



## GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

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### Second Sunday of Advent

December 6, 2020

#### Tree of Life

John calls people to repent, to clear the decks, to completely reorder their lives so that nothing gets in the way of the Lord's coming. The reading from Isaiah gives the context for this radical call: the assurance of forgiveness that encourages us to repent; the promise that the coming one will be gentle with the little ones. Isaiah calls us all to be heralds with John, to lift up our voices fearlessly and say, "See, your God is coming!" We say it to one another in worship, in order to say it with our lives in a world in need of justice and peace.

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

#### LIGHTING OF ADVENT WREATH

We give you thanks, O God, for this circle of light  
that helps us to track our days of preparation for Christ's appearing in the world.  
As we light the candles on this wreath,  
kindle within us the fire of your Spirit,  
that we may be light shining in the darkness.  
Enlighten us with your grace,  
that we may welcome others as you have welcomed us.  
Grant this through Christ our Lord,  
whose coming is certain and whose day draws near.  
**Amen.**

*Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah (#240) verses 1-2*

#### THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

And we give thanks to God for the gift of baptism. And not just the gift itself, but also the mode through which baptism takes place. For very specifically we are baptized with water in the presence of God's grace, and surrounded by the love of our community. And so baptism encapsulates all of that. It encapsulates the receiving of God's grace. It encapsulates the community in which we are welcomed and to which we belong. It encapsulates the cool and refreshing water and recreates it as the physical and tangible symbol of God here, with us, around us, and in us.

So those of you with water in front of you, feel free to dip your finger into it. Be aware of how it feels, how it changes, how it remains the same. Be reminded by it of God's love. Let it come to mind how welcome you are in God's kingdom and community. Feel the water cleansing your skin and purifying your heart by God's mercy.

And when you are ready, use the water to make the sign of the cross on your forehead or on the foreheads of those in your homes. Be renewed. Be thankful. Be at peace. Thanks be to God.

**Amen.**

**GATHERING HYMN:** Beneath the Tree Of Life (p. 3)

#### GREETING

The present grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the peace-evoking love of God, and the calming fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**And also with you.**

**KYRIE** (p. 4)

**HYMN OF PRAISE** (p. 6)

## PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, send you Spirit to speak peace, that the good news found even in times like these might be proclaimed to all people, through your Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## WORD

### FIRST READING: Isaiah 40:1-11

A reading from Isaiah.

*In grand, flowing, poetic lines, the prophet announces that the exile of God's people in Babylon is over. God will deliver Israel and will care for her as a shepherd cares for the sheep. This word can be trusted, because the only enduring reality in life is the word of God.*

<sup>1</sup>Comfort, O comfort my people,  
says your God.

<sup>2</sup>Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that she has served her term,  
that her penalty is paid,  
that she has received from the LORD's hand  
double for all her sins.

<sup>3</sup>A voice cries out:  
"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup>Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.

<sup>5</sup>Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
and all people shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

<sup>6</sup>A voice says, "Cry out!"  
And I said, "What shall I cry?"  
All people are grass,  
their constancy is like the flower of the field.

<sup>7</sup>The grass withers, the flower fades,  
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;  
surely the people are grass.

<sup>8</sup>The grass withers, the flower fades;  
but the word of our God will stand forever.

<sup>9</sup>Get you up to a high mountain,  
O Zion, herald of good tidings;  
lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,  
lift it up, do not fear;  
say to the cities of Judah,  
"Here is your God!"

<sup>10</sup>See, the Lord GOD comes with might,  
and his arm rules for him;  
his reward is with him,

and his recompense before him.

<sup>11</sup>He will feed his flock like a shepherd;  
he will gather the lambs in his arms,  
and carry them in his bosom,  
and gently lead the mother sheep.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**PSALM: Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13**

<sup>1</sup>You have been gracious to your land, O LORD;  
you have restored the good fortune of Jacob.

<sup>2</sup>**You have forgiven the iniquity of your people  
and blotted out all their sins.**

<sup>8</sup>I will listen to what the LORD God is saying;  
for you speak peace to your faithful people and to those who turn their hearts to you.

