



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

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ELW Holy Communion, Setting Ten

In today's first reading God uses the Gentile ruler Cyrus to accomplish divine purposes. When the Pharisees try to trap Jesus, he tells them to give the emperor what belongs to him and to God what belongs to God. To gather for worship reminds us that our ultimate allegiance is to God rather than to any earthly authority. Created in the image of God, we offer our entire selves in the service of God and for the sake of 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 in singing as we bless and worship God's holy name.

Amen.

For God is worthy of our worship and praise, as we have been given this gift of baptism. It is in this gift that we see God's refreshing and rejuvenating properties, that we hear God washing over us, that we feel God's presence right in our midst. So in thanksgiving and remembrance, let us who have water in front of us use that water to mark the sign of the cross on our foreheads or on the foreheads of those in your space. Let us feel God's love upon us. Let us hear the sound of our sin forgiven. Let us see the glistening and gleaming image of God in ourselves and each other, while giving God our thanks and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

GATHERING HYMN: God Is Here! (#526)

GREETING

The amazing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the life giving love of God, and the identifying fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

KYRIE (p. 203)

CANTICLE OF PRAISE (p. 204)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Holy God, we are made in your image and our hearts belong to you. Therefore we offer ourselves to you, in service, love, and praise. Use us for the glory of your realm and the good of your people; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 45:1-7

A reading from Isaiah.

The prophet announces that Cyrus the Persian emperor is the one the LORD has anointed to end Israel's exile. The LORD makes this choice so that the whole world will recognize this LORD as the only God. Persia had a god of light and a god of darkness; the LORD claims sovereignty over both light and darkness.

¹Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus,
whose right hand I have grasped
to subdue nations before him
and strip kings of their robes,
to open doors before him—
and the gates shall not be closed:

²I will go before you
and level the mountains,

I will break in pieces the doors of bronze
and cut through the bars of iron,
³I will give you the treasures of darkness
and riches hidden in secret places,
so that you may know that it is I, the LORD,
the God of Israel, who call you by your name.
⁴For the sake of my servant Jacob,
and Israel my chosen,
I call you by your name,
I surname you, though you do not know me.
⁵I am the LORD, and there is no other;
besides me there is no god.
I arm you, though you do not know me,
⁶so that they may know, from the rising of the sun
and from the west, that there is no one besides me;
I am the LORD, and there is no other.
⁷I form light and create darkness,
I make weal and create woe;
I the LORD do all these things.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 96:1-9

¹Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
²**Sing to the LORD, bless the name of the LORD;
proclaim God's salvation from day to day.**
³Declare God's glory among the nations
and God's wonders among all peoples.
⁴**For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised,
more to be feared than all gods.**
⁵As for all the gods of the nations, they are but idols;
but you, O LORD, have made the heavens.
⁶**Majesty and magnificence are in your presence;
power and splendor are in your sanctuary.**
⁷Ascribe to the LORD, you families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD honour and power.
⁸**Ascribe to the LORD the honour due the holy name;
bring offerings and enter the courts of the LORD.**
⁹Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness;
tremble before the LORD, all the earth.

SECOND READING: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

A reading from Thessalonians.

Most likely this letter is the first written by Paul. Paul gives pastoral encouragement and reassurances to new Christians living in an antagonistic environment. Their commitment of faith, love, and hope makes them a model for other new Christian communities.

¹Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace.

²We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly ³remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, ⁷so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. ⁹For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, ¹⁰and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 205)

GOSPEL: Matthew 22:15-22

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

After Jesus begins teaching in the temple, religious leaders try to trap him with questions. First they ask if God's people should pay taxes to an earthly tyrant like Caesar.

¹⁵Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap [Jesus] in what he said. ¹⁶So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. ¹⁷Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" ¹⁸But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" ²¹They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." ²²When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Holy God, you are our true and living Sovereign. Through the message of your gospel and the power of your Spirit, make us imitators of our Saviour, Jesus Christ our Lord, through and with whom we pray. **Amen.**

Who do you belong to?

Most people right of the bat would just say either “nobody” because they’re independent and make their own choices, or they’re truthful and say “my wife”. But in all seriousness, asking someone who they belong to can be really offensive, as none of us like to be seen as property.

Which I think is kind of funny, because we all want to belong to something. We all want to fit in. Pretty much our whole lives we want to find a place where we can call home, where we know others and can be known, where we ultimately feel loved.

