



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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All Saints Sunday

November 7, 2021

ELW Holy Communion, Setting Ten

Of all three years of the lectionary cycle, this year's All Saints readings have the most tears. Isaiah and Revelation look forward to the day when God will wipe away all tears; in John's gospel, Jesus weeps along with Mary and all the gathered mourners before he demonstrates his power over death. On All Saints Day we celebrate the victory won for all the faithful dead, but we grieve for our beloved dead as well, knowing that God honors our tears. We bring our grief to the table and find there a foretaste of Isaiah's feast to come.

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 hən̓q̓əmiṇəm̓ (Musqueam) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP AND REMEMBRANCE OF ALL SAINTS

We are gathered together both here in the space and online, in the presence of God our Sovereign through the power of God our Saviour, surrounded by God the Spirit and all God's saints, to remember, honour, and worship.

And as we are gathered we lift up the beloved saints who now reside only in our hearts. To remind us of their continued presence with us in our worship, we light candles for them, trusting in God's promise of life eternal, inspiring us in our faith and community.

Also in our remembering of the saints that we've lost in the past and will lose in the future, we dedicate this memorial garden put up in their honour. May its beauty symbolize for us the beauty of life, the beauty of relationship, and the beauty of God's grace bestowed on us all, welcoming us into God's kingdom and community with these very saints.

So as we sing our gathering song, may the candles we light and the garden we gaze upon be life giving to us as the love we share for God and all the saints be pleasing in God's sight.

Amen.

GATHERING HYMN: For All the Saints (#422)

GREETING

The eternal grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the undying love of God, and the saintly fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Glorious God, as we are gathered together with all the saints of every time and place, may your name be honoured and praised. As you have revealed your mercy and might to your people in every age, may we see the mystery of your life-giving grace and the love that even death cannot destroy, through Jesus our risen Saviour and Lord.

Amen.

WORD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 25:6-9

A reading from Isaiah.

Isaiah sees a vision of the end of days, when God will gather all people on God's holy mountain and will prepare for them a rich feast. At this banquet God will wipe the tears from all eyes. And there will be no more sorrow, for God will destroy death itself.

⁶On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

⁷And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;

⁸he will swallow up death forever.

Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.

⁹It will be said on that day,
Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.
This is the LORD for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 24

¹The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it,
the world and those who dwell therein.

²**For the LORD has founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the rivers.**

³Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD,
and who may stand in God's holy place?

⁴**Those of innocent hands and purity of heart,
who do not swear on God's being, nor do they pledge by what is false.**

⁵They shall receive blessing from the LORD
and righteousness from the God of their salvation.

⁶**Such is the generation of those who seek you, O LORD,
of those who seek your face, O God of Jacob.**

⁷Lift up your heads, O gates; and be lifted up, O everlasting doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

⁸**Who is this King of glory?
The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle!**

⁹Lift up your heads, O gates; and be lifted up, O everlasting doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

¹⁰**Who is this King of glory?
Truly, the LORD of hosts is the King of glory.**

SECOND READING: Revelation 21:1-6a

A reading from Revelation.

Here is a vision of the new heaven and new earth in which God resides fully with God's people so that mourning, despair, and pain have been eradicated. These renewing words from the God who spans all of time are trustworthy and true.

¹I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

"See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

⁴he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.”

⁵And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ^{6a}Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.”

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 205)

GOSPEL: John 11:32-44

The holy gospel according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Through the raising of Lazarus, Jesus offers the world a vision of the life to come, when death and weeping will be no more.

³²When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

³⁴He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵Jesus began to weep. ³⁶So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” ³⁷But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

³⁸Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Almighty God, your Word is life and your promises are trustworthy and true. By the power of your Spirit, write your Word upon our hearts, that we might see your new creation in us, through Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

“Unbind him, and let him go.”

I’m hoping that this line sounds familiar, as you just heard it read to you like 30 seconds ago. It was of course Jesus’ words to the likely gaped-mouthed bystanders watching formerly deceased Lazarus walking out of his own tomb.

“Unbind him, and let him go.”

A strange command, if you think about it. However, the whole situation was kind of strange. Not every day you see your friend come back from the dead.

“Unbind him, and let him go.”

So now you might be wondering one of two things. First is, “why does he keep repeating that line?”

And second, “what is the significance of Jesus saying this?”

