



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

7283 Nelson Avenue, Burnaby, BC V5J 4C2

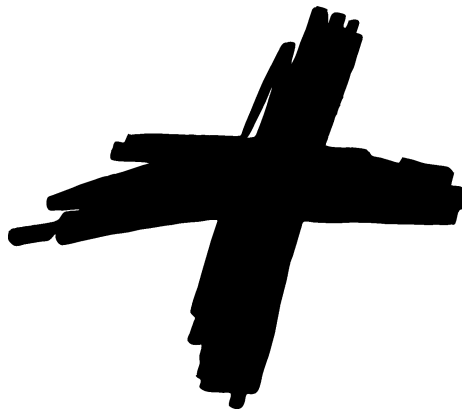
Phone / fax: 604-433-1515

Website: www.graceburnaby.com

Email: office@graceburnaby.com

pastor@graceburnaby.com

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Ash Wednesday

March 2, 2022

On Ash Wednesday we begin our forty-day journey toward Easter with a day of fasting and repentance. Marking our foreheads with dust, we acknowledge that we die and return to the earth. At the same time, the dust traces the life-giving cross indelibly marked on our foreheads at baptism. While we journey through Lent to return to God, we have already been reconciled to God through Christ. We humbly pray for God to make our hearts clean while we rejoice that “now is the day of salvation.” Returning to our baptismal call, we more intentionally bear the fruits of mercy and justice in the world.

A warm welcome back to those who are here worshipping with us in-person and to those on-line! 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 hən̓q̓əmiñəm̓ (Musqueam) and Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

GATHERING

KYRIE (p. 203) verse 1

PSALM 51:1–8

- ¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.
- ²Wash me through and through from my wickedness,
and cleanse me from my sin.
- ³For I know my offenses,
and my sin is ever before me.
- ⁴Against you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are justified when you speak and right in your judgment.
- ⁵Indeed, I was born steeped in wickedness,
a sinner from my mother's womb.
- ⁶Indeed, you delight in truth deep within me,
and would have me know wisdom deep within.
- ⁷Remove my sins with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be purer than snow.
- ⁸Let me hear joy and gladness;
that the body you have broken may rejoice.

KYRIE (p. 203) verse 2

PSALM 51:9–17

- ⁹Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my wickedness.
- ¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
- ¹¹Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
- ¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.
- ¹³Let me teach your ways to offenders,
and sinners shall be restored to you.
- ¹⁴Rescue me from bloodshed, O God of my salvation,
and my tongue shall sing of your righteousness.
- ¹⁵O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.
- ¹⁶For you take no delight in sacrifice, or I would give it.
You are not pleased with burnt offering.
- ¹⁷The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit;
a troubled and broken heart, O God, you will not despise.

KYRIE (p. 203) verse 3

GREETING (p. 251)

The mercy of God,
The steadfast love of Christ,

And the great compassion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, through love you have made us, and for love you call us to repentance. Grant to us the strength in your compassion and forgiveness as we move to mend our sinful ways. Restore to us the joy of your salvation; give us your Holy Spirit that we may serve you with willing hearts, bearing witness to your abundant mercy and your life-changing grace in all the world; through Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Because of the coming Day of the LORD, the prophet Joel calls the people to a community lament. The repentant community reminds God of his gracious character and asks God to spare the people, lest the nations doubt God's power to save.

¹Blow the trumpet in Zion;
 sound the alarm on my holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
 for the day of the LORD is coming, it is near—
²a day of darkness and gloom,
 a day of clouds and thick darkness!
Like blackness spread upon the mountains
 a great and powerful army comes;
their like has never been from of old,
 nor will be again after them
 in ages to come.
¹²Yet even now, says the LORD,
 return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
¹³rend your hearts and not your clothing.
Return to the LORD, your God,
 for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
 and relents from punishing.
¹⁴Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,
 and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain offering and a drink offering
 for the LORD, your God?
¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Zion;
 sanctify a fast;
call a solemn assembly;
¹⁶gather the people.
Sanctify the congregation;
 assemble the aged;
gather the children,
 even infants at the breast.

Let the bridegroom leave his room,
and the bride her canopy.
¹⁷Between the vestibule and the altar
let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep.
Let them say, "Spare your people, O LORD,
and do not make your heritage a mockery,
a byword among the nations.
Why should it be said among the peoples,
'Where is their God?'"

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING: 2 Corinthians 5:20b--6:10

The ministry of the gospel endures many challenges and hardships. Through this ministry, God's reconciling activity in the death of Christ reaches into the depths of our lives to bring us into a right relationship with God. In this way, God accepts us into the reality of divine salvation.

^{20b}We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{6:1}As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain.

²For he says,

"At an acceptable time I have listened to you,
and on a day of salvation I have helped you."

