



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 19, 2021

ELW Holy Communion, Setting Eight

Today we hear James warn against selfish ambition, while the disciples quarrel over which one of them is the greatest. Jesus tells them the way to be great is to serve. Then, to make it concrete, he puts in front of them a flesh-and-blood child. We are called to welcome the children God puts in front of us, to make room for them in daily interaction, and to give them a place of honor in the assembly.

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping in-person and 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.

Grace Lutheran worships, prays, and serves on the traditional and unceded lands and territories of the hənq̓əmin̓əm (Musqueam) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

GATHERING

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

As we worship together, both in person and online, we remember God's love for us all and we together give thanks for the gift of baptism.

In baptism, God reveals to us all how we are joined together as the one body of Christ. Through baptism, God shows us how we are many parts of this body, yet we are all equal. And by baptism, God welcomes us all as this body, acting as God's people in the world.

And to further remind us of this connection, those of you at home may dip your fingers in your water if you have it, and those of you here may receive what is traditionally referred to as asperges. That is, the sprinkling of water on us, symbolizing our unity in the Spirit through baptism (and don't worry, I checked and COVID is not transmitted through water).

As we interact with this water, may we remember our unchanging position in God's gracious love, how we are all welcomed as God's children into God's arms of steadfast love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

GATHERING SONG: Will You Let Me Be Your Servant (#659) verses 1, 2, 5

GREETING

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

And also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Gracious and merciful God, as we return together to meet physically in worship, you call us to live in the name of Christ with honour and respect, fully known to you and precious in your sight. Draw us nearer to you each day, as you teach us and guide us to walk in your ways of grace, peace, and love, through Jesus our Lord.

Amen.

WORD

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 11:18-20

A reading from Jeremiah.

Today's reading tells of the suffering of the prophet Jeremiah, who announced God's word to Judah but was met with intense opposition and persecution. Jeremiah continues to trust in God in the midst of his suffering.

¹⁸It was the LORD who made it known to me, and I knew;
then you showed me their evil deeds.

¹⁹But I was like a gentle lamb
led to the slaughter.

And I did not know it was against me
that they devised schemes, saying,
"Let us destroy the tree with its fruit,
let us cut him off from the land of the living,

so that his name will no longer be remembered!"
²⁰But you, O LORD of hosts, who judge righteously,
who try the heart and the mind,
let me see your retribution upon them,
for to you I have committed my cause.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 54

¹Save me, O God, by your name;
in your might, defend my cause.
²**Hear my prayer, O God;**
give ear to the words of my mouth.
³For strangers have risen up against me, and the ruthless have sought my life,
those who have no regard for God.
⁴**Behold, God is my helper;**
it is the Lord who sustains my life.
⁵Render evil to those who spy on me;
in your faithfulness, destroy them.
⁶**I will offer you a freewill sacrifice**
and praise your name, O LORD, for it is good.
⁷For you have rescued me from every trouble,
and my eye looks down on my enemies.

SECOND READING: James 3:13- 4:3, 7-8a

A reading from James.

The wisdom God gives unites our hearts and minds. Instead of living to satisfy our own wants and desires, we manifest this wisdom in peace, gentleness, mercy, and impartiality toward others.

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. ¹⁵Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. ¹⁶For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. ¹⁸And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.^{4:}

¹Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? ²You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures. ⁷Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ^{8a}Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 188)

GOSPEL: Mark 9:30-37

The holy gospel according to Mark.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus' teaching and action in this text are directed to the church whenever it is seduced by the world's definition of greatness: prestige, power, influence, and money. The antidote to such a concern for greatness is servanthood.

³⁰[Jesus and the disciples went on] and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it;³¹ for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again."

³²But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

³³Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" ³⁴But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. ³⁵He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." ³⁶Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

O God, may your wisdom be apparent to us all, that as it sets us free we might see and hear the Spirit working in the world, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Well, we're back. After 18 long months and some failed attempts at being in person, we are finally back together physically in our space and able to worship together. And as exciting as that is, I'll have to admit that I've had a lot of mixed feelings about coming back. Now, I'm not trying to deflate anyone's balloon or anything, and don't get me wrong, I've missed being in the same space as all of you dearly, but it's just that it's a pretty big transition to navigate as we're not exactly at "normal" levels.

