



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

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**Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 5, 2021
ELW Holy Communion, Setting Eight**

James tells us to stop showing favoritism in the assembly, treating the rich visitor with more honor than the poor one. Jesus himself seems to show partiality in his first response to the Syrophenician woman in today's gospel. Was he testing her faith in saying Gentiles don't deserve the goods meant for God's children? Or was he speaking out of his human worldview, but transcended those limits when she took him by surprise with her reply? Either way, the story tells us that God shows no partiality. Everyone who brings a need to Jesus is received with equal honor as a child and heir.

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 are reminded of God's grace for us all, joining us together by the Spirit and welcoming us in love.

And in this gathering, we give thanks for the gift of baptism, which symbolizes for us the unity in the Spirit, the walls between us taken down, and the inclusive arms of God wrapping around each and every one of us as we are declared as God's own children. So if you have water in front you, dip your fingers into it. Allow the majesty and mystery of God's promises swirl around you. Feel God's anointing and face shining upon you. Know that you are welcomed and loved, whoever you are, wherever you are from, and exactly as you come.

So if you are willing, use the water to mark your forehead with a sign of the cross, as you belong to God as proven to us by the work on the cross by Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Amen. Thanks be to God.

GATHERING SONG: Beautiful Savior (#838)

GREETING

The humbling grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the eye-opening love of God, and the ground-breaking communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of love, you show your people how to be truly rich in faith, humbling us through your challenging truth. Grant us wisdom and discernment to continually see you working in this world, even when our hope runs thin. We pray this through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by the power of your Spirit. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 35:4-7a

A reading from Isaiah.

These verses are a word of hope to the exiles in Babylon. Isaiah 34 portrays God's vengeance on Edom, Israel's age-old enemy, which makes the path from Babylon to Zion safe for the exiles' return. The desert itself will flow with water to give drink to the returning exiles.

⁴Say to those who are of a fearful heart,

“Be strong, do not fear!

Here is your God.

He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.

He will come and save you.”

⁵Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

⁶then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,

and streams in the desert;
^{7a}the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 146

¹Hallelujah!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

²**I will praise the LORD as long as I live;**

I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

³Put not your trust in rulers,

in mortals in whom there is no help.

⁴**When they breathe their last, they return to earth,**

and in that day their thoughts perish.

⁵Happy are they who have the God of Jacob for their help,

whose hope is in the LORD their God;

⁶**who made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them;**

who keeps promises forever;

⁷who gives justice to those who are oppressed, and food to those who hunger.

The LORD sets the captive free.

⁸**The LORD opens the eyes of the blind; the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;**

the LORD loves the righteous.

⁹The LORD cares for the stranger;

the LORD sustains the orphan and widow, but frustrates the way of the wicked.

¹⁰**The LORD shall reign forever,**

your God, O Zion, throughout all generations. Hallelujah!

SECOND READING: James 2:1-17

A reading from James.

Faithful Christians do not show partiality to the rich and powerful of the world, especially at the expense of the poor and weak. Likewise, faith does not pay mere lip service to God's will.

Instead, a living Christian faith expresses itself in acts of compassion and mercy for those in need.

¹My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? ²For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, ³and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," ⁴have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? ⁶But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? ⁷Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

⁸You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ⁹But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become

accountable for all of it. ¹¹For the one who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹²So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. ¹³For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? ¹⁷So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 188)

GOSPEL: Mark 7:24-37

The holy gospel according to Mark.

Glory to you, O Lord.

In Mark's gospel, encounters with women usually signify turning points in Jesus' ministry. Here, a conversation with a Syrophenician woman marks the beginning of his mission to the Gentiles.

²⁴[Jesus] set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, ²⁵but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. ²⁶Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷He said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.” ²⁸But she answered him, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.” ²⁹Then he said to her, “For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.” ³⁰So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

³¹Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. ³²They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. ³³He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. ³⁴Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” ³⁵And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. ³⁷They were astounded beyond measure, saying, “He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Holy God, send your Spirit that comes to us in both strength and weakness, that we might be humbled to hear you speak into our lives and hearts, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

You know, I love myself a good action movie. Even more than a regular action movie, I love it when the movie has martial arts in it. And even more than a regular martial arts action movie, I really love me a martial arts action movie based on Marvel comics. As you might have guessed, I'm talking about Marvel's latest theatrical release, Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings, which opened up this past Friday (well, technically Thursday but ain't nobody got time to go on opening night). I watched it on Friday with our two sons, and I have to say, it was pretty awesome.