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! ³We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 142)

GOSPEL: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus commends almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, but emphasizes that spiritual devotion must not be done for show.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹"Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

²“So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁶“And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

O Lord, by your Spirit open to us the Words of Life, a spring of water that shall never fail, through Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

“Have the day that you deserve.” I’ve been hearing that phrase a lot lately. Not being said by or to me, mind you, but by some frustrated folk to other folk who quite frankly have disillusioned them with their attitudes and closed mindedness and selfishness. And as you can imagine, that is happening a lot these days with all the divisiveness that is going on. So this phrase is used as a sort of passive-aggressive way of wishing someone harm without actually saying that you wish them harm. By offering someone the day that they deserve means that they probably don’t deserve a good day, and the hope is that something would happen that would somehow open their eyes to their follies and setbacks, at least the ones they have in our opinion. I have to admit though, it does sound a lot better than “drop dead” or “if I never see you again it’ll be too soon” or even “go to H-E-double hockey sticks”.

But in all seriousness, I have been hearing this phrase a lot lately because as I said, the world has been pretty divided. I know, it has always been divided, probably since the first signs of sentient life, but with the rise of social media essentially being this global platform for pretty much anyone with access to the internet to voice their opinions however misguided or not, the divisions have become so much more clear. It was already clear how patriotic people could be when it came to sports and them cheering for their home team for no reason other than it being their home team, but in recent years with the pandemic, politics, and even your main operating system of choice on your devices, people really seem to be at odds with each other as no one could agree on anything. Not even to disagree.

So when did things get so polarized? When did the world start to think in such black and white terms? When did we start defining ourselves by our opinions, our allegiances, and even our faith, and then using those self-imposed labels to ostracize others who don’t fall in our same categories? Well again, maybe always. But just from my perspective, people seem angrier now. People seem more hurt and broken. People seem more like they should perhaps maybe get the day that they deserve. And maybe that is just what is fair.

You know, in a funny sort of way, it kind of sounds like Jesus is telling people to have the day that they deserve in these Ash Wednesday texts. These are the same texts we get for every Ash Wednesday, almost like the lectionary writers don't expect that we would get the same people show up year after year. But hey, we sure showed them, huh? Jesus' instruction to his disciples in this passage, about proper fasting and alms giving, seems to allude to us getting what we deserve because of our strict and disciplined observance of how things should be done or lack thereof.

"Beware," Jesus says, "for then you have no *reward*". "Don't be like the hypocrites... they have received their *reward*." "Do this and that in secret, because God who sees in secret will *reward* you." Reward, reward, reward. Interesting language that is chosen here, I think if it were up to us, we would use something like "consequence" or "effect" or maybe even "punishment". At least, those are the words we would use for those hypocrites and the unrighteous and those that we just don't like, for ourselves we'd probably use "reward" quite easily.

But what is Jesus talking about here anyway? What is the lesson? What is this elusive reward?

Off the bat, we'd say it's heaven, right? We do good and we'll get to go to heaven. If we don't do good, then the reward changes to something a lot less pleasant. Isn't that what makes most sense in the common understanding of our faith? Isn't that sort of the textbook Sunday School answer? Isn't that what we'd like to believe because we want to know that all our hard work and efforts were worth it? I mean, we're not doing all this Christianity stuff for nothing, are we? Shouldn't we get the afterlife that we deserve?

That's the thing though, do we really want what we deserve? I mean really really deserve? I know, some of you might be thinking that you aren't *that* bad and most of our lives can be justified by momentary lapses in judgement, or misunderstandings, or somehow it just wasn't our fault... "the devil made us do it." I mean we can't really be held responsible and punished for those, can we?

I think most of us can agree that we actually can. While right off the bat we might think that we're good enough, but after a bit of digging and soul searching we find that no... we actually aren't. We can be so selfish. We can be very manipulative. We have a greater capacity for evil than we ever could imagine or admit. And that is a very sobering thought.

But it takes this kind of self-reflection and admission to see how sinful we actually are. It takes a certain amount of revelation of shame and guilt to see just how much we are in need of a Saviour. And it takes a great deal of humility to understand that we are completely and totally forgiven.

We are, you know. By God's love we are joined together with all the saints of all times and places. By God's grace we made to be perfect. By God's mercy we aren't given the day that we deserve, but we are given so much more beyond anything we could ever earn or imagine.

And so this brings me to today, Ash Wednesday, the solemnness of the day, the nature of the season, the contriteness of heart that is asked of us. This day that we are reminded of our mortality and limited time on this planet, this season that reminds us of our need of forgiveness and strength, this time that lands in the church calendar in a very specific place... right before the resurrection of Easter.

