



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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23rd Sunday after Pentecost

November 8, 2020

ELW Holy Communion, Setting Ten

Today the prophet Amos calls for justice to roll down like waters. Paul urges us to encourage one another with the promised coming of the Lord. Jesus tells the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids. Surrounded by the faithful of every time and place, we celebrate Christ's coming in our midst in the word of life and the feast of victory—the marriage feast of the lamb.

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 God, who lifts us up, welcomes us in, and invites us to live lives of joy, peace, and love.

Amen.

And so in our gathering we give thanks for the gift of baptism. We give thanks not because we must, but because the gift itself is gracious and merciful and full of life. We give thanks not because it saves us, but because it is the sign of our salvation. We give thanks not because God demands it, but because God is love and we are called to love in return. So in our thanksgiving, in our having been redeemed, in our love, let us be reminded of this gift as we touch the water in front of us. Let us be reminded of our dependence on water, that which cleanses us, refreshes us, and gives us life.

There is a reason why water is the mode of baptism. It joins us together, it welcomes us in with open arms, it holds us close as a community. So let us use this water to mark our foreheads with the sign of the cross or the foreheads of those in your homes or wherever you may be, and be clean, be refreshed, be alive, living the life that truly is life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

GATHERING HYMN: Let Us Go Now to the Banquet (#523)

GREETING

May the inviting grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the welcoming love of God, and the gracious 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 and almighty God, your wisdom is radiant and unfading, easily discerned by all who seek your way. We see heaven on earth when the faithful live in love and work for justice, not because they must but because of your inspiring grace and welcome. Give us the grace and welcome to live confidently in your love, trusting that you will not abandon us but continually abide with us in our communities, forgiving us with all compassion, and redeeming us with hope, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

WORD

FIRST READING: AMOS 5:18-24

A reading from Amos.

In the days of Amos, people thought that the day of the LORD would be a time of great victory, but Amos announced that it would be a day of darkness, not light. He said liturgy is no substitute for obedience. The LORD demands justice and righteousness in the community.

¹⁸Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord!
Why do you want the day of the Lord?
It is darkness, not light;
¹⁹as if someone fled from a lion,
and was met by a bear;
or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall,
and was bitten by a snake.
²⁰Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light,
and gloom with no brightness in it?

²¹I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
²²Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them;
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals
I will not look upon.
²³Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
²⁴But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 70

¹Be pleased, O God, to deliver me;
O Lord, make haste to help me.
²**Let those who seek my life be put to shame and confounded;
let those who take pleasure in my misfortune draw back and be disgraced.**
³Let those who say to me "Aha!" and gloat over me
turn back because of their shame.
⁴**Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you;
let those who love your salvation say forever, "Great is the Lord!"**
⁵But as for me, I am poor and needy; come to me quickly, O God.
You are my helper and my deliverer; O Lord, do not tarry.

SECOND READING: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

A reading from 1 Thessalonians.

Some of the Thessalonians are worried that dead Christians will be excluded from the resurrection to eternal life when Christ comes again. Paul reassures them with the word of hope that all Christians, living or dead, will be raised into everlasting life with Christ.

¹³We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. ¹⁵For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. ¹⁶For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from

heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 205)

GOSPEL: Matthew 25:1-13

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus tells a parable about his own second coming, emphasizing the need for readiness at all times.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; ⁴but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. ⁶But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ ¹⁰And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. ¹¹Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ ¹²But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ ¹³Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

O Lord, send your Spirit to move in our world and stir the water of our souls that we might be open to accepting your love and grace in and around us always, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

One of the joys of moving these services to live again instead of recording, editing, and posting, is that my sermons can be more current. Before, because my sermon would be written and recorded mid-week, there was always a possibility that something would happen between then and Sunday that would make the sermon already obsolete. And that would have been totally clear this week. This week, if I had to write early, we wouldn't have had the results of the US election yet, and the way world politics have been going, those results really should be talked about in this sermon. But, as it were, because I still write my sermon a little early for the sake of those who get paper copies and to post on our website by Friday night, and because of how the election is working this year, by the time I started writing this sermon we *still* didn't know who is elected, and I wasn't ready to pull another Saturday night special. But, now that we found out the results Saturday morning, I still had a bit of time to at least include this part of the sermon. But as it were, who won no longer matters for the purposes of this sermon. It matters to the world, of course, but just not for what I want to talk about today.

What I am going to talk about today, is how disappointed I was with how the people were reacting leading up to the pronouncement. I know, this was a big one for many people for many reasons, but the tension, the taunting, the threat of violence seemed a lot more prevalent this time around than ever before to my recollection. The divide between the right and left, the blue and red, the them and the us has been stronger in my non-American eyes than I have ever known it to be. The finger-pointing, the ridiculing, and the wild accusations of this and that were almost embarrassing. Actually, it was embarrassing. And... it was coming from both sides.

