



**GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH**

**EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA**

7283 Nelson Avenue, Burnaby, BC V5J 4C2

Phone / fax: 604-433-1515

Website: [www.graceburnaby.com](http://www.graceburnaby.com)

Email: [office@graceburnaby.com](mailto:office@graceburnaby.com)

[pastor@graceburnaby.com](mailto:pastor@graceburnaby.com)

Follow us on Twitter! @GraceLutBurnaby



**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter  
April 11, 2021  
Now the Feast and Celebration**

The Easter season is a week of weeks, seven Sundays when we play in the mystery of Christ's presence, mostly through the glorious Gospel of John. Today we gather with the disciples on the first Easter, and Jesus breathes the Spirit on us. With Thomas we ask for a sign, and Jesus offers us his wounded self in the broken bread. From frightened individuals we are transformed into a community of open doors, peace, forgiveness, and material sharing such that no one among us is in need.

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

### THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

We gather together while apart to be transformed by the saving grace of our Lord, evidenced by an empty tomb, the appearing to the disciples, and his presence in our daily lives.

In our gathering we also give thanks for baptism and its transforming and restorative properties, renewing us by the Spirit and empowering us to be God's people in the world. For God is faithful and just and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

So those of you with water in front of you, you may dip your fingers into it. Allow the water to envelope your skin and penetrate your senses. Feel its refreshing coolness, hear its playful splash, see its glistening clarity. Be reminded of our Saviour risen, our God forgiving, and the Spirit ever present.

And when you are ready, you may use the water to mark the sign of the cross on your forehead as symbol of your welcome into God's kingdom, your inclusion into God's grace, and your belonging in God's family as our gaze is shifted to the empty cross and our lives changed forever through the work and ministry of Jesus our Lord.

**Amen. Thanks be to God.**

**GATHERING HYMN:** Christ Is Risen! Alleluia! (#382)

### GREETING

The transforming grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the enveloping love of God, and the inspiring fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**And also with you.**

**KYRIE** (p. 3)

**NOW THE FEAST** (p. 4)

### PRAYER OF THE DAY

By the power of your Spirit, O God, open our minds, unlock our hearts and enliven our faith that we might be changed and reformed by the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has risen from the dead to show us once and for all the power of your love. **Amen.**

## WORD

### FIRST READING: Acts 4:32-35

A reading from Acts.

*While the apostles testified to others about the resurrection of Jesus, the early Christian community shared what they owned or sold their possessions to help their fellow believers who were in need.*

<sup>32</sup>Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. <sup>33</sup>With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup>There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. <sup>35</sup>They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

### **PSALM: Psalm 133**

<sup>1</sup>How good and how pleasant it is,  
when kindred live together in unity!

<sup>2</sup>**It is like fine oil upon the head, flowing down upon the beard,  
upon the beard of Aaron, flowing down upon the collar of his robe.**

<sup>3</sup>It is like the dew of Hermon flowing down upon the hills of Zion.  
For there the LORD has commanded the blessing: life forevermore.

### **SECOND READING: 1 John 1:1--2:2**

A reading from 1 John.

*The opening of this letter serves as a reality check. The reality of God is light, but our confessed reality has been sin. God cleanses us from our sinful reality through Christ's death so that we live in fellowship with Christ and walk in God's light.*

<sup>1</sup>We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—  
<sup>2</sup>this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—<sup>3</sup>we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

<sup>5</sup>This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup>If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; <sup>7</sup>but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup>If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup>If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

<sup>2:1</sup> My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; <sup>2</sup>and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

### **GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 8)**

## **GOSPEL: John 20:19-31**

The holy gospel according to John.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

*The story of Easter continues as the risen Jesus appears to his disciples. His words to Thomas offer a blessing to all who entrust themselves in faith to the risen Lord.*

<sup>19</sup>When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

<sup>24</sup>But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

<sup>26</sup>A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” <sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

<sup>30</sup>Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

The gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

## **SERMON**

O God, in our doubts and in our beliefs, transform us by your Spirit, that we might hear, see, and touch your blessing in our lives, through Jesus Christ our risen Lord. **Amen.**

“Opinions are like... elbows. Everyone has one, and they all stink.” This is a saying that you might have heard before, albeit I cleaned up the language a bit to make it more church-service-friendly. I’ll let you guess what it’s supposed to be.

I’ve been thinking about this a lot lately... people having opinions, that is, not the other thing. It just seems like lately, everyone needs to voice their opinion especially around this pandemic that we’re still in and how they might not agree with it, or might not agree with those who might not agree with it. And I get it, it’s been a long year and our lives have been disrupted to a scale hitherto undreamt of. So of course people are going to be uneasy with the situation. Of course people are going to push back and others push back against those who push back. Of course there will be misinformation and rumours and perhaps even conspiracy theories floating

around because people just want to make sense of this whole thing, and they want someone to blame.

