



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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Third Sunday in Lent

March 20, 2022

ELW Holy Communion, Setting Three

The warnings are plentiful and blunt on the third Sunday in Lent. Cut it out or get cut down! The warnings are accompanied by God's invitation to attentiveness: "Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live." The landowner's ultimatum is forestalled by the gardener's readiness to till the ground one more year. That is good news for all of us. Thanks be to God!

A warm welcome 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

CALL TO WORSHIP (Paraphrase of Psalm 63:1-8)

We gather together in person and online, out of the dry weariness of life to worship our God for whom we eagerly seek and our soul thirsts, to gaze upon God in God's holy place, beholding God's power and glory. For God's steadfast love is better than life itself and we shall praise and bless God with hands lifted up, all our days through. So we worship this day, praise God with joyful lips, remember and meditate on all that God has done as God continues to help us and cover us with wings of love and grace, holding us fast as God's beloved children.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

GATHERING SONG: I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say (#332)

GREETING

The protecting grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the steadfast love of God, and the satisfying communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Holy God you surround us with your glory and power, and we lift up our hands and call on your name. We are your people, thirsty for the living water you alone can give. You have been and continue to be our helper, giving us springs that gush up to eternal life. And so we cling to you, singing praises with joyful lips all days of our lives, through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord.

Amen.

WORD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 55:1-9

A reading from Isaiah.

To those who have experienced long years in exile, the return to their homeland is a celebration of abundant life. God calls them into an everlasting covenant of love. Those who return to God will enjoy new life and forgiveness, because God's ways are not our ways.

¹Ho, everyone who thirsts,

come to the waters;

and you that have no money,

come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk

without money and without price.

²Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,

and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,

and delight yourselves in rich food.

³Incline your ear, and come to me;

listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant,

my steadfast, sure love for David.

⁴See, I made him a witness to the peoples,

a leader and commander for the peoples.

⁵See, you shall call nations that you do not know,

and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

⁶Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;

⁷let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;

let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.

⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

A reading from 1 Corinthians.

Paul uses images from Hebrew Scriptures and prophecy to speak the truth of Jesus Christ: He is our rock, our water, our food, and our drink. Christ is the living sign of God's faithfulness.

¹I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ²and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. ⁵Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

⁶Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. ⁷Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play." ⁸We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. ¹⁰And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹²So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. ¹³No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 142)

GOSPEL: Luke 13:1-9

The holy gospel according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Asked about current tragic events, Jesus turns a lesson about whether suffering is deserved into a hard call to obedience. He then tells a parable that holds out hope that the timeline for ultimate judgment will be tempered by patience.

¹At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.²[Jesus] asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?”³No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.⁴Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”

⁶Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none.⁷So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’⁸He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it.⁹If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

The gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Sermon for Lent 3 | March 20, 2022

Luke 13:1-9

O God we seek your face in your Word and in this world, that by your Spirit we might all be satisfied by the rich feast of your love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

So much to our daughter’s delight, the Pixar movie “Turning Red” was finally released last weekend on Disney+. Seriously, she was asking to watch it since the first trailer dropped like last summer sometime and we never said that she couldn’t watch it, but we told her that she had to wait for it to come out just like everyone else. Still, that didn’t stop her from asking and asking and begging sometimes even for some strange reason. It’s like she doesn’t get how movie release dates work.

Anyway, if you haven’t heard of the movie before, this was the trailer that got her all hyped up about it. (you can click [here](#) for the video on YouTube)

I know right, it’s just basically a Pixar version of the Incredible Hulk.

But after watching it, I found that this story was a bit more complex than the Hulk. I mean, yeah, the mostly mild mannered main character does change into a giant rage monster when her emotions get out of control, but it was more of a coming of age story, where the main protagonist, Meilin Lee I think her name was, or Mei Mei for short at least, learns that her family has this thing where all the women turn into a red panda once they hit their puberty years. She finds this out when she turns into a red panda herself, much to her surprise. As if puberty isn’t hard enough as it is, imagine being unable to control when you look human or like a fluffy red animal.

