



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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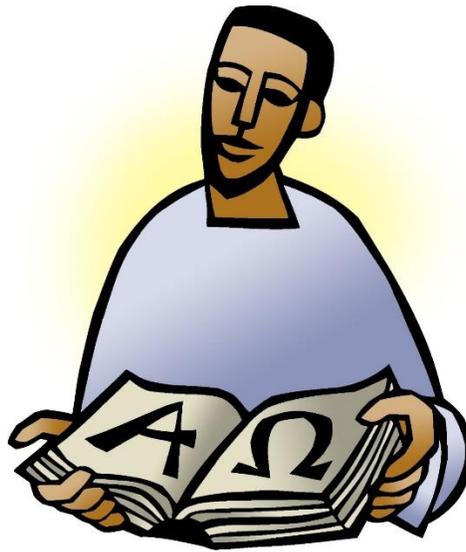
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Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

August 22, 2021

ELW Holy Communion, Setting Eight

In today's gospel many people take offense at Jesus' invitation to eat his flesh and drink his blood; even many of Jesus' disciples peel off. This is the backdrop in John's gospel for Peter's confession of faith. "To whom can we go?" asks Peter, in words we sometimes sing just before the gospel is read. "You have the words of eternal life." In order to take such a stand, as Peter and Joshua did, Paul tells us to arm ourselves with the word of God. We pray in the Spirit that we might be bold ambassadors of the gospel.

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 continue to gather while apart, we enter into worship in the name of Christ.

And as part of our worship, we give thanks for the gift of baptism. For it is through baptism that we can see our welcome into God's love. It is in the water that we can feel God with us. It is by this gift that we might know faith in, faith because of, and the faith of Jesus Christ our Lord.

So if you have water in front of you, you may dip your fingers into it. Allow the water to remind you of God's promises, God's presence in our lives, and God's providence for our very souls. And when you are ready and if you are willing, use the water to mark your foreheads with a sign of the cross, for God is with you, with all of us, always.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

GATHERING SONG: God Is Here! (#526)

GREETING

The faithful grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the steadfast love of God, and the whole fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

KYRIE (p. 184)

CANTICLE OF PRAISE (p. 185)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord our God, your Son Jesus has the words of eternal life. Grant that we may come to him in faith, follow him in this world, and abide in him forever and always, that we might continually be your faithful servants in the world, in his name.

Amen.

WORD

FIRST READING: Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18

A reading from Joshua.

In the Near East, covenant means "agreement" or "alliance." It describes relationships and is the primary word used to characterize the relationship between God and Israel. By delivering Israel, God has already begun the relationship. Joshua calls upon the people to respond.

¹Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. ^{2a}And Joshua said to all the people, ¹⁴"Now therefore revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

¹⁶Then the people answered, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve

other gods; ¹⁷for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; ¹⁸and the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.”

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 34:15-22

¹⁵The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous,
and God’s ears are open to their cry.

¹⁶**The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
to erase the remembrance of them from the earth.**

¹⁷The righteous cry, and the LORD hears them
and delivers them from all their troubles.

¹⁸**The LORD is near to the brokenhearted
and saves those whose spirits are crushed.**

¹⁹Many are the troubles of the righteous,
but the LORD delivers them from every one.

²⁰**God will keep safe all their bones;
not one of them shall be broken.**

²¹Evil will bring death to the wicked
and those who hate the righteous will be punished.

²²**O LORD, you redeem the life of your servants,
and those who put their trust in you will not be punished.**

SECOND READING: Ephesians 6:10-20

A reading from Ephesians.

Like a general giving a rousing speech to troops before battle, this letter closes by calling on Christians to be equipped for spiritual warfare against evil. The full armor of God includes truth, righteousness, peace, faith, the gift of salvation, and the word of God inspired by the Spirit.

¹⁰Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹²For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. ¹⁶With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. ¹⁹Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

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

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 188)

GOSPEL: John 6:56-69

The holy gospel according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

The “hard saying” that offends Jesus’ disciples is his claim that his followers must eat his flesh and drink his blood. The followers who return to their old lives know something about how odd this sounds. Simon Peter, on the other hand, knows something about the scarcity of living, gracious words. He asks the most important question: “To whom shall we go?”

[Jesus said,] ⁵⁶“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.” ⁵⁹He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

⁶⁰When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” ⁶¹But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, “Does this offend you? ⁶²Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? ⁶³It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. ⁶⁴But among you there are some who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. ⁶⁵And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.”