Now, let me be clear, I'm being intentionally vague about which side I'm talking about. I'm simply talking about the principle of these varying opinions and those who follow them. In my travels around the internet, I see this confusion between opinions and fact to be very present and apparent on all sides. It's like for every opinion published out there, there are at least a half a dozen different ones that directly oppose it. So if you think I'm not talking about you, think again, I am specifically talking about you.

But all this got me thinking, *what makes someone's opinion more credible to us over another opinion?* What kind of credentials, or education, or background would give their opinion more authority? Or is it even a matter of credentials? Could it just be that we can only agree with those that we already agree with and everyone else who doesn't is just bonkers?

Simple logic tells us that the experts would know more than the non-experts and thus are worthy of being those trusted authorities in whatever subject they are experts in. That's why we call them experts. But somehow instinct might tell us different. Instinct might get us to follow our gut, agree with just what we feel good about agreeing with, or perhaps just side with those who we, for whatever reason, have an affinity for.

Any one of those could be true for us. The fact is that we will believe what we believe when we believe, and usually we'd lean more toward that which is familiar, those that we trust, and opinions that speak to us the most.

So why didn't Thomas believe in today's gospel story? This is the passage we get every 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Easter, regardless of lectionary year. "Doubting Thomas" as we all know him, has his doubts. Pretty characteristic, I guess. The other disciples tell him that they saw Jesus at that exact time that he wasn't around. We don't know why he wasn't there or how long he was gone for, but he just can't believe them, not without empirical evidence anyway. For some reason, the eye witness accounts from his disciple colleagues and friends weren't enough.

But shouldn't they be? These are the opinions and stories from guys Thomas has no reason *not* to trust. They've hung out together all day every day for like 3 years, and they've been through a lot. I would imagine that this kind of fraternity or society level community would just demand them to trust and believe each other, especially when it comes to something like this. The disciples are the last remaining authorities of who Jesus is and what Jesus is about. Their testimony should be valid. But yet Thomas doubted.

And so, Doubting Thomas is coined. And I guess it makes unfortunate sense. He doubted his friends, he doubted Jesus' words, he maybe even doubted himself for hanging out with these weirdos. But if you remember what I've said in the past about this nickname, you'd know that I actually don't think that it's fair. It's not fair to single him out for not believing something that is so unbelievable. It's not fair to label someone as a doubter when the story itself is so doubtful. It's not fair that my man Thomas got this reputation when really, it was the other disciples that were the ones who didn't believe and doubted and thus made their opinions a lot less credible.

Wait. They didn't believe? Weren't they the ones telling the story? How could they not believe what they're saying?

Well, in their defence it is kind of an unbelievable and doubtful story, but that isn't why I think they didn't believe. Rather, it was their *reaction* to what happened that leads me to think that, and also perhaps led Thomas to not believe either. Their reaction to seeing the risen Christ was a bit unbelievable. Their reaction to the peace given to them by Jesus stirs some doubt in me. Their reaction to the Spirit breathed on them by their Lord and God was possibly a bit too much for Thomas to really be convinced that what they said was true.

In that... there was no reaction.

Nothing. Nada. They didn't even leave the room.

They just saw their mentor, teacher, and friend, who just days before was hanging dead on a cross, now standing in front of them in the flesh with the wounds still fresh in his hand and side, just as he told them would happen, and it was like they treated it like any other Sunday night. Thomas gets back and is like, "hey sup guys" and they're like, "hey, not much. We saw Jesus though" as they locked the door back up behind Thomas as he entered. Does that sound like the actions of people who believed? Does it sound at all like they were free of doubt? Does it sound like these men were at all transformed by the grace and peace of the Spirit?

I get it though, it's still a lot. In those days, before the centuries and centuries of interpretation and explanation of the resurrection, it was probably still really confusing for them. In those days, before they even really understood what Jesus meant about wheat and tares let alone "destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it up again," the disciples were probably baffled in what just happened. In those days, the concepts of forgiveness and redemption on this scale was still way over their heads and not at all part of their culture that the transformation in them just didn't happen right away.

But it eventually does happen. They are transformed to be God's people in the world because he is risen. They are able to declare and proclaim our Lord and God because they have the Spirit breathed upon them and they are blessed with peace. They end up unlocking those doors and going out into the world to preach and teach because Jesus shows up not just this one time, but again and again throughout their lives giving them strength, confidence, and hope.

And as with us, as we live in a world so divided, in such pain, and so broken, we too are transformed by the Spirit breathed upon us, filling us with the strength to care for each other, the confidence to live as Easter people, and the hope in knowing that even as we continue in this raging pandemic, that God continues to love us, appear in and around our lives, and give us peace. No amount of unbelief or doubt can change this, as God has promised this, God wills this, and God continually gives this as the ultimate authority on all things good.

As we navigate the opinions of the world, this transformation becomes our authority. We look for the alignment to God's principles of love, compassion, and community to inform us of our actions. We put away the unbelief and doubt, and lean on the gracious change within us, reforming us as God's own children, beckoning us out of the darkness and into the light where we might fellowship with one another and with Christ.

