



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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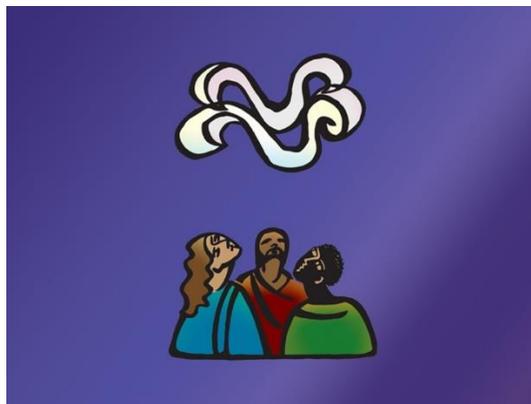
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7th Sunday of Easter (Ascension)

May 16, 2021

Now the Feast and Celebration

In today's readings the risen Christ ascends into heaven and his followers are assured that the Spirit will empower them to be witnesses throughout the earth. The disciples are told to not gaze up into heaven to look for Jesus (Acts 1:11); we find his presence among us as we proclaim the word and share the Easter feast. We too long for the Spirit to enliven our faith and invigorate our mission.

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

As we are gathered together while apart, we look ahead to our eventual return in this space, but we also revel in the fact that we have continued in our worship, continued as a community, and continued to be one with God and all the saints, joined together by this gift of baptism.

For in baptism we see that we needn't be together in person to be one in the Spirit. In baptism we see that we are invited and welcomed into God's grace. In baptism we see just how much we are provided for, taken care of, and loved.

So those of you with water in front of you, you may dip your fingers into it. Feel the Spirit present in your midst. Hear the invitation and welcome of God. Know that the God of love resides with you and alongside you as we together continue on through this pandemic.

And when you are ready and if you are willing, use the water to mark your foreheads with the sign of the cross. Let the water linger as it soothes and comforts, just as God does through the Spirit, by the power of Jesus our Lord.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

GATHERING HYMN: Rise Up, O Saints of God! (#669)

GREETING

The saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the unchanging love of God, and the uplifting 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

O God, we give you thanks for the life of Jesus among us, empowering us through your love and emboldening through the Spirit. Strengthen our hope and bless the work of our hands, that we might live as Christ's body in the world, acting and serving in his name. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Acts 1:1-11

A reading from Acts.

Before he is lifted into heaven, Jesus promises that the missionary work of the disciples will spread out from Jerusalem to all the world, and that the disciples will be accompanied and empowered by the Holy Spirit. His words provide an outline of the book of Acts.

[Luke writes:] ¹In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ²until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to

wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." ⁹When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 47

¹Clap your hands, all you peoples;
shout to God with a joyful sound.

²**For the LORD Most High is to be feared:
a great king over all the earth,**

³who subdues the peoples under us,
and the nations under our feet;

⁴**who chooses our inheritance for us,
the pride of Jacob, whom God loves.**

⁵God has gone up with a shout,
the LORD with the sound of the ram's horn.

⁶**Sing praises to God, sing praises;
sing praises to our king, sing praises.**

⁷For God is king of all the earth;
sing praises with a song.

⁸**God reigns over the nations;
God is enthroned on high.**

⁹The nobles of the peoples have gathered as the people of the God of Abraham.
The rulers of the earth belong to God, who is highly exalted.

SECOND READING: Ephesians 1:15-23

A reading from Ephesians.

The risen and exalted Christ reigns over the entire universe. The author of Ephesians prays that we are given the wisdom to know the power of the risen Christ and the empowering hope that the knowledge of this inheritance provides.

¹⁵I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰God put this power to work in Christ when he

raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²²And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 8)

GOSPEL: Luke 24:44-53

The holy gospel according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord.

On the day of his ascension, Jesus leaves his disciples with a commission, a blessing, and a promise of the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁴[Jesus said to the eleven and those with them,] “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.”⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

⁵⁰Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. ⁵¹While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵²And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; ⁵³and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

God, enlighten the eyes of our hearts and grant us a spirit of wisdom and revelation through the love and presence of your Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

So I finally got my appointment to get my COVID vaccination, after a very long wait to get my notification that I could even book. It’s pretty late for my age group, as basically everyone I know that was registered and eligible had their shot already, regardless if they live in a high transmission zone or not (which I apparently do live in one). After I got my booking, one of my friends was super excited and happy for me, while at best, I was just “meh.”

It’s not that I don’t want it or think that it’s necessary to get or anything, nor is it because I don’t think it’d be effective, it’s nothing like that. I just wasn’t in a super rush to get it, nor was I really bothered that everyone around me was getting it before I was. I couldn’t really explain why I feel this way. I couldn’t explain why I wasn’t more in a hurry or anxious about it, I couldn’t explain my lack of excitement when I finally did get the notification that said I could

book or that sense of relief that a lot of my friends did when they got theirs. I couldn't explain why I don't feel the urgency to take a picture of that sticker they give you and post it up on all my socials.