<sup>9</sup>**Truly, your salvation is very near to those who fear you,  
that your glory may dwell in our land.**

<sup>10</sup>Steadfast love and faithfulness have met together;  
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

<sup>11</sup>**Faithfulness shall spring up from the earth,  
and righteousness shall look down from heaven.**

<sup>12</sup>The LORD will indeed grant prosperity,  
and our land will yield its increase.

<sup>13</sup>**Righteousness shall go before the LORD  
and shall prepare for God a pathway.**

**SECOND READING: 2 Peter 3:8-15a**

A reading from 2 Peter.

*This short letter deals with pressing concerns regarding the final advent of Jesus, especially concerns that could arise over its apparent delay. The author of the letter calls on Christians to anticipate the promised coming of the Lord through conduct dedicated to God.*

<sup>8</sup>Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. <sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.

<sup>10</sup>But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

<sup>11</sup>Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, <sup>12</sup>waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? <sup>13</sup>But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

<sup>14</sup>Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; <sup>15a</sup>and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

## GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 10)

### GOSPEL: Mark 1:1-8

The holy gospel according to Mark.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

*The Gospel of Mark does not begin with a story of Jesus' birth but with the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord.*

<sup>1</sup>The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

<sup>2</sup>As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;

<sup>3</sup>the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.’”

<sup>4</sup>John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup>Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. <sup>8</sup>I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

The gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

### SERMON

Mighty God, send your Spirit to speak peace, that the good news of these times might be proclaimed through our witness and our lives, through your Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, with whom we pray. Amen.

So hot on social media this week (at least in my Christian pastor circles) are the churches in our area and around Canada who have decided to basically ignore the recent “no gathering” rules put in place by the health authorities. Granted, some of these churches have been gathering in their property's parking lots and everyone was instructed to stay in their cars and that there would be no bathrooms for them to use. But there were others who had full blown services with people inside the building, singing, chatting, and doing all those germ-spreading stuff that the health officials really don't want us doing... because it spreads germs.

And so the cops of course got involved, at least at the ones that I read about, and the whole backlash started. The cops just doing their job in breaking up what was a clear violation of the new health mandate, and the churches claiming that their civil rights are being violated. And articles on these stories circulate around and around on social media and guess what dumb thing I did?

I read the comments.

It was just what, two weeks ago that I warned you all against reading the comments? And here I went, reading them again. And so I scrolled through the inevitable finger pointing and name calling, the defensive language of internet stats and memes, and of course, people dead set on the assumption that they are right and the other is wrong. It was tough to read because my emotions then get riled up, but just like a few weeks ago, I couldn't stop.

But like, everyone has an opinion. Everyone is angry at the other side. Everyone has this divine foreknowledge of "the truth" that for some strange reason, no one else has. And I get it, in the midst of this pandemic, people are on edge. People have been wallowing in their pent up emotions and then they erupt and take it out on others. What I think is happening is that people, deep down, are afraid of the change that is happening all around them, in their jobs, the economy, their emotional health and well-being and maybe aren't acting all that rationally.

This might sound offensive to some, as everyone usually thinks that they're always rational. But seriously, looking at some of those online comments? Even arguing with some random person online? And even taking a stupid amount of time reading those comments? Irrational, I tell ya.

But this height of emotion, this kind of collective anxiety, this friction and animosity that is going around these days, they're not unique to our time. In fact, as I always seem to mention in all my sermons, every generation has had their own unique set of struggles and hardship. Be it wars, or famine, or an enemy occupying your land, every generation had to go through something like we are going through now. It might not be exactly the same in the fine details, but the emotions, the anxiety, and the stress around it all, is.

At the time that the gospel of Mark was written around 70AD, so like roughly 40 years after Jesus ascended into heaven, the nation of Israel was going through a rough patch themselves. For a while there, things were going ok, they were in the land that was promised to them by God, they had no enemies eyeing their spot, and religious life was good. So they thought it would be smooth sailing from there on out. But then the Romans came. And while things still weren't that bad per se, it was just different knowing that they weren't exactly "free". Then there was a rumour about someone coming to save them, a Messiah of sorts, but that ended up in one of many crucifixions that the Roman Empire used as a public example of what happens when you cross them. Then fast forward a few more years and Rome started to tighten their grip on Israel. Rome had some changes in government due to death and murder, and their current emperor started to really put pressure on this small and devout nation, not really strong in anything but their faith. Suddenly all seemed uncertain and scary again. It all seemed so confusing and anxious. It all seemed like everything was lost.