⁶⁶Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. ⁶⁷So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

O God, your Word gives us life, that just being in your presence is food for our souls. Feed us this day with your truth, and bring us up to see your face in a hurting world, in the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

I’m sure many, if not all of you have heard what is happening over in Afghanistan right now. After almost 20 years of war, President Joe Biden has pulled out the American troops, allowing the Taliban to basically take over everything. And while I haven’t kept up much with that news, what I’ve seen is pretty horrific. This action of course fuelled the fires that were already splitting the political left and right in the States, and the comments sections on the various articles and posts were going crazy.

I know, I know, don’t read those comments but ugh, I just can’t help it sometimes. It’s like a deer in headlights, I know the danger is coming but I just can’t look away. And lately, I’ve found that reading the comments, seeing some people’s unfiltered rants, checking out the often enraged opinions of others, helps me to learn. It helps me to open my horizons, it helps me to

remember that there isn't only one train of thought out there, and perhaps most of all, it helps me to wrestle with my own beliefs and work on myself.

I'm not saying that my mind is totally changed on anything from reading the comments, but it allows me to understand more fully why I believe what I believe and perhaps some insight on why those of differing opinions believe what they believe. And to be honest with you, I'm starting to think that many people believe what they believe because they simply want to.

Yup. It has nothing to do with logic, ethics, or even common sense. It is just the desire for the right to stay on the right, and the left to stay on the left. Meaning that those on your side can't do anything wrong, and those not on your side can't do anything right. It doesn't matter if it's the same doggone thing that they're doing, it's only good if they are rooting for the same colours as you, and it's definitely bad if they aren't. It's mind boggling.

On every major issue that has happened at least since I've started to pay attention, you'll see people on either side of the fence, strongly in support of only their side. And some people take it really personally, as they start to actually hate those on the other side. Like, the actual people. They don't hate just the side or the opinion, but suddenly everything about everyone on that side is somehow evil and wrong. It's like their whole opinion about an individual is centered solely on their opinion of this one particular matter. And it's disturbing. Not surprising at all, unfortunately, but disturbing.

We see this kind of polarization in today's gospel lesson, which is a direct continuation of last week's text. They actually could have included a "last week in John's gospel..." as this week starts with the same bit that last week ended with. And just as last week, what Jesus says is tough to swallow, as tough as swallowing human flesh as it were. Jesus is still saying that we need to eat his flesh and drink his blood.

But this time around, we get a reaction from the people. A reaction that perhaps we could relate to if we were first time hearers of this text: disbelief, disgust, and offense. This resulted in some of those disciples just getting up and leaving Jesus because this was the final straw for them.

Is it really that easy to just leave Jesus like that? Or has their doubt and unbelief of who Jesus is been percolating just under the surface for a while? Was this really the deal breaker for them that moved them from followers to deserters, or was it just the excuse big enough for them to hightail it out of there? Did this very obvious metaphorical statement from Jesus actually colour Jesus completely for them?

Or, as in the case with those modern issues I was just talking about, was this particular issue just reaffirming what they had already assumed about him this whole time?

I mean the text does say that Jesus knew from the get go that some of them didn't believe, and so I do think that this polarization is what is going on here. And so we can really see that this whole "I believe it, that settles it" mentality is present, even these ancient people.

So what should we do then? Just discard all of our beliefs and start from scratch? Believe only what comes from those sources that don't already agree with what you already believe? Or worse yet, make no decisions for ourselves but allow everyone else's opinion do it for us? No,

of course not, but I definitely think that we need to stop shooting first and not bothering to ask any questions after because the answers wouldn't make any different anyway.

Rather, I think we can take a page out of our second reading for today, from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, where he advises the people to put on the whole armour of God. Off the bat, we think that this armour is to protect us from "spiritual attacks" as Satan and whatever demons come at us with flaming arrows and stuff. But upon closer inspection, it seems like each of these pieces of armour are designed to help us in our discernment and views on the world and life in general. I mean, that is what the Satan, the adversary's M.O. is, to confuse our minds to the point where we can't tell the difference between good and evil. So have the belt of truth around your waist, that the support of all that heavy lifting would be rooted in our unchanging position in God's love. Put on the breastplate of righteousness to protect your heart from the evil desires of judging others and placing yourself and your opinions over all. Wear the shoes of the good news of peace, that you are able to walk away from the conflicts and distractions that take us away from our mission to proclaim God's gospel. And be sure to be armed with the shield of faith, that your trust in God's presence and mercy separate you from all the others who claim dominion over you. And lastly, don the helmet of salvation and be armed with the sword of the Spirit, that your mind is always on God's grace for us all, and you are able to lean on God's Word to take down the lies of the enemy.

