



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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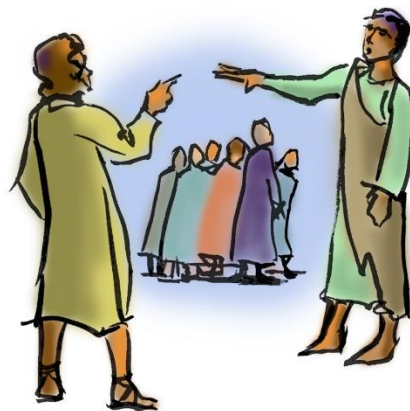
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**Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
January 31, 2021
ELW Holy Communion, Setting Ten**

In Deuteronomy God promises to raise up a prophet like Moses, who will speak for God; in Psalm 111 God shows the people the power of God's works. For the church these are ways of pointing to the unique authority people sensed in Jesus' actions and words. We encounter that authority in God's word, around which we gather, the word that prevails over any lesser spirit that would claim power over us, freeing us to follow Jesus.

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 our Sovereign, Saviour, and Spirit, who is here with us in the noise of the pandemic, in the silence of our isolation, and in the turmoil of the still unsure change that is happening all around us. And for this presence of God, we give thanks. For the calm stillness of God's love, we give thanks. For the gift of baptism that joins us together, we give thanks.

For God calls us to wade in these waters, to know that we are not alone but connected to God and each other, and leads us into change for the good of the world and God's kingdom graciously given to us all. And so those of you with water in front you, you may dip your fingers in the water. Hear the sounds. See the glistening clarity. Feel the refreshing coolness on your skin. And then when you are ready, use the water to make a sign of the cross on your forehead and be reminded of all the wondrous things that God has done, even throughout this pandemic and always, through Jesus our Lord.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

GATHERING HYMN: When Pain of the World Surrounds Us (#704)

GREETING

The life-giving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the life-leading love of God, and the life-changing communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

KYRIE (p. 203)

CANTICLE OF PRAISE (p. 204)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, you command the universe into being and your Word has the power to make whole that which has been broken. Teach us with your authority, heal us with your might, and free us with your unending and steadfast love, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

WORD

FIRST READING: Deuteronomy 18:15-20

A reading from Deuteronomy.

Today's reading is part of a longer discourse in Deuteronomy, an updating of the law for the Israelite community as the people wait to enter the promised land. Here Moses assures the people that God will continue to guide them through prophets who will proclaim the divine word.

[Moses said:] ¹⁵The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet. ¹⁶This is what you requested of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: "If I hear the voice of the LORD my God any

more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die.”¹⁷ Then the LORD replied to me: “They are right in what they have said.¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command.¹⁹ Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable.²⁰ But any prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, or who presumes to speak in my name a word that I have not commanded the prophet to speak—that prophet shall die.”

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 111

¹Hallelujah! I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,
in the assembly of the upright, in the congregation.

²**Great are your works, O LORD,
pondered by all who delight in them.**

³Majesty and splendor mark your deeds,
and your righteousness endures forever.

⁴**You cause your wonders to be remembered;
you are gracious and full of compassion.**

⁵You give food to those who fear you,
remembering forever your covenant.

⁶**You have shown your people the power of your works
in giving them the lands of the nations.**

⁷The works of your hands are faithfulness and justice;
all of your precepts are sure.

⁸**They stand fast forever and ever,
because they are done in truth and equity.**

⁹You sent redemption to your people and commanded your covenant forever;
holy and awesome is your name.

¹⁰**The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all who practice this have a good understanding. God’s praise endures forever.**

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

A reading from 1 Corinthians.

Paul is concerned about the way some Corinthian Christians use their freedom in Christ as license to engage in non-Christian behavior that sets a damaging example to other, impressionable believers. Christians have a responsibility to each other that their behavior does not cause another to sin.

¹Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. ²Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; ³but anyone who loves God is known by him.

⁴Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists,” and that “there is no God but one.” ⁵Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—⁶yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

⁷It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ⁸“Food will not bring us close to God.” We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? ¹¹So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. ¹²But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 205)

GOSPEL: Mark 1:21-28

The holy gospel according to Mark.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Forces that would bring death and disease have taken hold of a man, yet they recognize Jesus and know what his power means for them. Jesus commands these forces to leave and people are amazed at his authority.

²¹[Jesus and his disciples] went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. ²²They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. ²³Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, ²⁴and he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” ²⁵But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” ²⁶And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. ²⁷They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” ²⁸At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Holy God, burn within our yearning hearts and minds the understanding of your truth found in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

So any of you see how the stock market went nuts this past week? I should say that I’m not really into trading or anything nor do I have much experience or knowledge in the field, mostly because I don’t have that kind of money to play with like that. However, I did learn a lot this past week.