We might be pretty familiar with this story out of John’s gospel, the raising of Lazarus. It’s a bit pared down today for All Saints, but we might know the general outline: Jesus gets word that his friend Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha, is on his deathbed. But instead of going over right away, Jesus inexplicably waits a few days before heading over there, which proved to be too long as Lazarus had already died by the time Jesus arrived. The sisters of course are torn up but don’t exactly blame Jesus, but do mention how he should have gotten there sooner. And Jesus is moved by emotion and weeps. And then after telling the people to open up the tomb Jesus calls Lazarus to come out. And as we know and much to the surprise of everyone present, Lazarus actually does. Then Jesus tells them to *unbind him, and let him go*.

And for some reason as I read this story this time around, my eyes landed on that line. I mean, the whole “unbind him” part makes sense, as the text was pretty clear that Lazarus was wrapped in strips of cloth from head to toe, mummy style. But let him go? Let him go from what?

Was Lazarus facing some sort of oppression? Other than death that is, as Jesus had already freed him from that. But was there something that was holding Lazarus back from being able to go? Again, aside from death. Was there something keeping Lazarus from being free?

I also find it interesting that Jesus was telling the people to unbind Lazarus and let him go. It was Jesus who raised him from the dead, after all, why can’t he unbind him himself? The people already warned Jesus that the body wasn’t going to be smelling all roses, but Jesus did what Jesus did anyway. And why can’t Jesus be the one to let him go? He already resurrected him, allowing him to go should be easy, right?

Well, this is what I’m wondering... I wonder if what Lazarus needed to be let go from belonged to the people. Again, we can see that it doesn’t belong to Jesus, as Jesus already freed Lazarus from death. So then perhaps whatever it is that is still holding Lazarus back has its onus on the people. The people with their narrow minds and set paradigms. The people with preconceived notions and predetermined beliefs. The people whom resuscitation from the dead just didn’t sit well with. Let him go.

And so I wonder in our lives, is there something that is keeping us from being free? Is there something that is holding us back from doing the thing or saying the stuff or being at the place? Is there something or *someone* who is preventing us from feeling free?

I think back to All Saints Day of 2017. I had a number of All Saints Day services under my belt by that point, and our tradition at Grace was to have the congregation light candles for the saints that we’ve loved and lost. And for the sake of not double lighting for some people, I as presider

would light all the candles of those who have died who were connected to the congregation, unless immediate family were present, of course. Normally I would have about 4-5 candles to light but this year, that year of 2017 was different. We still had 4-5 candles for me to light, but one of them was for my dad, who we lost in July of that year.

Something you should know about my dad and me, we never had a good relationship. Our personalities clashed and aside from last name and mailing address for the first 20 some odd years of my life, we didn't have much in common. In fact, if anything I'd say that our relationship was dysfunctional at best. But still, losing him was hard. Sitting with him in the hospital, knowing the inevitable was coming sooner than later, holding his hand for probably the first time ever. It was a tough situation to be in.

Because after he died, I wasn't sure what I was feeling. But I was different. I was angrier. I was more distant from my wife and kids. I was more in denial of how much this man was connected to me even though we barely ever spoke. I didn't want to feel sad that he was dead, but I did. I didn't want to regret how I treated him and regarded him when he was alive, but I did. I didn't want to shed any tears for him, but I did.

"Unbind him, and let him go."

The words of Jesus today suddenly hit different. I hear them as a warning that my harbouring of these hard feelings toward my dad is affecting me in adverse ways. I hear Jesus encouraging me to unbind the preconceptions and narrow understanding that I had of my dad as this uncaring and detached father who didn't really want any part in my life. I hear Jesus empowering me to let go of the hurt, the anger, the regret .

Easier said than done, Jesus. The hurts and pain that we carry can be so deep that we can't just simply extract them and we'll be healed. Our traumas of past have impacted us so greatly that being told to just "let go" isn't exactly helpful. Our complicated histories have essentially written the stories of our lives and act as the foundation of our identities so removing them really isn't all that easy.

But maybe they would be easier if we saw how we are healed in them. This isn't to excuse those who have caused us hurt and pain but it is to say that those hurts and pains are seen, recognised, and mended by God. This isn't to belittle the traumas of our pasts but it is to say that in those traumas and difficult situations of our lives Jesus is present with us, feeling what we feel and weeping as we weep. This isn't to say that we are now impervious to the deep dark pits of the hardships of life, but it is to say that when we find ourselves in those pits and holes, God sees us, reaches out to us, and calls us by name to come forth.