So you see, this armour of God works together to help us in our discernment. These tools that God gives us grant us strength to withstand the conflicting arguments of the world. These very gifts from God bestow upon us a wisdom, a wisdom of humility and trust in God's will and guidance for our lives.

I know, easier said than done. It's not like we purposely walk around without any armour on, it's kind of a foreign concept for us in the western world. But at least we can be aware of what lenses we have at our disposal to help us in our discernment. These pieces of armour are there to help increase our faith. Paul is walking us through, step by step, how we can learn to see what God is doing in the world, and how we can jump on board.

Still, it is hard for our minds to change once it's made up. I know that because I'm like that. But it takes a great deal of humility and faith to allow God into the inner workings of our mind, where we can reflect, we can listen, and wrestle with the truths that we tell ourselves compared to the absolute truths of God. The absolute truths of love, grace, and mercy.

And by God's grace we can, in that humility, more easily see Jesus in the midst of the nonsense and conflicting arguments of the world. We can hear more clearly the truths of Jesus spoken to us in the midst of our confusion and maybe even in our certainty in our own opinions. Perhaps we can trust and have faith that it is Jesus who has the words of eternal life, and there is no one else to whom we can go.

So in this season after Pentecost, a season of church growth and ministry, may we lean on the wisdom of God, the faith of Christ, and the discernment of the Spirit as we continue to love and serve all of God's people even in this continuing pandemic. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Just As I Am, without One Plea (#592)

CREED

With all of God's faithful, let us confess the Christian faith with the Apostle's Creed:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**
**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**
**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Led into and guided by the faith of Christ, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "in your loving mercy, O God," and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. In your loving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, your eyes are upon us and your ears hear our cries. In your unending faithfulness you reach out to us and bless us with the peace that surpasses all understanding. Remind us of this promise and may it fuel our lives and service. In your loving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you do not turn your face from us but you shine on us with grace and mercy. Strengthen our ministry, that even when we are still sinners, we may do your work and proclaim your good news. 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 congregations of the BC Synod. In particular, we pray for Ascension Lutheran Church in Nelson and the pastors and leaders that serve there; and for Mt Zion Lutheran Church in New Westminster and their pastor Marlys Moen. In your loving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you hear our needs and you deliver us into your creation that provides for us. May we always be mindful of how we care for this planet, that it might continue to be our home and source of life. In your loving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you are near to us and deliver us from trouble. We pray for this world, its leaders and politicians, that your unending peace might rest on all our hearts. We remember especially Afghanistan, that their lands might be purged of the evils that plague them. And we lift up those we've sponsored to enter into Canada: Solyana Amanuel; and Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile,

and their children; that their journey here to reunite with their family be swift. In your loving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you keep us safe and save us. Be with all who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your faithful love be always apparent to us all. Especially we pray for Paula; Beulah; Diana; Marie; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bev and family; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; Charlotte; William; those who have been negatively affected by COVID-19; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...

In your loving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you don't punish us for our little faith, but you redeem us and welcome us into your grace with you and all the saints. May the lives of those we've loved and lost remain steadfast in our hearts and memories, that they continue to help us in our own faith and journey. In your loving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your steadfast faithfulness, seen in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

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

OFFERING PRAYER

Holy God, we give you thanks for all that you give us out of your love and faithfulness. Bless this food we have before us, that it be a reminder to us of your unending presence with and joining welcome for us all, through Jesus 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 in all places
give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God,
through our Saviour Jesus Christ;
who speaks your Word of eternal life,
joining us with the choirs of angels,
the church on earth and the hosts of heaven,
in praising your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 190)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

O Lord, your eyes are upon us as you listen to our cries and deliver us from what harms us. You are near to us and save our crushed spirits. In our troubles, you keep us safe and you redeem us from our shortcomings. Even in our sin, you do not punish us, but provide for us a way to everlasting life through your Son Jesus.

Who, on the night that he was betrayed, 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."

And after they had ate, Jesus 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 God providing for us in our times of need, even as we declare this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

To you, O God, be all honour and glory, as you remain faithful to us, you humble servants, through Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

Brought together in faith and 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

Take and eat, God is with us.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMN: Lamb of God (p. 191)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, you give us all things good and you feed and nourish us with your Word of eternal life. May this Word increase our faith, that we might continually lean and rely on your strength and truth for guidance in this hurting world, through Jesus our Lord.

Amen.

SENDING

BLESSING

May the blessing of God our Creator who delivers us, keep us.

May the grace of God the Christ who sustains us, shine on us.

And may the fellowship of God our Counsellor who empowers us, give us peace.

Amen.

SENDING SONG: Drawn to the Light (#593)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, live as God's chosen through Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God.