



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 25, 2021

Now the Feast and Celebration

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

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, the ELCIC as we often refer to it, today has been set aside to consider our vocational callings in Christ. The word "vocation" is rooted in the Latin word, *vocacio* meaning call or summons. A vocation is a calling: to serve God, to an occupation or profession, and/or an inclination to a particular activity. Individuals and congregations play a vital role in leadership formation. In faithful, prayerful community, we help each other to hear God's call and encourage each other to exercise gifts for ministry. Let us begin by giving thanks.

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at baptism, as the presiding minister begins.

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Refreshed by the resurrection life we share in Christ,
let us give thanks for the gift of baptism.

We thank you, risen Christ,
for these waters where you make us new,
leading us from death to life, from tears to joy.

We bless you, risen Christ, that your Spirit comes to us
in the grace-filled waters of rebirth,
like rains to our thirsting earth,
like streams that revive our souls,
like cups of cool water shared with strangers.

Breathe your peace on your church when we hide in fear.
Clothe us with your mercy and forgiveness.
Send us companions on our journey as we share your life.

Make us one, risen Christ.
Cleanse our hearts.
Shower us with life.

To you be given all praise,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God,
now and forever. **Amen.**

GATHERING HYMN: I Know that My Redeemer Lives (#619)

1. I know that my Redeemer lives!
What comfort this sweet sentence gives!
He lives, he lives, who once was dead;
he lives, my ever-living head!

2. He lives triumphant from the grave;
he lives eternally to save;
he lives exalted, throned above;
he lives to rule his church in love.

3. He lives to grant me rich supply;
he lives to guide me with his eye;
he lives to comfort me when faint;
he lives to hear my soul's complaint.

4. He lives to silence all my fears;
he lives to wipe away my tears;
he lives to calm my troubled heart;
he lives all blessings to impart.

5. He lives to bless me with his love;
he lives to plead for me above;
he lives my hungry soul to feed;
he lives to help in time of need.

6. He lives, my kind, wise, heav'nly friend;
he lives and loves me to the end;
he lives, and while he lives, I'll sing;
he lives, my prophet, priest, and king!

7. He lives and grants me daily breath;
he lives, and I shall conquer death;
he lives my mansion to prepare;
he lives to bring me safely there.

8. He lives, all glory to his name!
He lives, my Saviour, still the same;
what joy this blest assurance gives;
I know that my Redeemer lives!

GREETING

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

And also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray.

A brief silence is kept before the prayer.

Holy God, we pray for our church as we continue to engage in renewal: that the Spirit would guide us and enlighten us, and that in living into a renewed vision of the church we may all be strengthened for ministry in and for our church, and in and for our world. We give you thanks for the gift of being called through baptism. Bless the church with faithful pastors and diaconal ministers. Inspire us all to pattern our lives on our Lord Jesus Christ, in gratitude to you and in service to others. Grant us courage, patience, and vision; and strengthen us all in our Christian vocation of witness to the world and of service to others.

Amen.

WORD

FIRST READING: Psalm 23

You are my shepherd; I shall not be in want.

You make me lie down in green pastures and lead me beside still waters.

You restore my soul and guide me along right pathways for your name's sake.

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I shall fear no evil for you are with me.

Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of your enemies.
You anoint my head with oil and my cup is running over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in your house forever.

SECOND READING: 1 John 16-24

A reading from 1 John.

Jesus' death on our behalf is the clearest demonstration of divine love. This is the very love we share with others, not just through our words but especially through our deeds. In sharing such love we fulfill God's commandments.

¹⁶We know love by this, that Jesus Christ laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. ¹⁷How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

¹⁸Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. ¹⁹And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before God ²⁰whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and God knows everything. ²¹Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; ²²and we receive from God whatever we ask, because we obey the commandments and do what pleases God.

²³And this is God's commandment, that we should believe in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and love one another, just as Jesus has commanded us. ²⁴All who obey God's commandments abide in God, and God abides in them. And by this we know that God abides in us, by the Spirit that God has given us.

Word of God, word of life...**Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL: John 10:11-18

In language that recalls the twenty-third psalm, Jesus describes himself as the shepherd who cares for his sheep. He is willing to die for them, and he is able to overcome death for them.

[Jesus said:] ¹¹"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

¹²The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

The gospel of the Lord...**Thanks be to God.**

SERMON

Rev. Nathan Fong – Grace Lutheran Church, Burnaby, BC

This morning Pastor Nathan is preaching coast to coast to coast across the ELCIC!

Have you ever felt like you just didn't belong? I know I have. See, way back when dial-up internet still roamed the earth, I was in high school just being all teenager-like. I was still finding out who I was, defining my personality, and figuring out how I fit in my family, among my

friends, and in the world. And if the “pork chop and apple shawsh” episode of *The Brady Bunch* taught me anything, it’s that I’m not the only one who went through this type of existential crisis.

