



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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**First Sunday in Lent
February 21, 2021
ELW Holy Communion, Setting Three**

On Ash Wednesday the church began its journey toward baptismal immersion in the death and resurrection of Christ. This year, the Sundays in Lent lead us to focus on five covenants God makes in the Hebrew Scriptures and to use them as lenses through which to view baptism. First Peter connects the way God saved Noah's family in the flood with the way God saves us through the water of baptism. The baptismal covenant is made with us individually, but the new life we are given in baptism is for the sake of the whole world.

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping on-line with us today! Here at Grace Lutheran we believe God is active in your life. Even you being here now is testament of God's calling and leading in your heart, which you have faithfully heeded. So we welcome you, and pray that today you will be nurtured and that the gifts that God has graciously given you will be stirred for the sake of God's mission in the world.

GATHERING

ANNOUNCEMENTS

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

We gather together while apart on this 1st Sunday in Lent, where we get the story of Jesus driven into the wilderness where he was tempted by the Adversary. All accounts that we have of this story tell us that it happens immediately after Jesus was baptized. This tells us something about baptism.

Not that baptism causes temptation or trips out into the wilderness, but that baptism somehow allows us to hear the voice of God more clearly. Baptism somehow fills us with the Spirit that leads and guides us through life's journeys. Baptism somehow marks us as God's beloved children.

And for that, we give thanks. Thanks for this gift, thanks for the grace, thanks for the symbol of baptism that doesn't start our being loved but solidifies the fact that we already are and always have been.

So those of you with water in front you, I invite you to put your hands in the water. Feel the oneness with you and God. Feel the connection we have with each other even when we are in different places. Feel the Spirit residing in you, calling you forth and announcing your redemption.

And you may use the water to mark your foreheads with a sign of the cross, that as we begin this journey into Lent, we might be reminded that we are welcomed, we belong, and we are loved, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour, brother, and Redeemer.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

GATHERING HYMN: Just As I Am, without One Plea (#592)

GREETING

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

And also with you.

KYRIE (p. 138)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Loving God, you have made a covenant with us and with every living creature. We give thanks for the sign of the rainbow, for it reminds us of the promise you made, that the flood of destruction will not be the last word, but your eternal welcome, steadfast love, and gracious forgiveness shall reign in our hearts forever, through Jesus our Lord.

Amen.

WORD

FIRST READING: Genesis 9:8-17

A reading from Genesis.

Today's reading is the conclusion to the flood story. Because of human sin, God destroys the earth by flood, saving only Noah, his family, and the animals on the ark. Yet divine destruction gives way to divine commitment. As in the first creation, God blesses humanity and establishes a covenant with all creatures.

⁸God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹"As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." ¹²God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." ¹⁷God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 25:1-10

¹To you, O LORD,
I lift up my soul.

²**My God, I put my trust in you; let me not be put to shame,
nor let my enemies triumph over me.**

³Let none who look to you be put to shame;
rather let those be put to shame who are treacherous.

⁴**Show me your ways, O LORD,
and teach me your paths.**

⁵Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation; in you have I trusted all the day long.

⁶**Remember, O LORD, your compassion and love,
for they are from everlasting.**

⁷Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions;
remember me according to your steadfast love and for the sake of your goodness, O LORD.

⁸**You are gracious and upright, O LORD;
therefore you teach sinners in your way.**

⁹You lead the lowly in justice
and teach the lowly your way.

¹⁰**All your paths, O LORD, are steadfast love and faithfulness
to those who keep your covenant and your testimonies.**

SECOND READING: 1 Peter 3:18-22

A reading from 1 Peter.

As God acted through Christ's suffering and death to bring us to God, so God acts through baptism to save us from a sinful existence. This spiritual cleansing marks our new life in Christ.

¹⁸Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, ²⁰who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. ²¹And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²²who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 142)

GOSPEL: Mark 1:9-15

The holy gospel according to Mark.

Glory to you, O Lord.

The Spirit that comes upon Jesus at his baptism sustains him when he is tested by Satan so that he might proclaim the good news of God's reign.

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

¹²And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Gracious God, we confess our need of your sustaining Word. Speak to us this day, that the truth of your good news lead us to repentance and renew our faith, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Here we are, in Lent, probably every liturgical church goer's least favourite time of year. Why? Well, mostly because Lent isn't exactly a happy time for most of us. It happens near that lull after Christmas, we usually have more somber and depressing themes, and we don't even get to sing Alleluia at all during these 5 weeks. And to top it off, Lent is about reflection and repentance, which is an uncomfortable conversation that likely isn't on the top of anyone's list.