In case you didn't hear, a whole bunch of Reddit users (Reddit being an online messaging board) targeted a few short listed stock and bought them up like no one's business, making the prices of these stock skyrocket and costing a lot of short list investors a bunch of money. If this doesn't make any sense to you, don't worry as you're not alone. I've been reading about this whole thing almost non-stop all week, and I still don't really understand how it all works or what even the big deal is. All I know is that some regular middle class people got really rich really quick, and some really rich people are not as rich anymore.

Of course, Wall Street wasn't liking this. I read many Tweets and articles siding with the market about how these folk from Reddit were being malicious, unscrupulous, and just ruining things for the real investors, i.e. those rich people I mentioned earlier. It got so bad that some of the apps and platforms they were using to buy and sell these stock completely blocked the trading of those particular stock and they even shut down the subreddit message board where they hatched this plan so they couldn't even communicate with each other anymore.

Now, I know you all might have different opinions on this whole situation. And I figure that those different opinions would largely depend on whether you made money or lost money or had no stake in it whatsoever. But what I want to highlight from this strange situation is the discomfort that Wall Street went through once it realised that it wasn't completely in control, that there are weaknesses in their well laid out systems and procedures to get the rich richer, and what is good for them might not be good for everyone. That is tough news to swallow. So much so that out of their discomfort, they actually lashed back in finger pointing, name calling, and shutting down those who they felt were attacking them and did whatever they could to regain control again.

And such is the reaction to the message of a prophet. I'm not saying that Reddit is prophetic or anything like that. I mean, it isn't a bad source for news and really funny memes, but I don't think I've ever had my life changed by anything I've read there. But what I mean is that the message they tried to send to the big wigs of Wall Street is very similar to that of a prophet, as a prophet's message is usually an uncomfortable one. It is usually a message of some kind of judgement, some kind of reckoning, some kind of change that needs to take place. And people don't like those kinds of messages, so the prophet isn't exactly the most favourite person in the neighbourhood.

Because really, who likes to be told what's up? Who likes to be reprimanded, corrected, and disciplined? Who likes to have their faults and shortcomings brought to light? I don't, that's for sure. Like I said, it's uncomfortable. It's unpleasant. And probably most of the time, it's unwanted. So the prophet must really believe in their message that they give, because the wrong message according to today's first reading, will result in death. Not exactly a promising career prospect.

But it needs to be done. The prophet's message must be told. Like it or not, we need to be called out on our sin and faults. We need to be reminded of how we have fallen short of the glory that God has set out for us. We need to be told time and again that we too, can be filled with evil and the demons that haunt us.

And whether or not you believe in literal demons and evil spirits having the ability to reside in us and take control like we see in today's gospel lesson, I think it's pretty safe to say that we can have evil... just evil... residing in us and causing us to do things we don't want or know that we shouldn't. Things like trying to take money away from the rich, or trying to block the poor

from getting money in the same way the rich do, or perhaps what could be most relatable is the sheer denial that any of this could even apply to us.

Because, don't we all know someone else who this applies to? We all know someone who needs to be called out for something. We all know someone who should be brought down a notch. We all know someone who can be so full of unspeakable evil that we sometimes wonder how we could even be part of the same race as them. Maybe it's our neighbour or co-worker or classmate. Maybe it's someone we knew from years ago, some celebrity that just irks us, or maybe that person we read or hear about on the news. It could be any number of people, but... it can't be us, can it?

I mean we're the assembly that Jesus is talking to in this story, right? We're the ones who are in awe of and respect Jesus' wisdom and authority and we soak it all up and apply it to our lives without question, right? We're the good guys, aren't we?

Isn't it possible that we're the ones that need to hear this message of hope and change? Isn't it possible that maybe we're the ones who can have evil in us? Isn't it possible that we're the ones who need to hear the prophet speak, to call us out on our wrongs and shortcomings, to remind us that we, too, are sinners in need of a Saviour?

Isn't it possible that we're the ones with the demons that need to be silenced?

Again, whether you believe in literal demons or not, we cannot deny that we have the capacity for evil. Perhaps not the kind of evil that could get us arrested or thrown in jail, but the kind of evil that can be so subtle that we just write it off as normal or justify it by saying it's someone else's fault. The kind of evil that is so easy to just sweep under the rug. The kind of evil that needs to be silenced by the authority of a prophet.

And hallelujah, the ultimate prophet does just that.