I know, it's a crazy world and there are many times when it seems like it just isn't worth it. But if Jesus saw this world worthy of dying for and saving, then we too can be transformed to care for it, care for others, and live in the peace that has been breathed upon us through the Spirit, allowing us to live in unity with God and all the saints, both now and forever.

And so as we move into this season of Easter, may we continually live as an Easter people, resurrected and transformed in the light of Christ, empowered to love and care for others in fellowship, community, and peace. Thanks be to God. Amen.

**HYMN OF THE DAY:** I Know that My Redeemer Lives! (#619 verse 1, 2, 4, 8)

**CREED P. 9**

With all of God's people acknowledging Jesus in their midst, 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.**

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\*Or, "he descended into hell," another translation of this text in widespread use.

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Transformed by God's saving grace and mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "Our Lord and God," and you all may respond with, **hear our prayer.** Our Lord and God, **hear our prayer.**

Life-changing God, it is good and pleasant to be in your presence as you welcome us into your kingdom. May we be continually reformed by your grace, that the love of your Spirit be seen in and through our lives. Our Lord and God, **hear our prayer.**

Welcoming God, you call us to live together in unity and you bless us with relationship and community. Strengthen us in our communities and ministries, and shine your light in the world through us and in spite of us. 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 our companion churches of the BC Synod. In particular, we pray for Dunbar Lutheran Church in Vancouver and their pastor Thomas Keeley; and for the staff at the BC Synod office. Our Lord and God, **hear our prayer.**

Providing God, you have granted to us your creation to live in and anoint us as its caretakers. Give us the vision of a better future and the wisdom to discern how to get there, as we be mindful of the condition of a planet that we leave behind. Our Lord and God, **hear our prayer.**

Empowering God, you appoint for us leaders and guides to help us navigate the world, in hopes that we all might find true peace. May we all continually look to you as our ultimate leader, that we can lean on your wisdom and truth. We pray especially for Solyana Amanuel; Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children, that they all are able to arrive into our country soon. Our Lord and God, **hear our prayer.**

Loving God, like dew flowing down from the heavens, so is your healing and wholeness given to all people, covering our shame and mending our brokenness. You don't abandon us in our time of need, but you restore us and grant us peace. We pray especially for those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your presence among us all always be apparent. Especially we pray for Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Beulah; Diana; Paula; Bev and family; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; Henry, Charlotte; those who have contracted or been affected by COVID-19; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...  
Our Lord and God, **hear our prayer.**

Eternal God, you bless us with life forevermore and you welcome us into community with you and all the saints. May we be transformed by this promise, that our faith be increased as your hands and feet in the world. Our Lord and God, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your calming presence and transforming peace, shown to us by Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## **PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

**OFFERATORY HYMN:** As the Grains of Wheat (p. 10)

## **OFFERING PRAYER**

O God of new life, we give you thanks for all that you do and give and are, for you are present, you grant us peace, and you are the love that binds us all as one. May this food we have before us be symbols of that love, peace, and presence, that we be filled with your grace and nourished by your Word, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

## **MEAL**

### **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,  
holy and merciful God, through our risen Saviour Jesus Christ,  
who resides among us as your Spirit, revealing your love and granting us peace,  
that we might with all the choirs of angels,  
the hosts of heaven,  
and the church on earth,  
praise your name with this unending hymn:

**HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p.11)**

#### **GREAT THANKSGIVING**

O God it is good and pleasant to be in your presence, for you bring us together to live in unity with you and all the saints. You anoint us with your love and you breathe upon us your peace. And in the fullness of time, you bless us with the greatest gift: life forevermore in your church, your kingdom, and your community, through the life and ministry of your Son Jesus, whom you sent to us to be one of us and to show us the ways of your truth and love.

For on the night that he was betrayed, your Son Jesus sat with his friends for a meal, took some bread, and with thanksgiving in his heart he broke and shared it and said, “take and eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.”

And after they ate, he took the cup, and with thanksgiving he 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 given to us that we see God’s transformative love, even as we declare the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died.**

**Christ is risen.**

**Christ will come again.**

In this food, O God, we see your face. In this sharing we see the peace you give. In our fellowship, we see the Spirit breathed upon us, strengthening us with your grace and nourishing us with your Word, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Spirit, as one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

**LORD’S PRAYER (p. 13)**

Transformed by the power of 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 love and peace granted to us.

**Thanks be to God.**

### **COMMUNION**

**COMMUNION HYMN:** Lamb of God (p. 14)

### **PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Holy God, we give you thanks for feeding us with the symbols of your providence and love. Remind us always of the peace you give, that we be transformed and filled with confidence and hope, empowering us to proclaim your gospel to all whom we encounter, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

### **SENDING**

### **BLESSING**

May God our creator shine on you with love and grace,  
God our keeper breathe upon you the Spirit of peace,  
God our risen Christ bless you with life forevermore.

**Amen.**

**SENDING SONG:** The Peace of the Lord (#646)

### **DISMISSAL**

Go in peace, transformed to be God's hands and feet.

**Thanks be to God.**

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