I think about some of the kids that I grew up with and how drawn they were to street gangs or at least the thought of it. How they tried so hard to be tough and really wanted to fit that image. That need for belonging was so strong that it had my friends change who they are just so they can be perceived and someone who is sought after, someone who is desired, someone basically who belonged.

And I never really understood this as I was lucky in that my family, both immediate and extended, was pretty tightly knit and I was just naturally popular at both school and the church I grew up at. I never had to question my sense of belonging. I was basically that big fish in a little pond so I felt like I belonged everywhere I went.

But then I went to high school and oooohhhh that is what everyone else goes through. I had this massive growth spurt during the summer between grade 7 and grade 8, which was the transition from elementary to high school in Vancouver, and man alive was I ever awkward. I very quickly went from that big fish into a little pond to a small fish in a big pond, and I just didn’t know where I fit in. But I know I wanted to fit in somewhere, badly. So I would change myself, try to fit into some mold, be something that really wasn’t me in order to belong to something... anything. Just so I didn’t have to feel like an outsider anymore.

Maybe you had a similar experience to this. Not that you joined a street gang or something, but maybe you had to change something about yourself to fit in. Or maybe you compromised some of your beliefs or morals to be able to hang out with those people you really wanted to hang out with. Or maybe you found yourself in too deep so to speak, and you could barely recognise yourself anymore because of your need to belong.

And maybe you still do. I mean, let’s think about it for a second, how many of us identify with a group or demographic so strongly that we actually blame that for our actions? Things like “boys will be boys” or “as an introvert, I can’t help but...” or “my horoscope says” or even the term “dad jokes” insinuates that being a dad means you have to, by nature, have corny puns and really really hilarious and witty comebacks. How many times do we pigeonhole ourselves into our ethnicity, gender, social class, personality type, or what’s become super apparent to me lately, political party affiliation? How often do we feel helpless in having our own opinions and thoughts heard because we are trapped in the mob mentality? How often do we need to cover up our own hypocrisy just to appease that group to which we feel like we belong to?

And you know what? We aren’t the only ones. Today’s gospel lesson has these Pharisees and Herodians being all Pharisee and Herodian, which kind of says a lot as we totally know what the Pharisees are about, but we barely know anything about the Herodians but we read this and say that we know enough. Jesus calls them hypocrites, they are trying to portray something

when they actually are something else. They try to intimidate and gain power through their masks to hide their deep seated fears. They try to trap Jesus yet again in hopes that life for them would go back to normal, that is, full of privilege and inequality in their favour.

So is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not? We in our 21st Century North American lives would say of course it's lawful, it's actually unlawful not to pay. But in those days it was different. The emperor wasn't the Israelite's emperor by choice, rather it was forced on them when this emperor took over. This tax they had to pay was this yearly tax imposed by the Roman government to fund their continuing occupation in their land. The coin that they had to use to pay this tax was actually blasphemous in itself as it said that the current emperor, Caesar Tiberius, was the son of the divine Caesar Augustus. In other words, this coin was an image of a false god. An idol. And you all know what they say about idols...

"Idol know"

But the thing is the Pharisees and Herodians *do* know. They know that if Jesus says pay, then he is betraying the Israelites. But if he says don't pay, then he should be arrested for tax evasion. They had him on the ropes this time... or so they thought (again).

Jesus does something very interesting here. He asks them to show him a coin, and one of them very innocently just pulls one out of his pocket. That begs the question then, why did he have one just in his pocket? This coin that they are making such a big deal over just happened to be within arm's reach and handy for show-and-tell? This idol as they would have seen it was on his person somewhere, and perhaps more than just one. So then really, who do they belong to?

We know where Jesus is going, he shows them the image and says give to the emperor what is the emperor's and to God what is God's. Whoa. How did God come into this question?

Jesus was calling them out on their hypocrisy. He was calling them out on trying to trap him in hopes of driving him out of their town just because he was preaching equality and forgiveness. He was calling them out on their supposed loyalty to God when they actually liked this emperor for giving them the power and belonging that they so sought after.

But Jesus was saying, "Don't you see? You needn't look for belonging from the external world, for you have an internal belonging because you have been created in the image of God." And many of us saw that coming. Yes, we know that we're made in the image of God, and yes that means that we belong to God, and yes so we should give ourselves to God, and so on and so forth.

Yes, that is true. But just as you were made in the image of God, so is everyone else in this world, past, present, and future. Just as you, with who you belong to is sometimes undetermined, are made in the image of God, so are those whom you don't agree with or who you think they belong to. Just as you, as made in the image of God, need to tie you allegiance to God, so must you also tie their allegiance to God as they are also made in the image of God.