This isn't something that Mei Mei asked for, not something she wanted, and it definitely wasn't something she expected as her parents were completely quiet about it, thinking that they had a few years yet before she went through that transformation.

But what struck me about the movie though was just how difficult life can be, and how those around us may tend to brush it off. Not in a malicious way, mind you, but because they have their own things to deal with themselves. I know, none of us (that I know of at least) turn into a giant red panda when we are overrun by our emotions, but we are often overrun nonetheless. We often face sorrow and pain and perhaps it feels like we are changed because of it. We often run up against the realities of life where our backs feel up against the wall and we might feel like we're about to explode out of our own skin in frustration and anger and maybe even shake our fists in God's general direction and ask why.

Why us? What did we do to deserve this? How could such things happen the way they do?

And even though we might feel bad for asking such questions, like we have little faith or trust in God's good graces, I wouldn't blame any of us for doing so, not now, not ever, and especially not during this very long pandemic that we just went through. It's natural to wonder like this. It's normal to question these things. It's not unusual to sometimes be angry and frustrated with the way things are.

I mean, that's what happened in our gospel lesson for today, when Jesus was told about an untimely end to some Galileans by Pilate. He then addresses the questions they must have had about why, why did these folk meet such a fate? And those others who died from some engineering disaster, why did that happen? And to answer those questions, Jesus responds with a very confusing parable.

I say it's confusing because we aren't told exactly what it means. I've heard people say that we're the fig-less fig tree that couldn't produce figs if our life figgin' depended on it. And that God is the owner of the fig-less fig tree that expected some figs. And Jesus is the gardener who saves the fig-less fig tree from facing a fig-less death. Maybe you've heard the same. And sure, that sounds fine and dandy, but is that really what this parable is saying?

It might be, but upon some pondering I have some issues with the story itself. Looking closer at the whole thing, it becomes clear that both the owner of the tree and the gardener have no idea how fig trees work. Mind you, neither do I, really, but after some research and digging around (see what I did there?), I found that fig trees produce the most fruit when you leave it alone and allow it to do its fig business in peace. It doesn't need you to care for it or help it along, in fact from what I read that could actually be detrimental to its development. So for the gardener to suggest that he can save the tree by digging around and fertilizing it with cow poop just shows us how he doesn't know what he's doing. Also, it takes time for fig trees to grow and mature and start producing fruit after it's been planted, likely longer than the three years the owner gave it. So for him to come every year for just three years and be that frustrated at no fruit, well he's just asking too much of the poor tree that just doesn't work that way. So with this in mind, the point of the story seems to change a bit, the focus seems to shift off the tree and onto the gardener.

Because as bad as the gardener is at gardening, one thing is for sure, he cares a whole figgin lot about this fig-less fig tree that is seen as worthless. The chips are stacked up against it, but the

gardener puts his perhaps not-so-good reputation on the line to protect this tree, even when he doesn't know how. The world doesn't believe in the usefulness and goodness of this tree, but the gardener chooses to do so, chooses to see it, chooses to love in spite of all the reasons not to. The tree didn't choose this fig life, and it didn't choose to be fig less, but the gardener chooses to see its worth and stand between it and its owner and plead for its life by caring for it the best he can.

We don't know if it worked. We don't know if the tree was actually saved. We don't know how the following year's crop did. But we do know that the tree was cared for, watched over, and loved.

And so I think Jesus is telling the people here wondering who sinned and why did this happen, to not care so much about where to cast the blame, but care for those left behind mourning their loss. Jesus is saying who cares if the eighteen killed from a falling tower were worse offenders, people were hurt and damage was done that needs to be dealt with. Who cares why bad things happen to good people or to anyone for that matter, the fact is that bad things are happening and we are here to battle it with good, comfort each other with grace, and love each other in spite of it all.

In the movie *Turning Red*, while Mei Mei was going through all these changes in her body and in her life, it was her friends that she leaned on for strength and comfort. While she continued to be the dutiful daughter that she was raised to be, she needed to see the love that she has because she is who she is, not because she can do what she can do. While her life seemed to have flipped completely upside down by circumstances absolutely out of her control, she never lost her value and worth from her friends, her family, and the greater community to which she belonged.

