



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 9, 2021
Now the Feast and Celebration

This Sunday's image of the life the risen Christ shares with us is the image of friendship. We are called to serve others as Jesus came to serve; but for John's gospel, the image of servanthood is too hierarchical, too distant, to capture the essence of life with Christ. Friendship captures the love, the joy, the deep mutuality of the relationship into which Christ invites us. The Greeks believed that true friends are willing to die for each other. This is the mutual love of Christian community commanded by Christ and enabled by the Spirit.

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

In our gathering while apart, we give thanks for God's continued presence in our midst, showing up and giving us joy, granting us peace, and revealing to us all love.

And so we give thanks for baptism, the ancient symbol of belonging now reminds us of all joy, peace, and love, for through it we see that we are indeed joined together. In it, we see that we are lifted up out of our sinfulness and made to be clean. By it, we know that we are beloved beyond all measure.

So those of you with water in front of you, you may dip your fingers into it. Interact with it. Sense it for all its properties. Be reminded of God's marvelous deeds and righteousness. And when you are ready, use the water to mark your foreheads with a sign of the cross. Feel the water resting on your skin. Feel the graciousness of the cross penetrating your soul. Feel the love of God entering into your heart and never letting you go. For in these waters of baptism, we see God, we hear God, and we feel God, now and always.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

GATHERING HYMN: Although I Speak with Angel's Tongue (#644)

GREETING

The unending grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the unyielding love of God, and the unceasing 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

Loving God, your love for us is great and never ends, and it motivates us to love others in return. Allow us to see the joy from you abiding with us, that we be strengthened to continue to abide in you, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

WORD

FIRST READING: Acts 10:44-48

A reading from Acts.

While Peter shares the good news of Jesus with a Gentile soldier and his family, the Holy Spirit comes upon them. Recognizing that the Spirit works inclusively in the lives of both Jews and Gentiles, Peter commands that these Gentiles also be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

⁴⁴While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. ⁴⁵The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, ⁴⁶for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷"Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people

who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" ⁴⁸So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 98

¹Sing a new song to the LORD, who has done marvelous things,
whose right hand and holy arm have won the victory.

²**O LORD, you have made known your victory,
you have revealed your righteousness in the sight of the nations.**

³You remember your steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel;
all the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.

⁴**Shout with joy to the LORD, all you lands;
lift up your voice, rejoice, and sing.**

⁵Sing to the LORD with the harp,
with the harp and the voice of song.

⁶**With trumpets and the sound of the horn
shout with joy before the king, the LORD.**

⁷Let the sea roar, and all that fills it,
the world and those who dwell therein.

⁸**Let the rivers clap their hands,
and let the hills ring out with joy before the LORD, who comes to judge the earth.**

⁹The LORD will judge the world with righteousness
and the peoples with equity.

SECOND READING: 1 John 5:1-6

A reading from 1 John.

God's children believe that Jesus is the Messiah and love God by keeping God's commandments. Thus the world is conquered not through military might but through love and faith.

¹Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. ²By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. ³For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, ⁴for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. ⁵Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

⁶This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 8)

GOSPEL: John 15:9-17

The holy gospel according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

On the night of his arrest, Jesus delivers a final testimony to his disciples to help them in the days ahead. Here, he repeats the most important of all his commands, that they love one another.

[Jesus said:] ⁹“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹²“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

O God, pour your Spirit upon us, that we could be nourished by your Word and abide in your love, through Jesus Christ, our brother and friend. Amen.

Today is Mother’s Day, a day when we celebrate the mothers of the world and in our lives, whether they be our own mothers, our grandmothers, our aunts, sisters, daughters, or our very selves. We celebrate the maternal love mothers give their children. We celebrate the very important role that mothers play in the lives of those in their care. We celebrate the role that women play in the life of society, bringing a perspective that might compliment, contrast, or contest the male perspective, depending on what we’re talking about.

But in recent years, we’ve been getting warnings against celebrating Mother’s Day too hard. We were warned that celebrating Mother’s Day might be triggering to those who aren’t mothers, who don’t have mothers, or perhaps had abusive mothers. We were asked to tread lightly and be aware that everyone’s situation is different and so this day would mean different things for different people. I’ve even seen memes on social media talking about how this day can actually be offensive to others so we really should think twice about how we commemorate this day, especially at church.