I'm not going to get into the story or anything here, as I'm sure only about 1% of you listening to this would care (that 1% being myself), but the big take away that I got from the movie was about the yin yang philosophy that you might have heard of. Basically it is about balance between light and dark, good and evil, right and wrong. The philosophy wasn't talked about specifically in the movie, but it was totally hinted at when the main character Shang-Chi realised that he doesn't always have to fight with his fists, but he can change it up and hold an open hand instead. This might seem weird as a punch does more damage than a slap, but there was a symbolism there in the correlation between the aggressiveness of a closed fist against the thoughtful welcome of an open palm. In that, in the two, there can be balance.

You might remember this gesture *palm over fist

It is a traditional East Asian greeting, symbolising that exact balance and total unity that Shang-Chi alludes to. It is a symbol of hospitality, honour, and humility, as apparently back in the day in China, people would walk around always ready and armed for a fight, so this symbol meant that your weapons are turned on yourself. It means that you're not here for a fight, but here in the name of trust, relationship, and peace.

This gesture and its meaning all play in really well with the deeper themes of balance and peace in the movie, but I also think it lends really well in our modern, non-kung-fu-driven lives, especially these days when handshakes are almost frowned upon. Also, I think it speaks really well to our gospel text for today, where we get one of the rare times that Jesus acts and speaks out of an aggression that we're really not all that comfortable with.

"It's not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs" is what Jesus says in response to a poor Gentile woman's request for healing for her daughter. The children that Jesus is talking about of course are the people of Israel, and the dogs that he mentions are basically everyone who are not of Israel, you know, like her. So Jesus calls this woman a dog for the sole reason that she wasn't born within the borders that surrounded the so-called "chosen people".

Yes, it is as racist as it sounds.

You might think, no it's not racist! It's just Jesus testing her. *No, it was racist.*

Or no, it's not racist! Jesus was just highlighting the mentality of the day. *Yes, he was, and the mentality was racist.*

Still, some say, no, it's not racist! Jesus was calling her a cute puppy and not a full blown dog. *Well, actually in those days for a Jewish person even cute puppy were seen as scavenging and filthy beasts and not welcome anywhere near the home so it's still racist.*

And we have a hard time accepting this.

We have a hard time thinking that Jesus could say something so horrible. We have a hard time thinking that Jesus would stoop so low. We have a hard time believing that Jesus could act out of such racism because in our minds, racism equals bad, and Jesus can't be bad, can he?

I hate to say, in this case, he is. Maybe not in his innate nature, but the culture from which he comes from and that he currently holds is. Maybe Jesus didn't intend to be insulting or offensive, but the idea of insider/outsider can only be that. Maybe Jesus didn't want to draw the line between the us and the them even deeper in the sand, so with this woman's help, he erases it.

And this paves the way for Jesus to continue erasing those lines, as he did for the woman's daughter, and the deaf man he healed, and further for all those who didn't belong in the "in" crowd and were outcast for a variety of reasons. Not saying that this woman completely changed the trajectory of Jesus' ministry, but she certainly helped. She helped him and continues to help all of us to see the folly of our own ways, our own perhaps passive aggression, our own denial that we too could be bad.

I mean think about it, how many times do we make excuses and justifications for our own racist remarks? I'm not free of it either. I cringe when I look at all the times that I was racially insensitive to my own heritage and to that of others, and the many times that I was being offensive in the name of "getting a laugh". How often do we draw lines in the sand between us and them because *they* aren't such and such enough, or from the right mindset as us, or didn't vote the way we did? How many times do we look at someone who sits on the opposite side of the fence from us and scoff at them, completely writing them off as even a person because clearly they are of a lesser species than us who are on our side of that fence? How many times do we judge others as a "dog" or some other kind of undesirable animal because of whatever kind of criteria they don't meet?

Or, to name the elephant in the room, how many of us would look down on someone because they, for whatever reason, did or did not get the COVID vaccination?

I know, it's not comfortable. We want to make excuses to exclude and justifications to judge and reasons to refuse others. But the fact of the matter is that God loves us all. God accepts us all. And God welcomes us all from wherever we hail, whoever we are, and whatever sins continue to plague us.

And in that welcome, God forgives. Us. Them. All.

That doesn't mean that we go and hate on everyone still because we know we'll be forgiven anyway. But it means that as we realise we are forgiven, maybe we will be able to see and accept that same forgiveness is extended to others by God as well. And perhaps, if we can see that, maybe we can do that as well.

I know, it isn't easy. And I know there are a lot of reasons to hate. But if the Chinese have taught us anything besides being able to produce really good looking preachers, is that aggression can be met with peace, and together they can bring about a humility that just might be able to bring us all together and unite us in God's Spirit, and show us how God saves us from our own evils and demons from within.