I think the school administration figured that I wouldn’t be the only one, so to aid in the process they had all the students in grades 10 and 11 I think it was, take these career aptitude tests. Perhaps you know what I’m talking about. Basically they are an extensive list of very personal questions that we answer as honestly as possible and they’re supposed to help you discover your perfect career. It’s sort of like a paper form of Tinder, but for jobs.

Anyway, I think I did at least a half dozen of these tests throughout those years, just because each one had a different slant to them and perhaps would give you more ideas. I don’t know. But strangely enough for me, while my friends kept getting all these cool jobs like doctor, lawyer, and race car driver, I seemed to always get basically the same answers. In first place without fail, I’d get religious leader/Rabbi/priest. But in second place, I’d get plumber and once I got sanitation worker. Nothing against plumbers or sanitation workers, but really?

And of course, all my friends scoffed at my first place answer, not because they were against religion or anything like that, but more because...well...I’m not really religious leader/Rabbi/priest material. First of all, I’m not Jewish so that can be scratched right off the list. But while I was raised in the church and actually kind of enjoyed being in the church, I wasn’t your typical religious kid. I didn’t fit the stereotype that most people have in their heads. Even members of my own family even once said that they don’t think that I’m cut out for it because I didn’t have the demeanour or intellect of a pastor, also they warned me that my paycheque as a pastor wouldn’t allow me to afford all the stuff that I’d want. Basically, I was too goofy, too dumb, and too materialistic to make it in this field.

But that started something in me. Actually, it just continued something that was already in me since I was in grade 6, but that’s for a different sermon. But in spite of the naysayers I continued on this path toward vocational congregational ministry and here I am.

Well who’s laughing now?
....nobody. Nobody’s laughing now.

But you can see how I felt like I didn’t belong. I felt it with my friends who thought it was weird that this kid that grew up with them doing all the urban kid stuff with them would become a pastor. I felt it with my family who thought I wasn’t cut from the right kind of cloth and wanted “better” for me. And then I started to feel it within myself as all the things they said continued to ring in my mind, causing doubt, suspicion, and fear.

“I am the Good Shepherd,” Jesus says in today’s gospel lesson, “I know my own and my own know me.”

That sounds real pretty, Jesus, but if you know me so well, why did you put me in this position where I feel this way? Why did you burn this passion within me for the gospel and its proclamation? Why did you call me, of all people, to serve you in this way?

Because clearly, I don't belong. Clearly, I don't fit in. Clearly, I don't have what it takes if I have doubt within myself of myself, my abilities and talents or lack thereof, and how long I can last without trying to make an inappropriate joke.

And so I wonder how many of us might feel the same way. Maybe we feel like we don't belong as well, maybe we feel like we can't do much to help further the kingdom of God because we aren't talented enough or knowledgeable enough or whatever enough to make it. Maybe we have felt the call into ministry but brushed it off because if Jesus really knew us, there's no way he'd even consider us for anything remotely close to that. Maybe we've thought that.

But Jesus' words here don't sound facetious at all, do they? I don't think Jesus isn't lying about knowing us here. He probably isn't pulling a prank and just waiting for us to fall on our faces and be all like, "Just kidding! Got ya!" Which is kind of a pity as that would be kind of hilarious and quite honestly something that I would do. Maybe not to any of you, mind you, but to my kids for sure.

No, Jesus words here are to encourage us. Reassure us. Empower us and lift us up and remind us that even when the world tells us that we aren't good enough or don't belong, God continues to call by name and invites us and welcomes us into Jesus' one flock where he is the shepherd and we are known, blessed, and dearly loved. His words here are a promise that have not, are not, and cannot ever be broken.

What always strikes me in this passage is how Jesus talks about these "other sheep" that don't belong to this fold, and yet they are also just as included and welcome. As we all might have had that experience of not belonging, perhaps we've also felt that there are these "others" that don't belong. Whatever the case may be, I see Jesus here talking to us about them. Reminding us that they do, in fact, belong. And at the same time, I see Jesus here talking to *them* about *us*. Telling them that we too, in fact, belong. Revealing to us all that, in whatever demographic we find ourselves in or identify with, on whatever margins we feel like we're residing just outside of, within whatever label that we associate ourselves with or has been unwillingly affixed to us, we belong.

Not because we fit any kind of divinely predetermined mold that people expect of us. Not because we've earned enough points to get us in that higher tier of life and God's grace. Not because we're the sheepest sheep that ever sheepled in the flock. But because Jesus knows us, through and through, and has decided to love us anyway. And not just to love us, but to equip us and empower us to be God's children in the world: flawed but cherished, broken but healed, sinners but regarded as saints.

See, regardless of how we might feel about who we are, God has declared us as enough to be God's beloved. Regardless of how we might think we fit in or don't, God has welcomed us into God's flock with Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Regardless of how we see ourselves compared to our peers, our colleagues, or even our enemies and frenemies, we completely, wholly, and unequivocally belong.