See, no matter what side of that colour divide you sit on, you probably already know that the *other* side was acting uncouth. But if you stepped back and looked at your own side, I mean *really looked* at your side, you'd see how you... we were acting just the same way. Perhaps not in literal action and words, but in the gas lighting, the attitudes, and the dehumanizing of the other, both sides were acting unbecoming of a so-called "civilized" nation and democracy, as neighbours to each other in their country, or even, dare I say it, as human beings.

I know this might sound offensive, but frankly I'm tired of the denial that both sides carry about who is more correct or incorrect, I'm tired of the judgement on each other on who deserves what, I'm just tired of the bickering over this and that and how everyone thinks they are 100% right and the others are 100% wrong.

Maybe you're tired of it too. But I wonder if we can ever be free from it. Because we've never been up to this point, so what's going to change now? I mean generation after generation we see that there was that finger pointing and gas lighting, we see people not owning up to their faults and follies, we see history books literally changed in order to change the narrative that we will always be portrayed as on the side of what is good, right, and true... even when we totally are not.

And that brings us to today's readings. If you're like me at all, you can't stand these kinds of parables because not only are they hard to understand, but what seems to be the obvious interpretation doesn't always sit well with us because they seem a bit too harsh and law-orientated for our grace-centric Lutheran theology is comfortable with. I mean, just look at this story. We have these 10 bridesmaids that we aren't really all that sure what their role is. They have these candles that we don't really know what they're for. And the bridegroom that they're waiting for is late for reasons undisclosed. What makes it worse is that upon some inspection and digging around, it seems like no one knows the answers to these questions. They are traditions and customs that aren't really written about anywhere.

But they seem important, because when the ladies wake up from waiting for this guy for, like, ever, half of the group realise that their oil has run out, while the other half brought enough in anticipation of the tardiness. When those without ask for help, those with flatly refuse. So the 5 without go off to buy more oil and completely miss the bridegroom when he finally gets his sorry self there. But when they return all ready with their oil, they are too late and not admitted into the party that frankly they were on time for and it was the bridegroom's fault that they ran out of oil.

See what I mean? We don't like it. Because off the bat we think it's a warning that we need to be ready for God or else we aren't welcome to the party. So we frantically go around and do

this and do that just to make sure that we're ready and we even sometimes get annoyed with those around us who aren't getting ready as frantically as we are. We just don't want to be like those bridesmaids who were no longer welcome because of a little oversight. Instead we want to be those bridesmaids who were ready and so they were welcomed. We want to be prepared and have enough oil like those ladies. We want to be just like those unhelpful, selfish, and maybe a little vindictive bridesmaids who wouldn't help their counterparts with sparing just a bit of oil. Those were the ones welcomed into the party? So much about this story doesn't add up.

But maybe, just maybe, it isn't supposed to.

Maybe that is why there are no customs found around these bridesmaids and lamps. Maybe that is why there is no definitive parallel we can draw from this story. Maybe that is why we don't like the results of us trying to make sense of it, because that isn't what this parable is about at all.

I wonder if Jesus made up this unknown custom of the lamps to display the ridiculousness of some of our traditions. I wonder if Jesus told this story to bring to light how tightly we hold to our side and our interpretations that we might even leave the party to hold them up. I wonder if Jesus was saying that we needn't care about what others are doing, we needn't be so worried about what little things we are doing correctly or incorrectly, we needn't concern ourselves whether or not we are ready enough, because we'd be welcome regardless, with or without oil in our lamps.

See the 5 bridesmaids without oil weren't unwelcome because they didn't have oil, because they eventually got that oil. Rather they were unwelcome because they just weren't there. They missed the celebration. They were so worried about how they look, how they're perceived, how they must follow these customs and traditions that they completely forgot that they were invited to a party. So they left to deal with their shortcomings and missed it. Those who were welcomed weren't welcomed because they were exemplary human beings, they were just mean and selfish. But they were there. They were present. They were able to be welcomed not because they earned it or deserved it more, but because the bridegroom is gracious.

What does this have to do with the election? I think we are too ready to draw the line between the bridesmaids. We are too eager to list out in our heads who is in and who is out. We are too divided to be able to accept the other side... who, if you really think about it, is just as unworthy, undeserving, and uncouth as we are.

And if we understand that... if we understand how we are all just as finger pointing and judgemental as others, then maybe we can ease up on the condemnation, maybe we can relax with the walls we put up in keeping others out, maybe we can just learn to accept that God's welcome toward us extends also to all people, regardless of race, gender, or political affiliation.