And this is tough. Really tough. Because there are a lot of people out there that we really don't agree or see eye-to-eye with. There are those of a different political party, those of a different ethnicity, those of a different gender or no gender at all. There are those of a different social

class, those of a different part of town, those who root for a different sports team. There are those who believe in certain things and those who don't. There are those eat a certain way and those who cannot afford to eat at all. There are those act unscrupulous and those who are just hypocrites. All of them, made in the image of God.

God's image. Not yours. Not who you think they follow. Not even their own. God's.

And this might sound a little stifling, as now we can't really hate those we want to hate. But that is actually liberating, because that takes the yoke of being judge off our shoulders and gives it back to God. It frees us from the bonds of hatred and allows us to love. It erases the lines that are drawn between whole people groups and it allows us all to belong.

So who do you belong to? You belong to God. For you are created in the image of grace, mercy, joy, peace, and above all, love.

In this season after Pentecost, let's put down our weapons of aggression, let's drop our assumptions of loyalty, and let's tear down the walls of separation and learn to accept ourselves and each other as a brother or sister, equally loved and created in God's image, and invited and welcomed to belong to the one body of Christ, living together in God's kingdom, now and forever. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Take My Life, That I May Be (#583)

CREED

With all who are created in the image of God, 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 bear the image of God, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "by your mercy, O God," and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. By your mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, we sing to you a new song, for you have done marvellous things and you call us your own. May we faithfully serve you and display your love, that it may join in our song of praise. By your mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, we bless your name and proclaim your salvation to all people. Strengthen our ministry that our lives might give an accurate depiction of your grace and mercy, flowing through us and our communities. We remember in prayer our neighbouring faith communities; our partner Anglican Church of Canada; our bishop Greg, assistant to the bishop Kathy, and national bishop Susan; and our companion congregations of the BC Synod. In particular, we remember First Lutheran Church in Vancouver and their pastor Rebekah Swanson; and all the Lutheran Campus Ministries and chaplains across this country. By your mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, your glory is apparent in all of creation and in all people. Give us the strength to properly care for each other and all living things on this planet, that we might learn to live in harmony and abundance. By your mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you are great and worthy of our praise, above any other person or god. Grant to us your wisdom that as we face a new election for our political leaders, that we might choose those who would best serve you and this country for the betterment of all. Beyond our borders, we pray for all other nations facing elections or change in leadership, that the people's voices be heard and true peace can be had. We say a special prayer for Solyana Amanuel, that she remain safe where she is and her journey to our country come quickly. By your mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you are majestic and magnificent, and you give us sanctuary. Heal us in our ailments, that we might find hope in your love and mercy. We pray especially for those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely. In particular we pray for Beulah; Paula; Bev and family; Diana; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; Henry; Ivy; 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...
By your mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, we worship you in your holy beauty and we tremble before your power. Remind us of our connection to all the saints of all times and places in you and your love, that we might take their example and live lives of faith that bring honour to you. By your mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your great providence, revealed to us by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

MEAL

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

OFFERING HYMN: We Are an Offering (#692)

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, to at all times and places give thanks and praise to you, O holy and almighty God, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who reminds us of who we are and whose we are, and joins us 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, we sing to you a new song of blessing that proclaims your salvation always. For your glory is among the nations and your wonders among all people. You are great and worthy of our praise, for there is none like you. You are majestic and magnificent, powerful and awesome, gracious and merciful. For you have sent to us your Son Jesus, to be one of us and to reveal just how vast your love and forgiveness are.

It was on the night that he was betrayed, when Jesus sat with his friends for a meal, took some bread, gave thanks, 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, 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."

So it is in this food before us that we remember this act of love displaying the Lord's beauty of holiness, even as we declare this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

We ascribe to you, O Lord, the honour due to your holy name, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and brother, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, as one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered together as God's image bearers, 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.**

COMMUNION HYMN: Lamb of God (p. 208)

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Taste and see God's unending love for us.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Almighty God, all honour and majesty, strength and beauty are yours, maker of heaven and earth. The food that you have given to us feeds our bodies and souls, strengthening us to bring the glory that is due to your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

SENDING

BLESSING

The grace of God the Sovereign hold you and keep you,
the peace of God the Saviour shine on you and through you,
the love of God the Spirit bless you into faithful service,
now and always.

Amen.

SENDING HYMN: Lord, Be Glorified (#744)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, declare God's wonderful work and glory.

Thanks be to God.