which Jesus is sharing this, then we'd get a better idea of what is really going on.

In those days, a day labourer is basically someone who doesn't have a regular job. They don't have a consistent 9-5, they don't have an education or a degree, they don't belong to any trade or guild or wear a fancy class ring. All they can do is stand in the marketplace and hope that someone is looking for a casual worker that can do menial tasks for a period of time. And if hired, then that single day's wage would help them buy food, shelter, and support their family. The day labourer lived day to day, cheque to cheque, denarii to denarii, hoping that they would be picked to work and be able to survive one more day. This was normal practice back then, and it is something that worked for the many people who found themselves uneducated, unemployed, and for various reasons unconnected to the professional world.

That is, it worked for those who it worked for. This system didn't really work out for those who it didn't.

I mean if you were looking for a day labourer, what kind of person would you hire? If you needed someone to lift heavy things, push or pull big things, or carry lots of things for a relatively good distance, what kind of body type would you keep your eye out for? If you want help to bang some nails and raise some walls and had a short time frame, who would you get?

I think you know what I'm getting at here. Only the strongest, most muscular, perhaps best looking people would get hired (in other words, I'd thrive in that kind of environment). But those who would get looked over would be the elderly, the physically weak, or those who clearly would not be able to get the job done for whatever reason. Maybe due to a handicap, or an injured or deformed limb, or some kind of disability. Those are the ones who would be left behind, unchosen, and thus unable to earn any kind of money to buy food, shelter, or really even to survive. They aren't left unpicked because they're lazy, but because they are deemed incapable, and thus unworthy.

But the landowner chose them. He didn't choose them first, yes, but perhaps that was intentional and maybe even merciful as he might know that they would only be physically able to work for so long. And while they didn't work as long as those who were physically able to work long hours, they were paid just as much. In other words, those who were deemed unworthy by the world were made to be just as worthy by the landowner's grace.

And that, right there, is God present in the world. That is what the kingdom is like. That is how God regards all people, regardless of ethnicity, gender, and social class, and teaches us to do the same.

But those who were hired first of course complain. They feel like they have been wronged because they weren't paid more than those who worked only a fraction of the time. And I get their anger, but that truly is a "first world problem." Because while they didn't get paid more money, they have been privileged with a strong, healthy body and the ability to do this work. While they weren't paid better, they would have been just treated better by society because of their privilege. While they weren't seen as special through their pay, they were special enough and privileged to be picked first.

And I get that we might still not like how this story unfolds. We might still think that it's unfair and unjust. We might still relate to the anger of those *chosen first*, thinking that we would never stand for this nonsense, that we would stand up for what is right for us. But the problem with that is that we probably *aren't* those chosen first. We might think we should be, but we aren't. We might think we've earned it, but we didn't. We might even think we are capable enough to be first, but the fact is that we'd be wrong as it isn't until God's grace is bestowed upon us that we are truly worthy, truly capable, truly *deserving* of all that God blesses us with through God's love and mercy through Jesus Christ. And the sad byproduct of this is that there probably are people out there complaining about *us*.

And I know this is a tough pill to swallow. This might be a blow to our egos and our privilege. It isn't easy to see and recognise how we are poor in spirit, but then we are blessed anyway by God's grace.

So in seeing ourselves as actually those who are chosen last, we see how this parable reveals the kingdom of God. While we might understand Jonah's anger toward God's salvation of the Ninevites, we can also now share in and relate with the Ninevites' joy of being welcomed by the gospel in spite of shortcomings. And perhaps then we can name our own privilege and be able to see the value and worth in those who don't have or cannot share in that privilege and rejoice with them, for them, and because of them and the value and worth put on them by God's unending love and mercy.

The last will be first and the first will be last is just a confusing way of telling us that we are all equally valuable, first world or not. We are all loved, regardless of our ability levels. We are all God's children, regardless of privilege, power, or personality, or the lack thereof.

In this season after Pentecost, let us embrace our diverse brothers and sisters around the world, that while we aren't the same in so many respects, we know that we are the same in that we are all sinners saved by God's loving grace and mercy. Thanks be to God. Amen.

