



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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24rd Sunday after Pentecost

November 15, 2020

ELW Holy Communion, Setting Ten

Our readings during November speak of the end times. Zephaniah proclaims that the coming day of the LORD will be filled with wrath and distress. Paul says it will come like a thief in the night and urges us to be awake and sober. Jesus tells the parable of the talents, calling us to use our gifts, while we still have time, for the greater and common good. In a world filled with violence and despair, we gather around signs of hope—word, water, bread, and wine—eager to welcome the good news of Christ's coming among us.

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 are gathered in the name of Christ, who saves us and clothes us with faith and love.

Amen.

In our gathering, in our community, in our worship, we come to give thanks. Thanks to God for all that God has done, all that God promises, and all that God gives, the least of which isn't baptism. This ancient form of acceptance, of redemption, of mission and purpose. For the waters baptism isn't an accidental symbol, rather it was chosen for its properties that help to clean, to nourish, and to empower. And so this day we give thanks for this gift. We give thanks for this reminder. We give thanks for life, and the ability to live it to its fullest.

So those of you with water in front of you, you may dip your fingers in it. Swirl your hands in the cool refreshing substance, notice those properties, and be reminded of just how much you are loved by God. And if you will, use the water to mark your foreheads with the sign of the cross and the foreheads of those in your homes. Know God's presence with you, within you, and all around you for all your days, calling you, redeeming you, and loving you, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

GATHERING HYMN: Build Us Up, Lord (#670)

GREETING

The empowering grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the redeeming love of God, and the inclusive 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

O Lord our God, the gift of your Son is the life-changing treasure that is truly beyond all value. Your generosity and goodness astound us. Inspire us to teach your commandments and share your gospel, that all may enter into the joy of Christ. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18

A reading from Zephaniah.

Zephaniah (like the prophet Amos in last week's first reading) presents the day of the LORD as one of judgment and wrath. Descriptions of the last day in the New Testament include details taken from Old Testament accounts of the day of the LORD.

⁷ Be silent before the Lord God!
For the day of the LORD is at hand;
the LORD has prepared a sacrifice,
he has consecrated his guests.
¹² At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps,
and I will punish the people
who rest complacently on their dregs,
those who say in their hearts,
“The LORD will not do good,
nor will he do harm.”
¹³ Their wealth shall be plundered,
and their houses laid waste.
Though they build houses,
they shall not inhabit them;
though they plant vineyards,
they shall not drink wine from them.
¹⁴ The great day of the LORD is near,
near and hastening fast;
the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter,
the warrior cries aloud there.
¹⁵ That day will be a day of wrath,
a day of distress and anguish,
a day of ruin and devastation,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and thick darkness,
¹⁶ a day of trumpet blast and battle cry
against the fortified cities
and against the lofty battlements.
¹⁷ I will bring such distress upon people
that they shall walk like the blind;
because they have sinned against the LORD,
their blood shall be poured out like dust,
and their flesh like dung.
¹⁸ Neither their silver nor their gold
will be able to save them
on the day of the LORD’s wrath;
in the fire of his passion
the whole earth shall be consumed;
for a full, a terrible end
he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 90:1-12

¹ Lord, you have been our refuge
from one generation to another.
² **Before the mountains were brought forth, or the land and the earth were born,
from age to age you are God.**

³You turn us back to the dust and say,
"Turn back, O children of earth."

⁴**For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past
and like a watch in the night;**

⁵you sweep them away like a dream,
they fade away suddenly like the grass:

⁶**in the morning it is green and flourishes;
in the evening it is dried up and withered.**

⁷For we are consumed by your anger;
we are afraid because of your wrath.

⁸**Our iniquities you have set before you,
and our secret sins in the light of your countenance.**

⁹When you are angry, all our days are gone;
we bring our years to an end like a sigh.

¹⁰**The span of our life is seventy years, perhaps in strength even eighty;
yet the sum of them is but labor and sorrow, for they pass away quickly and we are gone.**

¹¹Who regards the power of your wrath?
Who rightly fears your indignation?

¹²**So teach us to number our days
that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.**

SECOND READING: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

A reading from 1 Thessalonians.

Though we do not know and cannot calculate the day of Christ's return, we live faithfully in the here and now as we anticipate the day when we will be given eternal salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. ²For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! ⁴But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; ⁵for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. ⁶So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; ⁷for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 205)

GOSPEL: Matthew 25:14-30

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus tells a parable about his second coming, indicating that it is not sufficient merely to maintain things as they are. Those who await his return should make good use of the gifts that God has provided them.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹⁴“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ ²¹His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ ²²And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ ²³His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ ²⁴Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ ²⁶But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Holy God, may your Spirit open our hearts and minds this day, that we might be illumined by your living Word and walk together as your beloved children, by the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Has anyone ever lent something to you that you were just too scared to even enjoy? When I was a kid, I hated lending out my toys to my friends. Not because I was selfish or didn't know how to share... it's just that my friends enjoyed playing with my toys a little too much. In that they would fight battles by smashing them together, they would force the wrong weapon into the wrong hands, they were just a lot more rough on those delicate GI Joe figurines than *this* toy enthusiast would ever be. So it wasn't unusual for me to get my toys back in much worse shape than they were when they left my possession.