Today, aside from it being the 4th Sunday of Easter, it is also Good Shepherd Sunday as well as our church's Vocational Sunday. And so I encourage every single one of you that if you've ever even had a whiff of a call to serve in ministry, talk to your pastor or deacon about it. If you don't have a pastor or deacon, then talk to a trusted friend or loved one about it. If you don't have a

trusted friend or loved one, then ok, you can contact me and we talk about it. But let me assure you, if a dumb, goofy, materialistic teenager like me can find a way to belong in the church as a pastor, then I am certain that you can too.

And so as we continue in this season of Easter, as we continue to look at the empty cross and be reminded of a resurrected Christ, may we take the call that Jesus has for our lives to be part of his flock, that we might follow the leading, guiding, and caring of our good and gracious Shepherd that knows us and loves us. Thanks be to God. *Amen.*

HYMN OF THE DAY: Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song (#808)

1. Lord Jesus, you shall be my song as I journey;
I'll tell ev'rybody about you wherever I go:
you alone are our life and our peace and our love.
Lord Jesus, you shall be my song as I journey.

2. Lord Jesus, I'll praise you as long as I journey.
May all of my joy be a faithful reflection of you.
May the earth and the sea and the sky join my song.
Lord Jesus, I'll praise you as long as I journey.

3. As long as I live, Jesus, make me your servant,
to carry your cross and to share all your burdens and tears.
For you saved me by giving your body and blood.
As long as I live, Jesus, make me your servant.

4. I fear in the dark and the doubt of my journey;
but courage will come with the sound of your steps by my side.
And with all of the fam'ly you saved by your love,
we'll sing to your dawn at the end of our journey.

AFFIRMATION OF BAPTISM

Dear friends, we give thanks for the gift of baptism as we come before God to make public affirmation of baptism into Christ.

Let us pray.

Merciful God, we thank you that you have made us your own by water and the Word in baptism. You have called us to yourself, enlightened us with the gifts of your Spirit, and nourished us in the community of faith. Uphold us and all your servants in the gifts and promises of baptism, and unite the hearts of all whom you have brought to new birth. We ask this in the name of Christ. **Amen.**

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I ask you to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, reject sin, and confess the faith of the church.

Do you renounce evil and all the forces that defy God,
the powers of this world that rebel against God,
and the ways of sin that draw you from God?

Response: I renounce them.

Do you believe in God the Father?

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

**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.**

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

**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.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Alive in the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we bring our prayers before God who promises to hear us and answer in steadfast love.

A brief silence.

Loving Shepherd, you know your own and your own know you. Your voice calls us to your loving embrace. Strengthen your church throughout the world that we bear witness to your expansive love. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Gracious Shepherd, you are generous with the gifts of goodness and mercy. Restore your creation to wholeness so that cities and towns, countryside and wilderness, may abound with life. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Hope-giving Shepherd, the nations and peoples are your heritage. Place into the hearts of all leaders and rulers the passion to serve. Crucify any desire to overpower others and give leaders joy in lifting up the lowly. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Abiding Shepherd, your love flows as we reach out to those around us. Move us with your Spirit, so that we lay down our lives for those in need. Help us love one another in truth and action. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Saving Shepherd, you restore us to wholeness. Help our community in our life together and give us vigor as a people of faith. In the midst of challenges and opportunities, fill us anew with you Holy Spirit. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Eternal Shepherd, you hold us securely in your loving hands. In the assurance of resurrection hope, we remember our loved ones who have died in you. Bring us, with them, to dwell in your house forever. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

In the hope of new life in Christ, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

**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.**

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.
And also with you.

AFFIRMATION OF CHRISTIAN VOCATION

Siblings in Christ, both your work and your rest are in God. Will you endeavor to pattern your life on the Lord Jesus Christ, in gratitude to God and in service to others, at morning and evening, at work and at play, all the days of your life?

Response: **I will, and I ask God to help me.**

Almighty God, by the power of the Spirit you have knit these your servants into the one body of your Son, Jesus Christ. Look with favor upon them in their commitment to serve in Christ's name. Give them courage, patience, and vision; and strengthen us all in our Christian vocation of witness to the world and of service to others; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

SENDING

BLESSING

The God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

The God of all grace ✝ bless you now and forever. **Amen.**

SENDING SONG: Will You Come and Follow Me (#798)

1. Will you come and follow me
if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown
in you and you in me?

2. Will you leave yourself behind
if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare,
should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer pray'r
in you and you in me?

3. Will you let the blinded see
if I but call your name?
Will you set the pris'ners free
and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean,
and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean
in you and you in me?

4. Will you love the you you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound
in you and you in me?

5. Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.

DISMISSAL

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Go in peace. Share the good news. Alleluia!

Thanks be to God. Alleluia!

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