I couldn't explain it, that is, until I read the texts for this Ascension Day. See, like I mentioned to some of you prior to this, Ascension Day actually lands on the 40th day after Easter Sunday. The way the math works means that it will always be on a Thursday, and never a Sunday. So we literally won't ever get these texts in a regular service if we stuck to the actual church calendar. But as I read them just for fun because I'm kind of nerdy that way, they really spoke to me. The journey of the disciples from the ministry, to the death, to the resurrection, and then to the ascension of Jesus would be such a roller coaster. The emotions they must have gone through from the joy and peace of knowing and being able to hang out with and learn from the Messiah, to the sorrow and guilt of seeing him arrested and crucified and not having done anything to stop it, to the elation and relief to see that he is back and has forgiven them, but then to the disappointment and confusion when he just ups and floats away without even bringing about that restoration of Israel that they were so looking forward to. All of that must have been so turbulent and traumatizing that they might be left with not knowing who to trust ever again. It's like Jesus was everything they dreamed he would be, but at the same time not at all anything like they imagined or expected.

All their eggs were in that basket and every single one of those eggs seemed to have been smashed into unrecognisable bits. Their excitement in seeing a political victory for Israel was burst into flames when Jesus unexpectedly lifted off. Their hope in seeing that joy once again popped and left them feeling deflated.

Because, as the texts suggests, the disciples, even after 3 years of following and learning from Jesus, had only one thing in mind: the end of the oppressive Roman rule. The restoration of the full Jewish occupation in the Promised Land. They wanted Israel to be great again by their own narrow definition of great. Ok, I guess that was three things.

See, they had this tunnel vision. They couldn't see past their own vision of the future. They weren't able to fully understand Jesus' lessons and teachings because they were just a bit too caught up in having things the way that they wanted them to be. It wasn't until Jesus opened their eyes to God's Word and him actually leaving them by floating up into the clouds that they were able to really get the joy and fulfilment that he was talking about the whole time. The "joy" they would have gotten from any kind of restoration to Israel would have paled in comparison. The "fulfillment" that they would have received from seeing their enemies being punished would have only lasted until the next conqueror or conflict arose. Their "great" wasn't all that great at all. But yet, that is what their hope was in, something fleeting, something perhaps a little selfish, something that wasn't the lasting love, grace, and mercy of God.

And... this is why I think I wasn't all that excited to get the vaccine. Let me reiterate, I will be getting it, I'm booked and everything, don't you worry about that. It's just that... well, I'm not sure how much is going to change after I do. I'm not sure if this vaccine will do all it's promising to do, that it'll get us out of this pandemic and back into normal. I'm not sure if we're putting too many of those eggs in this vaccination basket, because I'm afraid what will happen if things don't get back to what we expect them to, and how that might introduce a whole host of other problems that would put our current problems to shame.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not out to burst your vaccine bubble or anything. I'm just trying to be cautious and guard my own heart and expectation. I'm worried that this isn't the happily ever after so many are hoping that it might be. I'm scared that we are putting too much faith in this vaccine, thinking that it will be our saviour.

Because the thing is, we already have a Saviour who has saved us from before we were even born.

This isn't to say that we don't need to get the COVID vaccine or any vaccine for that matter, but it is to say that our faith and happiness needn't and shouldn't lie on things that might not be able to deliver. It is to say that our joy doesn't rely on the condition of a broken world. It is to say that our position and identity as God's beloved children isn't dependant or any way affected by this pandemic, the end of this pandemic, or us regaining what we think is normal or not. I'm also not saying that the vaccine won't help us or bring life as we know it back to "normal", but I'm saying that when it comes to our faith, it shouldn't matter if it does or not.

Rather, we can trust in the promises of grace and mercy from God, look to the empty cross to be reminded of who we are and whose we are, and have the deep seated joy of Christ made complete in us. We can look at the situation that we find ourselves in, look to see how God rises us up out of it, and have that love revealed to us through our community and beyond. We can put our faith and hope in knowing that while the physical manifestation of God's Word in Jesus was lifted up off this earth, that the Spirit of Christ, God, and all things good continues to reside in us and through us, showing us the good news and empowering us to apply that to our lives as God's witnesses, acting as God's hands and feet in the world.