Sound familiar? It sort of sounds like the times we're going through now, at least the emotions that we're feeling. We're uncertain and scared of who might be carrying this virus and could inadvertently pass it to us, we're anxious of how we might react to the virus and how all of this could continue to push our society on this downward spiral, and it might seem, like we talked about last week, the end. The times are different, the situation is different, but the feelings are the same.

But then going back to 70AD and the times that the Israelites were going through, imagine someone handing you a scroll, and as you unroll it, you see the first sentence and perhaps also the title, "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Good news? The

beginning? Son of God? Is this real? At first it might seem like it's not, as each of those phrases actually carry their own connotation, mostly all political and leaning towards Rome. But it is intriguing because it says it is the beginning, the start, something fresh and new and maybe even perhaps exciting.

Because at times like these, we need to restart, give us something fresh that would point to a new beginning and remind us that God is good.

So this scroll that has this story on it, this good news, this "evangelion" as it would have been called, isn't what you think. You've heard the story before, maybe you lived it, maybe you took part in some of the events that were described, or maybe a friend of a friend was there and confirms it all to be true. Although you've heard the story before, this time it hits different. It hits different because in these times, these times of anxiety, conflict, and fear, this story seems to offer something else. It offers community, it offers comfort, it offers peace.

There is peace in knowing that God walked as a man among us. There is comfort in knowing that we are forgiven of all the things that would have excluded us before. There is community found in knowing that we are all beloved children of God, in spite of difference, upbringing, or even belief system.

See this story found on this scroll, this beginning of the life and teachings of Jesus, teach us that life isn't about a set of rules that we must or mustn't follow, but that it is a fluid journey of ups and downs. It teaches us that we aren't given the responsibility of judging who belongs and who doesn't, but we can deal with each other with grace and mercy. It teaches us that even in times of anxiety and fear, we have a God that bestows upon us a Spirit of hope, joy, love, and peace.

And so we can take these lessons that we learn from this scroll, this evangelion, this gospel according to Mark, and we can apply them to our lives. The lessons in this book, this good news, are lessons that teach us right relationship, teach us how to live in community, teach us how to be a loving neighbour to all.

What it doesn't tell us, though, is that we should go and prove each other wrong, point fingers and ridicule, and judge others on the sole basis that they don't agree with us and our opinions. It most certainly doesn't say we should argue with each other on the internet or otherwise. But instead, the scroll teaches us not to judge, not to exclude, and not to draw lines in the sand. Rather, live in God's forgiveness, revel in God's love, and rest in God's peace. These are all easier said than done, but the scroll also teaches that we aren't alone in this journey, but we are given a community of saints to lean on, to give and draw support, and to grow with in this difficult thing we call life.

But this scroll ends with a cliff hanger. At least, in the earliest copies that we have of this scroll ends with a cliff hanger. It just ends with the women at the tomb of this Jesus but instead of finding him they encounter a young man dressed in white, telling them that Jesus isn't here, but he has risen, and that they need to tell the disciples what they saw. And the scroll ends with, "so they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

That... isn't really an ending at all. I mean, what happens next? What happens now? Why did this random stranger share this scroll with me?

See, the scroll is the beginning. How it ends is up to you.

As we continue in this season of Advent, may we rest on the peace given to us by God, the peace that surpasses all understanding, that while we are living in these uncertain times, we might know the sure and certain hope of a Saviour who loves us, saves us, and equips us for love and community. Thanks be to God. Amen.