And this carried over in me into my adulthood. I remember a time when I was in seminary and between cars, and a friend of mine who... let's just say had more zeros on his paycheck than I did (which wasn't hard, I only had one zero with nothing in front of it) lent me his BMW to drive while he was out of town. It was his idea, and I wasn't going to say no. But man did I ever take care of that thing. I washed it as often as I could, I did some needed maintenance on it, and I even attempted to fix his aftermarket headlight that shorted out. I failed, but at least I tried. I everywhere I went, against every fibre of my being, I kept it under the speed limit. I mean I got to that speed limit pretty darn fast off the line, but I wouldn't go over it in fears that something would happen that I quite literally wouldn't be able to afford to fix.

I mean this guy trusted me with his car. Maybe that was his own fault as he knew full well my... how should we say... *spotty* driving history. He knew I liked myself a good spirited drive and he handed me his keys anyway. I wasn't going to let him down. I couldn't. I wouldn't be able to live with myself if I were to betray that trust that he so willingly gave me.

And so this is why I scratch my head at this parable that Jesus gives us today. This is why I get confused like pretty much every time I read it. This is why I just plain don't like this parable and every year it comes up I just cringe at the thought of trying to find some good news from this story that just makes no sense at all.

Like, why on earth would this master treat his slaves that squandered his money so well? Sure, they got lucky playing the market and doubled the amount, but they were lucky. Do you think my friend would have been happy if I took his car to the track and made some bets and won him some money? Do you think I'd be happy if my friends took my toys and sold them at a collector's auction for a hefty profit? Do you think anyone would want someone they trusted to betray that trust and play with something that really wasn't theirs to begin with?

But this master was all like, "hey good job guys. Here, have some more money." And let's be clear here, they got a LOT of money. A talent is roughly the equivalent to 16 and a half years of straight labour, no weekends, no statutory holidays, no sick days. 16 and a half years. And the first slave got 5 of those, 80 years straight of wages, before tax. The second got 2, so just 32 years. BUT STILL.

I can't even imagine. I mean I was scared enough to drive my buddy's car for two weeks, and that is what, like a year and a half of straight wages? Or maybe 5 years financing if you don't carry that kind of cash around?

So no wonder that third slave was scared. That guy was given just the one talent, so 16 years only. Still a lot more than a BMW though, and a heck of a lot more than a handful of GI Joes. And seeing at how this slave views the master, I mean that makes it all worse. He does what any of us would do in that situation, act out of his fear and bury that talent where no one could find it and steal it from him. He kept that talent safe and secure. He kept that talent away from anything that could harm it, dwindle it, or straight up just take it away.

And for his prudence, he was punished. For his protecting of what wasn't his, he was chastised. For his playing it safe out of his fears, he was thrown into the outer darkness where much weeping and teeth gnashing happens.

Doesn't seem all that fair, does it?

Or does it?

My friend who lent me his car was kind enough to lend me his car. He was gracious enough to care for my wellbeing and ability to get around conveniently and not have to worry about public transit. He wanted me to use his car. And when I gave it back to him with a flat tire that totally wasn't my fault, he refused when I insisted I pay for it. He said, "you ran over a staple (which I did), it could have happened to anyone." My friends that borrowed my toys, I admit that I was a bit annoyed when I saw the condition they came back in, but I also saw the joy that they had from those toys. They enjoyed them as much as I would.

See, the master didn't lend all this money to the slaves to prove a point, to test them, or to scare them out of their wits. He gave it to them because he is gracious, he is generous, and he is loving. He gave it to them because he wanted them to experience it, to enjoy it, to *live* it. I know he wasn't clear with it in the beginning, which for the sake of the third guy, that would have been really helpful... like life-changingly helpful. But you can see it in his reaction to the other slaves. You can see it in how pleased he was not at the profit he made, although that probably helped, but at how they knew him and knew his unspoken intentions.

The third slave? Well, he pegged that master all wrong. He assumed all these things that he clearly was not and he acted out of fear. Fear of the master, fear of punishment, fear of living life. He couldn't accept this gift of 16 years wages, so he just buried it where he or anyone else could ever enjoy it.

We too, have been given a gift. We have been given the gift of community, relationship, and time. The question then becomes what are we going to do with this time?