I once heard a story of a pastor named Brad Schmeling out of Minneapolis in the States, who was helping to lead worship at a conference that he was at. The service that he was helping to plan just happened to land on Ascension Day that year, and the group wasn't entirely sure how they would drive the recognition of the day home for the people. Someone brought up the old tradition of extinguishing the Christ candle, that is typically lit throughout the Easter season, during the reading of the gospel. They took that idea and ran with it. But instead of just blowing it out, representing Christ leaving the building so to speak, they had a dancer move around the space, passing smaller candles that were lit from the Christ Candle to the participants of worship. After all of these were handed out, the dancer went back up to the Christ candle and extinguished it, revealing to all that while that particular flame was out, it had already ignited a sea of flickering candles, its warm glow representing the Spirit of Christ out in the world, residing with, in, and through the church, God's children, and all of God's kingdom bringing joy and peace to all that it encounters.

Of course, we can't do something like that here and now, not through the internet at least. But we can take that image, and see that while we can't be in person here at the church still, while we can't meet physically face to face and embrace each other, while we can't together break bread and share in a meal, we can still revel in the Spirit of Christ, shining in and through us and maybe even in spite of us, showing us and all people the love of God that cannot be extinguished, not by any pandemic, not by any vaccine, not by any kind of darkness whatsoever.

So as we approach the end of the Easter season, may we lift up this light of God as it leads us and guides us into service, into community, and into everlasting joy and steadfast love. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Guide Me Ever, Great Redeemer (#618)

CREED (p. 9)

With the whole church joined together in risen Jesus, 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 and empowered to see God through Christ in the Spirit in our midst, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "God, in your adapting mercy," and you may respond with **hear our prayer**. God, in your adapting mercy, **hear our prayer**.

Resurrecting God, we clap our hands and shout to you, for your grace fills our lives with your joy and love. May we continually see your ever-present wisdom, that we be able to rely on you and your strength throughout our lives. God, in your adapting mercy, **hear our prayer**.

Almighty God, you are our great sovereign who rules with justice and mercy, and you are worthy of our reverence and worship. Work through us and our ministries and make your steadfast love apparent to all people. We especially 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 congregations of the BC Synod. In particular, we pray for Grace Lutheran Church in Victoria and the pastors and leaders that help with their ministry; Mount Olive Lutheran in Surrey and their pastor Peter Hanson; and all the prison ministries and chaplains and the inmates to whom they minister. God, in your adapting mercy, **hear our prayer**.

Creator God, you have chosen to give us this planet you have made and all that it is in it to live in, to interact with, and to love. Continue to teach us different and better ways to care for all life and preserve your creation and its beauty. God, in your adapting mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Powerful God, your love reigns over all the nations, and your grace joins us together as one. Grant your wisdom to all world leaders and politicians, that their judgements be fair and equitable. We also pray for those we have sponsored to come to our country: Solyana Amanuel; and Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; that they all be able to arrive soon. God, in your adapting mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Healing God, you reveal to us your soothing presence and you lift us up back into peace. Be with all among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that the reliance on your love be shared with us all. We pray especially for Diana; Marie; Beulah; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bev and family; 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, in your adapting mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Eternal God, you gather us together with all the saints as your people, for you, O God of Abraham, are not bound by time or space. You are present in our midst wherever and whenever we might be, and you lift us up into your holiness. May the lives of all the faithful continue to empower us as we together continue to proclaim your good news to the world. God, in your adapting mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in the unending presence of 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, in your generosity and providence, you continue to give us good things even when we fail to recognize them. May this food before us serve as a reminder of your goodness of which we are witness to, 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 our Saviour Jesus Christ,
who abides with us and we with him,
as we, with the choirs of angels, the hosts of heaven,
and the whole church on earth,
praise your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 11)

GREAT THANKSGIVING

O God, to you we clap our hands and shout for joy, for you are the Most High God and we sing your praises. You choose to bless us with gifts of mercy and love, and you gather us together in your name, revealing to us your grace and bringing us to all peace. And in the fullness of time, you sent to us Jesus, your Son, to teach us with words and actions all the wonders of your truth.

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, he took the cup that they shared, gave thanks and had them all drink from it as he said, "this cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me."

It is by this food that we see God highly exalted, lifting us up even as we ponder this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

For you, O God, are maker and redeemer of all things, and you welcome us into your love and grace, filling us with the joy of knowing that you are with us always, through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with us and the Holy Spirit, as God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER (p. 13)

Gathered together in peace and wholeness by the Holy 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

Take, eat, know that Christ is with you.
Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMN: Lamb of God (p. 14)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, you have again fed us with your very love that we are witnesses to, and you empower us to love others in return. May our actions as your hands and feet in the world be pleasing to you, that the news of your gospel may reach all the ends of the earth, through Jesus our Risen Lord and Saviour.
Amen.

SENDING

BLESSING

May God our Creator bless us with hope and thanksgiving,
God the Christ reveal to us the glorious inheritance that we receive,
and God as Counsellor lift us up and empower us to be God's witnesses in the world,
both now and forever.
Amen.

SENDING SONG: Lord, You Give the Great Commission (#579)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, grow in faith and love.
Thanks be to God.