I had to rejig the order of worship and how we do things in order to keep people as safe as possible. I had to rethink, redesign, and remodel the behind-the-scenes of our online presence. And above all, I had to get over my own ego that this probably won't be perfect the first time around.

But I really really wanted it to be. I wanted to wow all of you with what I could do in terms of live streaming and setting up the tech and how seamless the transition would be. I wanted you to be in tears with how moving and touching this service could be. And maybe a just little, I wanted to show my colleagues how good of a pastor I could be so maybe I'd have a shot of being bishop at the next election...

However, in spite of all the thinking, the planning, and the rejigging over the past several weeks, I started to realise that my standard of perfect wasn't going to be met. The bar that I

set for myself, while not exactly *too high* per se, ended up being too high for me. I was almost embarrassed to have to ask for help in the whole process as I wanted to do it myself, so perhaps I would get all the credit myself and maybe, just maybe, be seen as the greatest.

And I guess I'm not the only buffoon who wanted this, yeah? We read about the disciples in today's gospel lesson arguing about who among them is the greatest. And as I just displayed, perhaps this mentality of comparing ourselves to each other is somewhat relatable. I mean, yeah I know we like to make fun of the disciples and shame them for being so dull and unable to understand Jesus even when he's speaking super plainly, but this time around it seems like they're acting just like one of us in their little competition to determine who among them could be considered as the greatest.

Sure, maybe we wouldn't argue about it in front of the Son of God, although in their defense they did try to be discreet about it, it's just that Jesus caught on and asked them about it. But don't we like to rank ourselves by the salaries we get from our jobs, the size of our houses and what part of town we live in, or our children and whatever awards they might have received? Don't we like to puff up our chests and talk about our conquests, our accomplishments, and our spoils? Don't we often dress to impress and try to be seen as perfect? And even if we don't actively do all those things, we sure like to receive the compliments, don't we?

We like to come out on the winning side of the comparison. We like to be considered better than the other. We like to be regarded... *identified* even... as the greatest.

Except, Jesus redefines for us what the greatest even is, what the title even means, and how we would even get there. Jesus explains that it isn't power and status and a great looking worship service that puts us on the top. Jesus describes the humility of a servant, the innocence of a child, and the divine welcome of the Spirit. I know, it isn't really super easy to understand what Jesus is getting at here and also I continue to scratch my head wondering where on earth that kid came from that he just grabbed and put on his lap.

Jesus says if you want to be first, then you need to be last. But the confusing irony in that is the last doesn't even want to be first or they wouldn't be last. Second last, maybe, but not dead last. So aiming for last in order to be first really sort of negates you wanting to be first at all. Your priorities and goals will shift just by nature of the definitions. And welcoming a child? Sure, we'd do that in a heartbeat these days because let's face it, kids are cute. But in those days? Kids might have still been cute but they were more seen as snot-nosed, skinned-kneed, second-rate *humans*, let alone citizens. Welcoming one of those only happens when one of those turns into an adult, you know, when they aren't those gross children anymore.

But maybe... maybe that is the point. Not that kids are gross. Well, I mean they can be at times because they do get sick easily and often to use sleeves, carpets, even pillow cases before they ever think about using a tissue, but that's not what I'm talking about. What I am talking about is identity. In those days to be identified as a kid meant that you weren't an adult. To be identified as the last meant that you weren't first. To be identified as anything but the greatest meant that you must be a loser.

But Jesus was telling them that just isn't the case. Things aren't that polarized, we aren't divided so deeply, the separation between this and that isn't as stark as we often think. The folly in the disciples arguing about who was the greatest among them and the folly in our

comparing ourselves with each other isn't about ego or selfishness or show-offy attitudes, but it is in that we aren't judged like that by God. By each other, maybe, but not by God.

See, God sees past all of that and recreates us as redeemed, forgiven, and welcomed people. God brushes aside all fleeting worldly measures of greatness and gives us the opportunity to participate in the lasting divine measures of greatness found in humble service and community. God knows all of our faults and imperfections and fills them with a grace that spans all time and space.