And I admit, I did curb my enthusiasm for Mother’s Day. I changed the language, I made concessions, I compromised in order not to offend. To be honest though, I still don’t want to offend, but at the same time, I do want to commemorate mothers and their contribution to the family, to the community, and to the world, because we all come from a mom somehow.

The thing is, when I was growing up, Mother’s Day was a big deal in our house. My 3 siblings and I would do everything we could to make this day special for our mom, which mostly meant some kind of collaborative homemade card and some sort of gift. Well, actually it was a card that my sister pretty much would make by herself and I would just put my name on it, and my other sister would figure out what to get our mom and I would pitch in my few dollars. But hey, I tried at least.

We wanted to show our appreciation for our mom because we knew our mom did a lot to raise us. While my dad was the one who brought home the bacon so to speak, my mom did pretty much everything else. So it was important for us to make sure that our mom knew that we see the work that she put into raising us, even though we didn't always see eye to eye. But not once (I don't think at least), was this celebration about our mom's action of giving birth to us. We didn't talk about how we gestated in her womb for 9ish months. We didn't commemorate the hours of labour that she went through just to push the 4 of us out.

But we did celebrate her raising us. We commemorated her many hours of sacrifice in ensuring that we were fed, well rested, and bathed. We wanted to show our appreciation for the love that she showed us and continues to show us throughout our lives.

And so it seems really appropriate that on this Mother's Day we get these texts that are all about love. It seems appropriate that we get this scriptural basis for how we should treat each other with welcome, hospitality, and all that kind of stuff mothers seem to be able to instinctively do. It seems appropriate that we celebrate not just mothers specifically for their having given birth, but for their Christ-like care, their Godly love and goodness, and divine wisdom and discernment.

See this passage that we get out of John is a portion of what we call the "farewell discourse," which is basically Jesus saying goodbye to his disciples as he knew that his crucifixion was coming. He didn't want to leave them high and dry so he very lovingly gave them some comforting words of comfort, with the intention to comfort them and prepare them for the upcoming discomfort of seeing their mentor, teacher, Rabbi, be arrested and executed.

This part of the discourse is interesting as in most of it, Jesus describes his relationship with God and with them, his disciples. But this part actually includes some instruction. Jesus tells them to love. And not just feel fuzzy feelings for other people, but to love and Jesus loves. This means to love through action, through service, through laying down their very lives.

Wow, this just got real.

I mean, we know what Jesus did on the cross and all that, but to ask us to do it? I don't know. Maybe some of us would be willing to die for others, like parents for their kids, or individuals for their significant others, or some kind of caregiver for those under their care. But if we're honest, I think our instinct of self-preservation would be really strong, perhaps overpowering our desire to follow Jesus' command here. The situation would have to be pretty precise and exact, in that we would probably need a solid guarantee that our death won't be vain, but that our sacrifice would mean someone else being saved from whatever it is that we're trying to protect them from.

And that is the thing, our mind seems to always jump there, doesn't it? When we are asked to sacrifice, we think that the gains would have to be greater than the cost that we pay, or it's just not worth it. If we have to give, we need to ensure that we get as much or more for it to be a good deal. If we're expected to lay down our lives, then it better be earned or deserved.

But Jesus doesn't put that kind of condition on it, does he? He didn't for himself, if you think about it. Rather, he went and loved without any bounds, without any conditions, without any expectations. See, we didn't choose him, but he chose us.

So what then, are we supposed to just haphazardly give up our lives for others without any regard for ourselves? Seems kind of irresponsible, doesn't it? Well, I don't think that we're talking about actually dying for someone else, although it might. Let's not forget that Jesus says this before he was arrested and crucified, before the disciples really were able to see the weight and extent of his sacrifice, before they would ever equate these words with actual death. Instead, what I think Jesus meant by laying down one's life was more of an emptying oneself; being able to let go of assumptions, opinions, and prejudices; and being humbled within in order to be fully present for the other.

You know, kind of like how a mother would love.

I know, not only mothers are capable of this love and I know many mothers aren't capable of it. But it is that kind of maternal love that I believe Jesus is talking about. The kind of love we see in Peter as he baptizes a bunch of Gentiles even when it was against the custom at the time. The kind of love we see in the gracious acts that deem all people worthy. The kind of love that drives us to let go of our power, our privilege, and our pretensions, that room can be made for us of all walks, all skin tones, and all orientations to live not just in peace and harmony, but in the joy that is found in the name of Christ.