Come forth into life. Come forth into freedom. Come forth to be unbound and let go.

For God is doing a new thing in the world and in our lives, not wiping away the hardships but wiping away the tears. Not undoing death but undoing the finality of death. Not eliminating the hurts and sorrows that we inevitably will face, but rolling away the stone that keeps us locked up in them.

You see, my friends, the healing of God isn't about just putting a Band-Aid on the wound and pretending that it never happened. The grace of God isn't about giving us everything we want

or doing things how we think they should be done. The love of God isn't about preventing bad things from ever happening to us. But the healing grace and love of God is about welcoming us into relationship with God and all the saints, revealing to us the eternal connection we have with the one body of Christ, and guiding us by the Spirit into caring and compassionate community and inviting us to live the life that truly is life.

So in Jesus' call for those present at Lazarus' tomb and to us to let them go is more of an encouraging promise than it is a command. It is a promise that tells us we will have the strength. It is a promise that we will have the healing. It is a promise that we will have hope, in that God continues to do that new thing in and around our lives, full of grace and peace and reminding us of all joy, through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord.

On this All Saints Sunday, may we remember with fondness the saints of the past, connect deeply with the saints of the present, and look ahead with hope to the saints of the future, that we can truly know and feel the unbound freedom from sin and all that oppresses us, in the name of God Sovereign, Saviour, and Spirit. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: By All Your Saints (#421)

CREED

With all the saints living and non, let us confess the Christian faith 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 eternal community and worship, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with "O God, King of glory," and you all may respond with **hear our prayer**. O God, King of glory, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, we know that the earth and all that is in it belong to you, and that we reside in your loving and steadfast hand. Remind us always of your promise of eternal life, that we be freed and liberated from all fear and shame as look to you, our sanctuary. O God, King of glory, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you welcome us to ascend to your holy place to reside with you and all the saints in your eternal kingdom. Humble us in our service to you and others, and may we never forget the gospel that we proclaim. We pray especially for our neighbouring faith communities; our partner Anglican Church of Canada; our bishop Greg, assistant to the bishop and bishop elect Kathy, and national bishop Susan; and our companion congregations of the BC Synod. In particular, we pray for Lutheran Church of the Cross in Victoria and their pastors Lyle McKenzie and Lyndon Sayers; and for Good Shepherd Lutheran Church also in Victoria and the pastors and leaders that serve their ministry. O God, King of glory, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, your love is seen and felt in the lands, seas, and rivers and we praise you for all that you have made. Strengthen our stewardship of this planet that you have entrusted to us, and may we act with responsibility and care as we consider what we are leaving behind for the generations. O God, King of glory, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, the nations of the world are yours and may the doors to our hearts be opened for you as king. We remember in prayer all places that face political turmoil and violence, and humbly ask that your righteousness and salvation be seen and break through the evil. We pray especially for those that we've sponsored to come into our country: Solyana Amanuel; and Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; that their journey here can begin soon. O God, King of glory, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, we lean on your strength and might and in our weakness we find sanctuary in you. Be with all among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, and bring to us all the healing of your eternal love. We pray especially for Beulah; Bev and family; Marie; Diana; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Paula; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; Charlotte; William; all those who have been affected by COVID-19; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time... O God, King of glory, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord of hosts, your love is everlasting and you lift up our hearts in community with you and all the saints. In our remembrance of all whom we've loved and lost, may we be encouraged in our faith and proclamation of your gospel through our lives and relationships. O God, King of glory, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your eternal love shown to us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

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.

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

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 reveals to us your truth of gracious forgiveness and everlasting life, that we might see how we are joined together with you and all the saints of all times and places as the one body of Christ.

As it was on the night that he was betrayed that Jesus sat with his friends for a meal, 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, 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 by this food that we get a glimpse of God's providence and our connectedness to each other, 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 for all that you do and give, through Jesus Christ, our risen Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered together with each other and all the saints, 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 that God loves us all.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 208)
United at the Table (#498)
Eat This Bread (#472)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

O God, again you show us your providence by giving us the nourishment of your Word embodied in the body and blood of Jesus. May our faith be evident in our lives that our connection to you and all the saints always be on the forefront of our very identities, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

May the Lord our God,
the Alpha and Omega,
the first and the last,
the beginning and end,
bless you with abundant grace, now and always.
Amen.

SENDING HYMN: Soon and Very Soon (#439)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, unbound and set free.
Thanks be to God.

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