So just as Jesus picked up that random kid, so God lifts us up, places us on God's lap and calls us beloved. Us. Beloved. In all our gross incompetence, in our needy selfishness, in our absolute imperfection and janky live streams and not so polished worship services. God welcomes us. Loves us. Calls us as God's own children.

So we needn't compare ourselves with each other. We needn't rank ourselves against our peers. We needn't worry about how we might be identified in the world. But we can look at each other as equal partners in the gospel, equally loved and welcomed by God, equal bearers of God's grace in spite of whatever we might think of ourselves.

Because in God's eyes, we are perfect. Just the way we are.

As we celebrate the gradual emerging out of this pandemic, may we see our unchanging position in God's love in ourselves as well as others, that we might be as welcoming and accepting as one of God's beloved children can be. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service (#712) verses 1, 2, 4

CREED

United together in Christ, 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 humble service to God and all people, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "Lord, in your equitable mercy," and you may respond with **hear our prayer**. Lord, in your equitable mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God, by your name you save us and in your might you defend our cause. Continue to lift us up in your truth that we might always see the welcome to extend to all people. God, in your equitable mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God, you hear our prayers and answer us when we call. Strengthen us in our ministries as we transition back out of pandemic, we might continue to faithfully proclaim your gospel in this changing world. 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 in the BC Synod. In particular we pray for St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Prince Rupert and their pastor Diana Edis; and for Our Saviour Lutheran Church in Richmond and their pastor Christoph Reiners. God, in your equitable mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God, you are our helper and the sustainer of life. This planet that you have created for us to live in is full of your majesty and wonder. May our stewardship of what you have entrusted to us be pleasing to you, that your creation's beauty endure throughout the ages. God, in your equitable mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God, the world seems to be full of evil and faithlessness, but you remain faithful and just and you protect us in our time of need. We pray for the countries of the world that are facing political turmoil and for the safety of all their citizens and residents. We pray for our country as it faces an election during a somewhat tumultuous time. And we pray for those that we've sponsored to enter into our country: Solyana Amanuel; and Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; that the process to bring them here be swift. God, in your equitable mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God, your name is good and we praise you for all that you have done. You watch over us and care for us in our time of need. Be especially with those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your love can be apparent in all our lives. In particular, we pray for Beulah; Paula; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Diana; Marie; Bev and family; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; William; those who have been affected by COVID-19; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...
God, in your equitable mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God, you rescue us from trouble and you welcome us into your eternal kingdom to live with you and all the saints forever. Remind us always of this promise, that our actions might reflect the reality of our everlasting connection with you and all people of all time. God, in your equitable mercy, **hear our prayer**.

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trust in the redeeming salvation of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**.

PEACE

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

OFFERING PRAYER

Holy God, it is good for us to be back together. But we know and understand that even if we weren't, we would still be joined with you and each other through the gifts of your love and grace. May this food be a reminder of that connection, that wherever we may be, we might continue to live in community with you and all of your children, through the love of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

MEAL

DIALOGUE

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

PREFACE

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
that we should at all times and in all places
give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God,
through our Saviour Jesus Christ;
who welcomes us all into your love and joins us
with all the choirs of angels,
with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven,
that we can praise your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 190)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

O God, you save us and defend us. You give ear to our prayers and you help us and sustain our lives. We praise your name, for you rescue us and watch over us, and in due time you have sent to us Jesus, to be with us as one of us, teaching us the vast expanse of your love and grace, reaching us all to the ends of the earth.

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."

And after they ate, he took the 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."

So it is in this food before us that that we see God's equal regard for us all, displayed to us in this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

To you, O God, be all honour and glory, for your welcome for us all is great and merciful and full of the love of Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

Welcomed in God's kingdom 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 and eat, God loves us all.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 191)
Eat This Bread (#472)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, we are thankful to be back together in person where we can share this heavenly food. Be with us as we go from here, keeping ourselves safe and considerate for others who may not be as privileged as we are, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

Now may the God of sickness and health, bless you and keep you,
the God of order and liberties, shine on you and be gracious unto you,
the God of welcome and consideration, look upon you with favour, and give you peace.
Amen.

SENDING SONG: Light Dawns on a Weary World (#726)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, be gentle, honest, and merciful with those you meet.

Thanks be to God.

From sundaysandseasons.com.

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