So I apologize if my saying "Happy Mother's Day" is offensive to some of you. I am sorry that those who find this day difficult continue to suffer whatever it is that makes this day difficult. I mourn the fact that some of us have had bad experiences and have fallen victim to the sin that even mothers can have. But this day isn't to celebrate those experiences. This day isn't to commemorate the abuse and harassment. This day isn't to lift up the evils that people can commit and say that it is ok. Rather this day is to remind us all of the wide and expansive love that mothers and all people are called to share; this love that brings us together as a community, joined with each other connected to the true vine; this love that we first received from Jesus, our Messiah and Lord, who chooses us first and has decided to call us his friends.

So as we approach the end of the Easter season, may we celebrate and be humbled by the love of God through Jesus our Messiah that has been shown to us through our mothers, through those who have given us motherly care, and those who exude that divine care. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: What Wondrous Love Is This (#666)

CREED (p. 9)

With all of God's beloved in every time and place, 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 share in the love of Christ, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "God of gracious love," and you may respond with hear our prayer. God of gracious love, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you have done marvellous things and we sing your praises. Continue to bless us with your love and empower us to reflect it onto others, that your name be known to the ends of the earth, joining us together as the one body of Christ. God of gracious love, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you reveal to us your righteousness and you are victorious over death and all that blocks us from your justice. May our ministry similarly reveal your righteousness to the world, that you be magnified throughout the nations. 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 our companion churches of the BC Synod. In particular we pray for Lutheran Church of the Cross in Victoria and their pastors Lyle McKenzie and Lyndon Sayers; and for Good Shepherd Lutheran Church also in Victoria and the pastors and leaders that serve there, as they and we continue to mourn the passing of their most recent pastor Guenther Sandl. God of gracious love, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, all the lands shout with joy as we rejoice and sing at all the marvels that you have made. May our stewardship of this planet be faithful and pleasing to you, that all that you have entrusted to us might continue to flourish as we live in mutual respect and care. God of gracious love, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you judge the world with righteousness and people with equity, yet we continue to exploit the poor and powerless for our own gain and selfishness. May the leaders and those in power of this world learn from your righteous judgments that we might all be able to live in harmony and peace. Especially we pray for those that we have sponsored to come to our country: Solyana Amanuel; and Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; that they will be able to arrive into Canada soon. God of gracious love, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, in our times of difficulty we turn to you and your healing love. Be with us who are ill, who mourn, or who feel lonely, and may we always remember that there is wholeness in your name. We pray especially for Diana; Marie; Beulah; Bev and family; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Paula; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; 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...

God of gracious love, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you welcome us into your eternal kingdom and community with all the saints. May the time we have in this life be informed by the faith of those in the past, that we all might learn to work together to create lasting change in a hurting world. God of gracious love, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in the unending love 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

Holy God, we give you thanks for this food that we share, as it remains for us a sign of your love and providence, and as it blesses us with your nourishing love, through Jesus Christ. **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, O God,
through your Son Jesus Christ,
who joins us all together as his one body in the world,
blessing others as we have been blessed,
as we together,
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 Lord, we sing to you a new song, for you have done marvelous things. You are victorious over death and shame and you welcome us all from the ends of the earth into your steadfast love and faithfulness. And in the fullness of time you sent to us Jesus, your Son, to be with us as one of us, revealing to all the boundless grace of your love.

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 given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

Then after they ate, he took the common cup, gave thanks and shared that saying, "this cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me."

It is in this food that we can see your righteousness and equity, even as we declare this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

All honour, glory, and power are yours, O God, as you continue to bless us with your gracious love and mercy, through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER (p. 13)

Welcomed to abide in God's love, 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 unending love.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMN: Lamb of God (p. 14)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, again you have provided and again you have fed. We are nourished by your love, and empowered by you calling us friends through the words of Jesus Christ our brother, Lord, and Saviour. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

May the righteous fairness of God, the loving friendship of Christ, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit bless you now and forever.

Amen.

SENDING SONG: Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love (#708)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, live in the joy of Christ's love.

Thanks be to God.

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