**HYMN OF THE DAY:** There's a Wideness in God's Mercy (#588)

**CREED**

With all God's people equally loved and forgiven, let us 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 to live in the grace and mercy of God, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "Lord, in your gracious mercy," and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. Lord, in your gracious mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord our God, we exalt and bless your name forever, for you have treated us not as we deserve but out of grace and boundless forgiveness. May we see our neighbours as you do, with eyes of your endless love, that we might learn to live in harmony with all your children. Lord, in your gracious mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord our God, every day your name shall be praised, through our words and actions. Strengthen us in our ministry to all people, that your love be apparent through relationships and community. We remember in prayer our neighbouring faith communities; our partner Anglican Church of Canada; our bishop Greg, assistant to the bishop Kathy, and our national bishop Susan; and for our companion churches of the BC Synod. In particular we remember St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Prince Rupert and their pastor Diana Edis; and for Our Saviour Lutheran Church in Richmond and their pastor Christoph Reiners. May all ministries and worshipping bodies bring glory to your name, especially through times such as this pandemic. Lord, in your gracious mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord our God, there is no end to your greatness, as you have created all wonder and beauty and a planet upon which we can live and call our home. But all the beauty and wonder needs to be cared for and respected as it can be powerful and destructive as well. We pray for all those affected by the wildfires plaguing the West Coast that the loss of life and homes be minimized and that lives can be rebuilt. And we give thanks for those who are working tirelessly to contain the situation, that their work be not in vain. Lord, in your gracious mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord our God, your works and power has been passed down from generation to generation as your wisdom and truth are not bound by time but only by our openness to listen. May all politicians and world leaders be receptive of your ways of equality and grace, that they may



govern their people with justice and love. We pray especially for Solyana Amanuel, that her journey into our country and safety be swift. Lord, in your gracious mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord our God, we will always remember your great goodness and your righteousness will always be on our lips. We pray for those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your wondrous acts of healing and wholeness will always be apparent and relied on. Especially we pray for Bev and family; Elsa; Diana; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Beulah; Paula; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Linda; Cindy; Henry; Chris; all those who have been affected by the COVID-19 coronavirus; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time... Lord, in your gracious mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your expansive and inclusive love, shown to us by Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

## MEAL

### PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

**OFFERING HYMN:** The Peace of the Lord (#646)

### OFFERING PRAYER

Holy God, we are privileged to be counted among those whom you have called, graced to have been given your work to do, and blessed to receive more than we will ever earn. And you feed and nourish us with your Word and with this food before us, that we be empowered to live as your children in this world, reflecting your love unto all people as we join 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 our God, you are indeed holy and we shall exalt and praise your name forever and forever. There is no end to your greatness as we declare your power and works to the generations, your glorious splendor and majesty shall last eternally. For you have sent to us Jesus, your Son, to be one of us and show us the ways of your grace and peace.

For on the night that he was betrayed, your Son Jesus sat with his friends for a meal and took some bread, and after thanking you for it he broke and shared it and said "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, and with thankfulness in his heart he shared that with all and said, "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 and drink before us that we remember God's great goodness and righteousness, even as we declare this mystery of faith:

**Christ has died.**

**Christ is risen.**

**Christ will come again.**

O Lord you are gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. You deal with us mercifully and you are generous with your abundant blessing upon us, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

### **LORD'S PRAYER**

Gathered in grace 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**

Taste and see the graciousness and steadfast love of God.

**Thanks be to God.**

### **COMMUNION**

#### **POST-COMMUNION PRAYER**

God of the harvest, you have again fed us with your heavenly food, nourished us with your Word, and empowered us by your Spirit to go out into the world to proclaim your goodness and grace, that your righteousness be passed to the generations through Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**

### **SENDING**

#### **BLESSING**

May the generous grace of Christ attend you,  
the astounding love of God find you,  
and the surprising movement of the Holy Spirit guide you, everywhere and always.

**Amen.**

**SENDING HYMN:** Blest Be the Tie That Binds (#656)

**DISMISSAL**

Go in peace, practice God's strange generosity toward others.

**Thanks be to God.**

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