**HYMN OF THE DAY:** O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (#257) verses 1,2,7,8

**APOSTLES' CREED** (p. 11)

With the whole church, 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**

Led to see and recognize God in our midst, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with "in peace, O God," and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. In peace, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you have been gracious to us as you restore us to yourself. Strengthen our hope, joy, and peace, that our lives in our communities might be pleasing to you. In peace, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you have forgiven our sins and blotted out our offenses, and in thanksgiving we proclaim to the world all that you have done. May our faithful witness to your works accurately reflect your love and grace to all people. Especially we pray for our neighbouring faith communities; our partner Anglican Church of Canada; our bishop Greg, assistant to the bishop Kathy, and national bishop Susan; and the whole of our Synod here in BC. We say a special prayer for Mount Zion Lutheran Church in Smithers and the pastors and leaders that help there;

and for our own congregation here of Grace Lutheran and all the ways we minister to our neighbourhood. In peace, O God, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, teach the leaders of the world to listen to what you're saying, for you speak peace to all and lead us in your justice. May this peace be realized in the world, not just between nations but between neighbours, family members, and communities. We pray in particular for Solyana Amanuel, that she be able to travel to our country and make her home here in safety. In peace, O God, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, your glory is present throughout the lands and your very creation speaks of your salvation. May we properly care for all that you have entrusted to us, that this world might continue yield its increase and be restored to its natural beauty. In peace, O God, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, your steadfast love and faithfulness have met as you show us your righteousness and peace. Look down from heaven upon us, for we are in need of your healing. We pray especially for those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your love and peace rest upon them as we together journey toward wholeness. In particular, we pray for Beulah; Bev and family; Paula; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; Thomas and Marie; Chris; those who have contracted or been affected by COVID-19; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...

In peace, O God, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, just as John the baptizer pointed to the Messiah, may we see how the saints have pointed toward you, preparing a pathway for you into our hearts. Remind us of the lives of faithfulness that have gone before us, that we be inspired by their examples of love and service. In peace, O God, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in the coming and present Messiah, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## MEAL

### PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

**OFFERING HYMN:** Come, Let Us Bring (p. 13)

### OFFERING PRAYER

God of all hope and peace, we give you thanks for all that you have done, and for providing for us the food and drink we have before us. Bless it and us, that we be reminded by it of your unending love and providence, joining us together as the one body of Christ, with whom we pray.

**Amen.**

## **DIALOGUE (p. 14)**

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 place give thanks and praise to you, Holy and almighty God, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, whom we look to and who is present among us, joining 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. 14)**

### **THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE**

O Lord, you have been gracious to us and restored us in your community. For you have shown us grace and forgiveness, and you speak peace to us and those who turn their hearts to you. Your salvation is given freely, and your steadfast love and faithfulness fill this land with your glory. Throughout all of creation, you have revealed your faithfulness and through your Son Jesus, you have shown us your righteous as you sent him to live among us as one of us, showing us your ways of truth and peace.

For on the night that he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus gathered with his friends for a meal, where he 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."

It is with this food graciously given to us that prepares a pathway in our hearts for God, even as we declare this mystery of faith:

**Christ has died.**

**Christ is risen.**

**Christ will come again.**

O Lord, your grace and mercy are endless and you shower us with love and you bring us peace. May we accept these gifts you give and be strengthened for your ministry in the world, through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

## **LORD'S PRAYER (p. 17)**

Gathered in peace by the Spirit, let's 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.**

#### **INVITATION TO COMMUNION**

Taste and see God's goodness and hope present in our lives.  
**Thanks be to God.**

#### **COMMUNION**

**COMMUNION HYMN:** Lamb of God (p. 17)

**POST-COMMUNION HYMN:** By Your Hand You Feed Your People (p. 18)

#### **PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Lord, we give you thanks for Christ entering into the world in the past, present, and future, meeting us where we are and nourishing us with your Word and truth. May we be strengthened by your love, that we might go forth in your name, living in confidence by your peace, through Jesus Christ.  
**Amen.**

#### **SENDING**

#### **BLESSING**

May faithfulness spring up from the ground and righteousness look down from heaven as you walk in the way of peace, and may the blessing of God be with you now and always.  
**Amen.**

**SENDING HYMN:** All Earth is Hopeful (#266)

#### **DISMISSAL**

Go in peace, for God's salvation is near.  
**Thanks be to God.**