Because God welcomes us, yes, but God also welcomes those who aren't us. God welcomes us in spite of our sin and shortcomings, just as God welcomes all others who have sins and shortcomings that we might be all too ready to point out. God loves us and declares us as God's children, just as God loves those that we don't or can't, and joins us together as the one, albeit diverse, multicultural, multi-faceted, multi-denominational, and non-partisan body of

Christ. Hopefully we can learn to work with each other in spite of difference, hopefully we can put aside the “us versus them” mentality, hopefully we can see and feel our welcome as well as the welcome for all people into God’s eternal, merciful, and inclusive kingdom.

Above all, whatever might happen in the coming days and months, may we always remember God’s love for us, in us, through us, and all around us, also for all people. So we can relax our supposed ways of doing things, we can relax our thinking of how things should be or ought, we can relax about how the other isn’t like us and doesn’t even seem to try, and let’s just show up in God’s grace and mercy, and be ready for God’s celebration of hope and joy.

As we move ahead together in this brave new world, may we accept, forgive, and even love each other, just as we are accepted, forgiven, and loved by a gracious God. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: We All Are One in Mission (#576)

CREED

With all of God’s children welcomed into the kingdom, 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 to live in God’s love, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with “great are you, O Lord,” and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. Great are you, O Lord, **hear our prayer**.

O God, you help us and deliver us, and you free us from our past of shame and guilt. Help us as we move into the future of community and love, that we might unabashedly and unreservedly live and serve in your gracious name. Great are you, O Lord, **hear our prayer**.

O God, protect us from the persecution of our faith, and strengthen us in our confrontations that any misunderstandings be dealt with in grace and love. May our ministry always reflect your mercy and proclaim your name to all people. We pray especially for 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 churches of the BC Synod. In particular we pray for Lutheran Church of the Cross in Victoria and their pastors Lyle McKenzie and Lyndon Sayers; and for Good Shepherd Lutheran also in Victoria. May we all confidently live according to your will and serve you and all people for the sake of your gospel. Great are you, O Lord, **hear our prayer.**

O God, your creation is wondrous and we see your face in its beauty and your handiwork in its intricacies. May we responsibly care for this planet and all its creatures informed by your love, that none be denied the gift of life from you. Great are you, O Lord, **hear our prayer.**

O God, you redeem us from our sin and save us from our shame. May all the world leaders and politicians lead and govern with the example of your grace, that we might all work together to know true peace. We pray especially for Solyana Amanuel, that she can make it into our country and safety soon. Great are you, O Lord, **hear our prayer.**

O God, in you we rejoice and are glad, for you save us with your love and forgiveness. We pray for those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that they can always see your greatness and lean on your strength. Especially we pray for Beulah; Paula; Bev and family; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; Henry; Chris; all those who contracted or been affected by COVID-19; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...

Great are you, O Lord, **hear our prayer.**

O God, you are our helper and deliverer, in you we have nothing to fear. For even in death, you remain as our God and you watch over us for eternity. Remind us of how you join us with you and all the saints, that we might always rest in your arms, living as the one body of Christ forever. Great are you, O Lord, **hear our prayer.**

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

Amen.

MEAL

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

OFFERING HYMN: Just As I Am, Without One Plea (#592)

OFFERING PRAYER

God, who is gracious and just, opens the door to all who seek wisdom and truth. Thus, let us together accept God's welcome and blessing and live in community and service, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

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 merciful God, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who reminds us that we needn't earn your love but only to accept your invitation to 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 God, we cry out to you for deliverance and help, for we face hardship and stress as we are torn between the life of faith and the life of the world. We struggle with what is right and proper and are tempted by that which is alluring and enticing. But in our confusion and inability to understand, you reach out to us and send to us Jesus, our helper and deliverer, to redeem us into your salvation with a grace and mercy before unheard of.

For on the night that he was betrayed, Jesus sat with his friends, took some bread, gave thanks, broke it, and said to them, "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 thanksgiving in his heart he shared it 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."

For it is in this food before us that we can see God's graciousness and love, welcoming us and joining us together, even in this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

This food be blessed, O God, reminding us of your invitation into your kingdom, your welcome into your community, your love that declares us part of your family through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered into one family 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.**

COMMUNION HYMN: Lamb of God (p. 208)

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Eat, drink, know that God is gracious and loving.
Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Great and loving God, we give you thanks that you have again fed us with your love and generosity. May your grace and mercy shine in and through us, that all people might see and know your love reflected by our lives and service, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

May God, who creates, redeems, and sustains,
keep you fervent in faith, cheerful in hope, brimming in justice, and overflowing in love.
And the blessing of God, Sovereign, Saviour, and Spirit,
be among you and remain with you, now and always.
Amen.

SENDING HYMN: Blessed Assurance (#638)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, know the welcome of God for you and all people.
Thanks be to God.