And this year it seems like it'll be an even tougher Lent than usual, because we're still in this pandemic, and we'll be hitting the one year anniversary when all this started within this season. So this Lent is coming with this big mix of emotion, different feelings, and just a bunch of baggage that you know we'd just rather not have to deal with. Not this time around. Not this season. Maybe not ever.

But I'll have to be frank (well, maybe not exactly Frank because that was my dad's name), while I just totally bagged on this season, maybe put to words what some of us were already thinking, I don't know if I can say that these feelings are 100% Lent's fault. I mean, Lent is what Lent is, but those feelings we might be having are really coming from within ourselves.

Not saying that this season isn't about all those things, it is. Not saying that this pandemic isn't difficult, it is. Not even saying that Lent is actually a favourite time of year, because it absolutely is not. But what I'm saying is that much of that fault comes from us.

Because really? Life is tough for all of us, pretty much all the time, not just during Lent. Not one of us has an easy life, no matter how it's portrayed on social media. Not a single one of us have gone for any great length of time without some kind of difficulty or less than ideal situation. None of us are living a perfect utopian life, regardless what the happily ever after fairy tales would want us to believe.

Motivational author David Goggins says in one of his books: "The Buddha famously said that life is suffering, I'm not a Buddhist, but I know what he meant and so do you. To exist in this world, we must contend with humiliation, broken dreams, sadness, and loss. That's just nature. Each specific life comes with its own personalised portion of pain. It's coming for you. You can't stop it. And you know it."

Cheerful, I know. And likely common sense. But I think it is a good thing to be reminded every now and then of this fact that life is suffering. Life during Lent is suffering. Life outside of Lent is suffering. Life in general is just... suffering.

When I think about this, this hardship that we face, this difficult life that just is life, this suffering that we go through, I sometimes think that it'd be nice to just hit the reset button. You know, start all over. Build from the ground up. Take what we've learned in the past and avoid the mistakes in the future. Wouldn't that be nice? Just a fresh clean slate to do create anything we would like, make an actual utopia for us all.

Well, the problem with that is that it was done before, and it didn't work. Remember the flood? That was essentially hitting that reset button. Quite literally the world was wiped out and washed clean, save Noah and his family, as they were supposedly the most righteous of us all. And how did that work out for him? As soon as they got off that ark life just went right on the way it was... suffering. Even though they were literally floating above the earth, suffering wasn't too far away.

And Jesus faced this suffering too. Peter even says in our second reading today that Jesus suffered. We read in this gospel according to Mark that Jesus was lifted up in baptism, and immediately was driven into the wilderness for suffering and temptation purposes. Mark doesn't give us the fine details of the temptations that Jesus faced like we do in the other gospel accounts of this story, but maybe for Mark, those details just don't matter. All that

matters is that Jesus was in the wilderness and was tempted. Jesus was taken by the Spirit away from people to be alone, hungry, and to face trials. Jesus, right after the elation of being baptized and having the heavens breaking open in front of him in joy and thanksgiving of this event, suffered.

Now it's getting really bleak. I mean if Jesus isn't free from suffering, what chance do we have? Our suffering could be attributed to us giving into our temptations, but we read that Jesus didn't give in and yet he still didn't have it easy. Jesus, the pronounced beloved Son of God, wasn't free of hardship. Jesus, our Messiah and Saviour, our brother and friend, our one true path to God, faced the difficulties of life. Jesus our Lord suffered. But yet through all of that, he continued to worship and praise our God.

Because God is worthy to be praised.

What? Why? If life is suffering then shouldn't God be cursed? Shouldn't God be called out for not doing a very good job in protecting us and shielding us from harm? Shouldn't God be shunned out of our lives so then maybe our lives could get better?

Well, God didn't promise anyone a life free of suffering, what God promised was that life would be full of blessing, relationship, and love. God promised that even in the midst of our suffering, we will not be alone but the Spirit will walk alongside us along with all the saints. God promised that no matter how bad the world can get, God will never again find it in God's heart to hit that giant reset button, because to God, we are worthy to be saved.

Jesus knew this intimately. This temptation story we get in Mark is the shortest of them all, as Mark is known the gospel of action, or point form if you will. The veritable Cole's Notes of the life of Jesus. But I like how our lectionary framed the temptation story. Perhaps it's by accident because it's so short, but it begins with Jesus being baptized. It continues with Jesus driven in the wilderness and tempted. But it ends... it ends with Jesus proclaiming the good news of God.

Jesus, in the midst of his suffering, proclaimed the good news of God. Jesus, while he faced the difficulties of life just like you and I, felt that God continued to be worthy of praise. Jesus, even though having spent that 40 days alone in the wilderness, never forgot God's promise and declaration to him that he is God's Son, the Beloved, with whom God is well pleased.