Some use this time to heed to their fears, play it safe and don't live life at all. Others use this time for themselves, amassing as much wealth and power as possible while sacrificing the other two important gifts of community and relationship. Yet others, seeing this time as a gift, knowing that the giver is gracious and loving, spend their time loving others, reminding them of their value and worth, and welcoming them into community and relationship.

See this gift that we've been given isn't a test. It isn't to prove a point with how we're all just screw ups. It isn't to scare us in any way. Rather, it's by God's grace that we are given each new day. It is by God's love that we are placed in a community of support and strength. It is by God's joy that we live life that truly is life, embracing all that it has to offer for the sake of God's kingdom.

And when we believe that God truly is gracious, we can live in faith knowing that we are forgiven and accepted. When we believe that God truly is love, we can live confidently serving our communities and those around us, proclaiming this love to all whom we meet. When we believe that God truly finds joy in us, we can be empowered to live the life that truly is life, full of faith, love, and hope, encouraging and building up one another as the one body of Christ.

As Paul says, we aren't destined for God's wrath no matter what many would have us believe. Rather, we are destined to obtain the redeeming salvation through Jesus Christ, who continually reminds us of our position in God's family, place in God's love, and identity as God's children. We truly have nothing to fear, but we can be confident in God's grace, empowering us to live in this gift that has been given to us.

So as we approach the end of this church year, may we look at all the lessons we've learned about God, about ourselves, and about our community, and move forward into the next year and beyond, and confidently proclaim God's name and live in God's love. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Lord of Light (#688)

CREED

With all those empowered by God's grace, 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 lives full of grace and mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with "Redeeming God," and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. Redeeming God, **hear our prayer**.

Lord, for generations you have been our refuge and our strength, empowering us to act and serve in your name. May our lives be pleasing to you, that our stories effectively contribute to your story throughout time through Jesus Christ. Redeeming God, **hear our prayer**.

Lord, you turn us back to you and you raise us up as your children. Strengthen us and our communities, that our ministries be faithful to your love and grace. 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 Grace Lutheran Church in Victoria and their interim pastor Lenora Grauer; Mount Olive Lutheran Church in Surrey and their pastor Peter Hanson; and for all the prison ministries and their chaplains in our Synod and national church. May all our ministries reflect your joy and peace throughout our lives. Redeeming God, **hear our prayer**.

Lord, you are our God from before the mountains and lands were formed, and your power and might are revealed in all of creation. Continue leading us in our stewardship of this planet, that it may continue to flourish and produce for life and community. Redeeming God, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, you know our iniquities and secret sins, but you judge us with mercy and forgiveness. May the world leaders and politicians heed to your example and govern accordingly. We pray for the political turmoil in the USA, that they learn to set aside their differences and work together toward peace and reconciliation. We also pray for Solyana Amanuel, that she might make it into our country safely and efficiently. Redeeming God, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, the sum of our lives pass quickly, but we strive to be faithful with the time we have. We pray for those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that we all might continually know of your love and providence. Especially we pray for Beulah; Paula; Bev and family; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; Henry; Chris; all who have contracted or been affected by COVID-19; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...

Redeeming God, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, while our days are limited, we use them to seek out your wisdom as did the saints before us. Remind us always of our connection to them through your love, that we can live confidently as the one body of Christ in the world. Redeeming God, **hear our prayer.**

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

Amen.

MEAL

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

OFFERING HYMN: Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love (#708)

OFFERING PRAYER

O Lord, we come before you in thanksgiving and gratitude for all that you have done and continue to do. May we be motivated to be your faithful hands and feet in the world as you continue to feed and nourish us with your Word of life, Jesus Christ our Saviour and friend.

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

Indeed it is 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 our Saviour Jesus Christ,
who strengthens us with your promises and blessing,
allowing us to join 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 have been our refuge since before we were even created, you have been our God before the world was formed. Throughout all of time and space you have revealed your majesty and might, but at the same time, you offered your grace and forgiveness. For in your anger, we would not survive, but rather it was out of love that you have sent to us Jesus your Son, to save us and empower us with your mercy.

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

It is in this food before us that we might know of God’s redeeming grace, empowering us to be God’s children in the world, even as we declare the mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

O Lord, we know that in you we are strong, we are revitalized, and we are brought into your kingdom and welcomed by your love. May this food we eat serve as a reminder of our connection to you and all the saints eternally as the one body of Christ, through whom all glory and honour belong to you with Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD’S PRAYER

Gathered into God’s blessing and strength, 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 abundant blessing and love.
Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

O God our creator, redeemer, and sustainer, we give you thanks for all that you are and all that you do. May your blessing upon us continue to strengthen us to confidently live in faith and serve in love, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

SENDING

BLESSING

May God, our strength, keep you fervent in faith,
God, our hope, keep you steadfast in love,
and God, our redeemer, be among you and remain with you always.
Amen.

SENDING HYMN: Be Thou My Vision (#793)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, live in God's abundant faith and blessing.
Thanks be to God.