So maybe we can bring down our hate. Maybe we can level out the aggression. Maybe we can extend our welcome to those we have always thought to be unwelcomeable, and together we can work toward a common ground on which we can all see the gracious salvation of God, brought into light by the work of Jesus on the cross, allowing us all the joy of opened eyes and unblocked ears, giving us the ability to see and hear the promises of God that bring us into relationship and community as the body of Christ in the world.

We are living in very polarized times. It seems like the lines we draw and walls we build are getting thicker and taller. It all can seem so very hopeless. But I believe that God brings us balance in our lives and in the lives of others. I believe that God joins us together in spite of difference and shows us how all of us can indeed be welcomed. I believe that God's grace can cover us all, lifting us up in salvation, and loving us into new life.

So as we approach the end of the summer season and look forward to meeting to worship again in person, may we all join and balance our difference and love together, that we might humbly accept each other as fellow children of God, saved by grace and welcomed in love. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light (#815)

CREED

With all people fed by the gospel, 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 to compassionately care for our neighbours, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "in your steadfast mercy, O God," and you may respond with **hear our prayer**. In your steadfast mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

Lord of our praise, we sing to you with our whole being, for you are generous and gracious and you teach us your ways of everlasting love. Humble our hearts to be open to your truth and to accept all people as your beloved children. In your steadfast mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of our songs, we praise you for as long as we live. You have given us every good thing and you continue to guide us in our ministry and service. May our work in the world reflect your love and grace and may all people see your truth in our community life and action. 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 Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Penticton and their pastor Curtis Aguirre; Trinity Anglican + Lutheran Church in Port Alberni and their pastor Brenda Nestegaard Paul; and for the ministry of all the hospital chaplains in our Synod. In your steadfast mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of our lives, you have made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them, and your promises are forever. Strengthen us in our stewardship of this planet that you have entrusted to us, that we take the warnings in the weather changes seriously and act more responsibly for the sake of future generations. In your steadfast mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of justice, you reside with the oppressed, the hungry, and the captives and you lift us up in love. Open the eyes of all world leaders and politicians that the goal in their leadership shifts from power and greed to peace and goodwill. We also pray especially for those that we have sponsored to come to our country: Solyana Amanuel; and Maেকে Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; that their entry into our country would come soon. In your steadfast mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of all care, we know that you sustain the orphan and widow and bring healing to all who call upon your name. We offer our prayers for those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, as we together lean on your strength and support. Especially we pray for Diana; Marie; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Beulah; Bev and family; Paula; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; Charlotte; William; all those who have been negatively affected by COVID-19; and those whom we name aloud or quietly at this time...
In your steadfast mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of eternal reign, you live and remain steadfast in love and faith throughout the generations. Remind us of the connection you make with us and you and all the saints, that we see how we are all equally and wholly welcomed to live in your kingdom together forever as your children. In your steadfast mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

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

Amen.

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

OFFERING PRAYER

Holy God, we give you thanks for all that you give to us out of your generosity and the opportunity and means for us to give back to you. Bless the food we have before us and grant to us the knowledge of your promises and truth of inclusion and welcome, in the name of 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 in all places
give thanks and praise to you, O God,
through our Saviour Jesus Christ;
who teaches us humility and grace,
bringing us into community with you and each other.
And so, with all the choirs of angels,
with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven,
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 190)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

O Lord, we praise you for as long as we live, for our trust is in you and you help us who are in need. Even in death, you love us into life and recreate us as your beloved and forgiven children forever. You bring us justice, set us free, and lift us up. Your care for us sustains us, as you sent to us your son Jesus to be one of us and show us your eternal reign.

For on the night that he was betrayed, your son Jesus sat with his friends for a meal where he took the 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."

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."

It is in this food given to us that we know our welcome into God's kingdom, made possible by this mystery of our faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

To you, O God, be all honour and glory, for you are our righteousness and shield, humbling us before you saved by the power of Jesus, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

Welcomed as one into God's grace, 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 graciousness to us all.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 191)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, we give you thanks for feeding us, nourishing us, and granting upon us your gracious welcome as your people. Continue revealing to us the nature of this grace, that we be humbled and learn to live in love for all people, through your son Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

Our glorious God bless you and keep you, our generous God shine on you and welcome you, our gracious God look upon you with favour, and bring you peace.
Amen.

SENDING SONG: Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus (#802)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, be humbled by the Spirit.
Thanks be to God.