In our denial, in our subtle evils and even in our not so subtle evils, Jesus enters into our lives with authority, calls out those hidden demons that plague us, and silences them with the love and grace of God. Still, I know this sounds uncomfortable. It sounds unpleasant. It sounds like something that we wouldn't really want because of all those things we talked about before. But we need to remember that the work of a prophet isn't to make us feel uncomfortable but it's to inform and reform. The job of the prophet isn't to be unpleasant, but it's to rouse up change for the better. The message of the prophet isn't just that we're evil and we need to get our act together, but it is that God loves us in spite of our shortcomings and saves us from ourselves and puts us in a place in which we can act, serve, and love in turn as God first loves.

This doesn't make it easy. But it makes it worth it. It isn't easy because facing our demons and evils and the skeletons we hide can hurt so much that we want to scream inside. But it's worth it because God's love moves us to change, inspires us to be better, and calls us to live in love and community in God's kingdom, praising God's holy name forever.

See this is the situation that we're in now. This is the reality for us as God's people living in 2021 in the midst of pandemic, reeling from political ups and downs, and wondering when the next Robin Hood might call us out on our privilege. This is the message of the prophet, one that

is uncomfortable, unpleasant, and maybe at first unwanted, but one that is necessary, gracious, and deep down in a way that we might not see just yet, loving.

In this season after the Epiphany, this time of learning and growth both for us as individuals and as a church, let us reflect and recognise the subtle evils that reside in us, that we might be changed by the loving authority of Jesus Christ our Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: God of Grace and God of Glory (#705)

CREED

With all of God's called, forgiven, and changed, 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 follow the authority of Christ, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with "O God, by your mercy," and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. O God, by your mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, we give you thanks with our whole heart, for you have done great things and you show us your ways of truth and justice. Speak your strength into us, that we might faithfully serve you and rightly love our neighbour. O God, by your mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, we praise you for your majesty and splendor in our assemblies and congregations, and you bring delight to all as your righteousness endures forever. May our ministries reflect this truth to all, and may your love reign in our hearts forever. 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 Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church in Langley and their pastor Kristen Steele; and Hope Lutheran Shared Ministry in Mackenzie and the pastors and leaders that serve them. O God, by your mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, we remember your graciousness and compassion through the wonders of your creation in which we live. Strengthen our stewardship and care for all that you have entrusted to us, and may our respect for this planet be seen in our actions. O God, by your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you provide for our needs and you honour your covenant with us to love us with grace and mercy. Be with all world leaders and politicians of the nations and teach them the power of your works, that they be informed in their lawmaking and governance. We pray especially for Solyana Amanuel, that her journey into this country and safety be swift and without complication. O God, by your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, your works are faithful and just and are done in truth and equity. Remind us of your presence always, in our good times and bad. We pray especially for those among us who are ill, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your love and redemption always be apparent to us all. In particular, we pray for Beulah; Paula; Bev and family; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Eleanor and Cally's family; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; Henry; those who have been affected by or contracted COVID-19; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time... O God, by your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, your name is holy and awesome, and the covenant you make with us stands forever. Remind us of our connection with you and all the saints, that we might be mindful of our faith and love toward ourselves and each other, empowered by your truth and wisdom always. O God, by your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your authority and wisdom, reflected in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

MEAL

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

OFFERATORY HYMN: Change My Heart, O God (#801)

OFFERING PRAYER

God of wonders, you call us into your presence and we stand in awe before you. May your blessing upon us be seen through this food and drink given to us as it nourishes us and fills us with the knowledge of your providence and love, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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, gracious God, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who calls us and brings us to change as we are joined 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 give thanks to you with our whole hearts as an assembly and congregation. For your works are great and majestic and give us great delight, your righteousness endures forever. We remember the wonders of your grace and compassion as you fulfilled your covenant with us when you sent to us your Son Jesus, to live among us your people, showing us your power, your faithfulness, and your justice that stands fast forever and ever.

For on the night that he was betrayed, your Son Jesus sat with his friends for a meal together, and he took some bread, which he gave thanks for, broke and shared saying, “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 and said, “this cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.”

We see your covenant with us through this bread and cup, even as we declare this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

Holy and awesome are you, O God, as we praise you forever along with Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

Called to live in his authority, 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.**

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Taste and see that God is good.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMN: Lamb of God (p. 208)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

We give you thanks, O God, for calling us, gathering us, and feeding us with this holy food, allowing us to once again see, feel, and taste you present in our lives, full of love and grace, and empowering us to be your hands and feet in the world, through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord.

Amen.

SENDING

BLESSING

May God our Sovereign bless you and keep you with authority,
God our Saviour shine on you and be gracious until you with redemption and peace,
God the Spirit look upon you with favour, and grant you the healing love that spoke creation into being, now and forever.

Amen.

SENDING HYMN: Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus (#802)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, recognise God's power of grace in your life.

Thanks be to God.

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