And you know, there is a joy in that. Even in this dreary season of Lent, even in this long and dragged out pandemic, even in the everyday suffering of life that we have to contend with, God continues to regard us as God's beloved children, worthy to be saved, created to be in relationship with God, each other, and all of creation. This isn't because we're so good and living our lives, but solely because God is gracious and merciful and whose love knows no bounds. God is indeed worthy to be praised even when times are tough.

I know life is hard. I know life can feel impossible, especially now as we just passed the statistically worst month in regards of burn out, depression, and mental health issues, all the while still dealing with a global pandemic. I know life is suffering. We can't escape it. But we can take it with the strength that God gives, we can endure it with the faith of Christ, and we can even find joy in it by the leading of the Spirit in all our lives.

Yes, Lent isn't easy. This pandemic is no picnic either. And life is indeed suffering. But with God at our side, we can weather this storm. We can cling to the good news. We can look at the rainbow and be reminded of the promise of a peace that comes from within, gifted to us by God, and brings us to new heights that are beyond all understanding.

So in this season of Lent, may we find the joy of Christ in our self-reflection and repentance, confidence in God's forgiveness, and lean on the peace of the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: There's a Wideness in God's Mercy (#588)

CREED

With all of God's beloved, 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 by the Spirit into resurrection and new life, 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 lift our souls to you and in you we put our trust. You have shown us time and again that you are merciful and your grace has no end. May we follow the leading of your Spirit, that we be empowered to hear your voice and see your face in the world. O God, by your mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you show us your ways and teach us your paths, and we learn to minister to others and proclaim your good news. Strengthen us in our service, that your love be seen and reflected in all that we do. 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 all our companion congregations of the BC Synod. In particular, we pray for Ascension Lutheran Church in Nelson and all the pastors and leaders that serve there; and Mount Zion

Lutheran Church in New Westminster and their pastor Marlys Moen. O God, by your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, your compassion and love are from everlasting, and it is seen in the covenant you made with us marked with a rainbow. May we learn from that truth and properly care for what you've entrusted to us: this planet and all that is in it, that it might flourish and be restored to its natural beauty. O God, by your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you judge us not by our sin and transgressions, but by your steadfast love and goodness. Teach the governments and leaders of the world this grace, that their judgements be wise and fair and lead to the good for all people. We pray especially for Solyana Amanuel, that her journey into our country be swift and safe. O God, by your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you are gracious and upright, and you heal us of our brokenness and bring us back into wholeness. Be especially with those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your love shine in and through us all. We pray in particular for Beulah; Paula; Ron, Tess and Mineko; Bev and family; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; Henry; all who have contracted or been affected by 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 love and faithfulness are steadfast and eternal, and you welcome us to live with you and all the saints forever. Remind us of how we are all connected throughout time and space by your love, that our actions be informed and motivated by your unending grace. O God, by your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

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

MEAL

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

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

OFFERING PRAYER

God our provider, we give you thanks for feeding us with your Word and nourishing us with your Spirit and reminding us of your love through this food we have before us. May it be blessed by your gracious truth and empower us to do your holy will, through Jesus our Lord.

Amen.

DIALOGUE (p. 144)

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 in all places
give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God,
through our Savior Jesus Christ;
who on this day overcame death and the grave,
and by his glorious resurrection opened to us the way of everlasting life.
And so, with all the choirs of angels,
with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven,
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 144)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

O Lord, we lift our souls up to you and in you we trust, for you show us your ways and teach us your paths and we see your truth and salvation. You are compassionate and gracious and you regard us according to your steadfast love and goodness. And so to save us from ourselves you send to us Jesus, your Son, to show us just how faithful your covenant with us is.

For on the night that he was betrayed, your Son Jesus sat 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, Jesus took the cup, gave thanks, and shared that saying, "this cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me."

It is in this food that has been given to us that we see God's justice of grace and mercy, as we together declare the mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

Your paths, O Lord, are steadfast love and faithfulness to us, your beloved children, who you redeem and save by your grace, through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered together in the 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.**

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Taste and see God's steadfast love and faithfulness.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMN: Lamb of God (p. 146)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Compassionate God, we again give you thanks for feeding us and nourishing us with this heavenly food. May we be strengthened to do your will and walk in your ways, that your love can be seen and felt in and through us, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

SENDING

BLESSING

May the God of covenant faithfulness enfold you,
the beloved Son encourage you,
and the Holy Spirit descend upon you in blessing,
both now and forever.

Amen.

SENDING HYMN: Take My Life, That I May Be (#583)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, walk in the way of Christ.

Thanks be to God.