See we are very mortal. We are very limited. And we are very sinful. But the joy in this day and in this season is that while our lives are fleeting, while we might see that we don't deserve all that much, while we are told that we are dust and to dust we shall return... we are given life. We are shown love. We are welcomed to bask in God's presence, full of joy and community and above all, God's grace that has welcomed us there in the first place.

The good news is that this invitation is offered to all: all hypocrites, all who openly think they are better than the rest, all who have sin, and reminds us all of when it comes down to the nitty gritty, we are all the same carbon based life forms that came from the same place and will return to the same place. What really matters then is what we do with this information, and how it affects us and the way we live our short and limited lives. Not to earn our place or to gain some kind of reward, but as a response to this immeasurable grace that has first been given to us.

So when we pray, it isn't to those who are judging us, but it is to the God who already declared us beloved. When we give generously, it isn't for the approval of others or for the tax receipt, but it is to reflect God's generosity given to us. And when we live humbly and with discipline, whether that be in the form of a fast or something else, it isn't to show the world how spiritual or devout we are, but it is to remind ourselves of where our true strength, our true identities, our true selves reside, in the great and wide arms of the living (and loving) God who created the universe.

So in a few moments we all will be marked with a sign of the cross, not to set us apart in any way, those with ash in this space and those with no ash in your homes, but to remind us all of how we are equally sinners, equally saved, equally getting so much more than what we deserve.

As we journey together through this season of Lent, may we be able to tear down the walls that divide us, understand the anger and frustration that separate us, and humbly accept the love and grace that join us together. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY

Just As I Am, without One Plea (#592)

INVITATION TO LENT

Friends in Christ, today with the whole church we enter the time of remembering Jesus' passover from death to life, and our life in Christ is renewed.

We begin this holy season of reflection and repentance by acknowledging our dire sin and need for God's mercy and salvation. We are indeed created to joyfully and lovingly live in communion with God, each other, and all of creation. But our sinful nature separates us from that truth, and thus cannot fully enjoy the life our creator intended.

As disciples of Christ, we are called to a discipline that contends against evil and resists whatever leads us away from loving God and neighbor. I invite you, therefore, to the discipline of Lent—self-examination and repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving and works of love—strengthened by the gifts of word and sacrament. Let us continue our journey through these forty days to the great Three Days of Jesus' death and resurrection.

CONFESSION OF SIN

Let us reflect on and repent from our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Most holy and merciful God,
we confess to you and to one another,
and before the whole company of heaven,
that we have sinned by our fault,
by our own fault,
by our own most grievous fault,
in thought, word, and deed,

by what we have done and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven others as we have been forgiven. We confess this as sin.

Have mercy on us, O God.

We have shut our ears to your call to serve as Christ served us. We have not been true to the leading of your gracious mind and heart. We have grieved your Holy Spirit. We confess this as sin.

Have mercy on us, O God.

We have been unfaithfulness, prideful, envious, hypocritical, and apathetic throughout all areas of our lives. We confess this as sin.

Have mercy on us, O God.

We have been self-indulgent in our appetites and ways, and we have exploited the weaknesses of other people for our own gain. We confess this as sin.

Have mercy on us, O God.

We have been negligent in prayer and worship, and we fail to faithfully share the love and truth you have put in us. We confess this as sin.

Have mercy on us, O God.

We have neglected the human need and suffering in front of us and around the world, and have been indifferent to many forms of injustice and cruelty. We confess this as sin.

Have mercy on us, O God.

We have made false judgments and had uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors, and held prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us. We confess this as sin.

Have mercy on us, O God.

We have wasted much and polluted your creation, and have lacked concern for those who come after us. We confess this as sin.

Have mercy on us, O God.

Restore us, O God, and let your anger depart from us.

Hear us, O God, for your mercy is great.

IMPOSITION OF ASHES

Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth.

May these ashes be a sign of our mortality and penitence, reminding us that through the symbol of the cross of Christ we are granted life eternally with you; through the same Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord.

Amen.

HYMN: Ubi caritas et amor (#642)

Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us all our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life.

Amen.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Merciful God, accompany our journey through these forty days of this season of Lent. Renew us by your love and grace, that we may faithfully act as your hands and feet in the world: providing for the needy, praying for the oppressed, and above all, proclaiming the greatness of the equity found in your kingdom through the life and ministry of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER (p. 112)

Gathered into one equal body 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.**

SENDING

BLESSING

May the God of reconciliation bless you, the grace of our Lord Jesus keep you, and the power of the Holy Spirit strengthen you to love and to be loved, this day and always.

Amen.

SENDING HYMN

Take My Life, That I May Be (#685) verses 1, 2, 5, 6

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, be reconciled to God and to each other.

Thanks be to God.