This isn't to belittle the things that are going on around the world, this isn't to demean the hurt and pain that we face day in and day out, this isn't to pretend that life doesn't sometimes get too difficult for us to handle. But it is to say that when we see someone hurting we needn't have to find out if they deserved it or not to sit with them through the pain. It is to say that if we notice injustice we don't have to dissect the reasons for it to speak up against what is wrong. It is to say that when we ourselves are at a loss and in need, we don't need to be shy about asking for help because before we know it, we might be surrounded by a cloud of support and care, a community upon which we can depend and rely, and a God who declares us all as beloved and worth it.

As we move through this season of Lent, a season of scarcity and depravity, may we lean on God's strength and the strength of our community, knowing that while life is difficult, it is easier when we walk through it together. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery (#334)

CREED

With all those lovingly included under the shadow of God's wings, 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 the love and care of our God, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "God, in your loving mercy," and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. God, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you are our God and eagerly we seek your face. Remind us always of your presence in our lives, that we might rely on your strength and wisdom to guide us along right paths. God, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, our souls thirst for you as you lead us out of these dry and weary lands of the hardships and difficulties of life. Strengthen our faith that we might rely on you and proclaim your goodness to all the world. We pray especially for our neighbouring faith communities; our partner Anglican Church of Canada; our bishop Kathy and national bishop Susan; and our companion congregations of the BC Synod. In particular, we pray for St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Prince Rupert and their pastor Diana Edis; and Our Saviour Lutheran Church in Richmond and their pastor Christoph Reiners. God, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, by your power and glory you have created a world full of beauty for us to live in and upon which we can gaze and see your face. Help us in our care for all that you have entrusted to us, that this planet can continue to be our home for the generations to come. God, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, your steadfast love is better than life itself, and with it we are content as with the richest of foods, yet our thirst for power often gets the better of us. Be with all areas of the world that are facing violence, political turmoil, or general unrest and conflict, that all citizens of this planet might work together to bring out peace. We pray especially for Ukraine, that the war there ends soon; and for those that we've sponsored to come into our country and away from that kind of oppression: Solyana Amanuel; and Maekele Kiflu, Selam Hailie, and their children. God, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, we praise you with joyful lips as we remember and meditate on your goodness and grace and healing. Be with all among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, and bring us all your steadfast love. We pray especially for Paula; Diana; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bev and

family; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; Charlotte; William; Jenny; Chris; Mr. Cifuentes; Min; Katherine and family; Jessica; 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 loving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you have always been our helper and our whole being clings to you as you hold us fast in your arms of love, welcoming us under the shadow of your wings with all the saints of all times and places. May we hold onto this promise of eternity with you, that it strengthen us in our faith today and always. God, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your steadfast love, shown to us by Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

MEAL

DIALOGUE (p. 144)

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, to at all times and places give thanks and praise to you, O God, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who comes to us to show us your steadfast love and care even through the difficult times in life.

For on the night that he was betrayed, our Saviour 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 common cup, gave thanks, and gave that to them to drink from 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 bread and cup that we see the strength in your love and promises, emboldening us for life even as we declare this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

For to you, O God, be all honour and glory, for caring for us and watching over us throughout our lives, through 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

Gathered under the shadow of God's wings 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

Taste and see, God connecting us all together.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMN: Lamb of God (p. 146)
Lamb of God Your Only Son (#336)
Here Is Bread (#483)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, your Word and love feed us and nourish us and grant us strength. Be with us as we face life's twists and turns, and bring us into the joy of your salvation and community, now and always, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

SENDING

BLESSING

May the mercy of God our Shepherd ground us, the love of God our Saviour take root in us, and God the Spirit grow in us for the sake of the gospel in the world, now and forever.

Amen.

SENDING SONG: O Living Bread from Heaven (#542)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, seek God in your lives.

Thanks be to God.