



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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Fourth Sunday in Lent March 27, 2022 ELW Holy Communion, Setting Three

The psalm sets the tone this day: “Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sin is put away!” Happy are those who have “become the righteousness of God” in the merits of Christ Jesus. Happy are those for whom the forgiveness of God has “rolled away . . . the disgrace” of former times. Happy is the father at the return of his prodigal son. Happy are we that our sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake. Rejoice!

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 Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP (Paraphrase of Psalm 32)

We gather together to worship our God, for God has forgiven our transgressions and put away our sin. There is joy in the Lord's grace that takes away our shame and moves us into confession and repentance. Therefore we look to God in times of trouble as God acts as our hiding place, surrounding us with shouts of deliverance and guiding us and teaching us on the ways that we should go. May God grant us mercy as we together be glad, rejoice, and shout for joy, today and always.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

GATHERING SONG: Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing (#807)

GREETING

The amazing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the blessed love of God, and the reconciling fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Gracious God, you seek the lost and draw us your children back into your loving embrace. Restore us in our inheritance of grace and mercy and reconcile our hearts to you, that we might become ambassadors of your steadfast and forgiving love in all the world, through Jesus Christ, by the power of your Spirit. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Joshua 5:9-12

A reading from Joshua.

By celebrating the Passover and eating the produce of the promised land instead of the miraculous manna that had sustained them in the desert, the Israelites symbolically bring their forty years of wilderness wandering to an end at Gilgal.

⁹The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt." And so that place is called Gilgal to this day.

¹⁰While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. ¹¹On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. ¹²The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

A reading from 2 Corinthians.

One way to describe the gospel is the promise that in Christ everything is transformed into newness. All mistakes, all deliberate sins, all old history is reconciled with Christ's resurrection. This is Paul's strong message to the congregation in the city of Corinth.

¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; 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.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 142)

GOSPEL: Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

The holy gospel according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus tells a parable about a son who ponders his father's love only after he has spurned it. The grace he receives is beyond his hopes. That same grace is a crisis for an older brother who believes it is his obedience that has earned his place in the father's home.

¹Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to [Jesus.] ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." ³So he told them this parable: ^{11b}"There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" ²⁰So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²²But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

²⁵"Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' ²⁸Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out

and began to plead with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' ³¹Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Almighty God, by your Holy Spirit open our minds and bodies to the recreating power of your Word, that we might see the world through the mind of Christ and live in the grace that you so lovingly give in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

And just like that, Spring Break is over. For those of you who might not have known, Spring Break for the public schools grades k-12 (which our kids are in) started two weeks ago and now it's already finished, which makes sense seeing as how Spring Break only lasts two weeks. But it felt much faster than that as I don't think the kids are ready to wake up early tomorrow for school since they're probably still asleep right now. And this fluidity in how time moves makes me think of my upcoming Sabbatical, that while I'm looking forward to it, I know that before I even know it I'll be back... and I haven't even left yet.

But isn't that how life is? We look forward to something, we get really excited and think it'll be the ultimate joy, the anticipation we feel has us in the clouds and we think once we're there, once we've made it, life will be awesome, like that will be our "happily ever after". Be it Spring Break or a Sabbatical, or a vacation or a promotion, or maybe it's a new relationship or a higher stage in that relationship. Or maybe it's something more tangible like a new piece of technology or a toy or something that you've had your sights on for a while. Whatever it is, we've all had something that we really looked forward to, something we really longed and yearned for, something that we thought would change our lives for the happier forever, but when we got there, it was more... meh.

Don't get me wrong, I know there usually a "honeymoon" stage so to speak, especially in a marriage when you have your literal honeymoon, but after some time passes, either the highly anticipated trip ends, the new piece of technology or toy gets old, obsolete, or maybe even breaks, and the relationship has become so familiar that it just doesn't do it for you like it did before. I'm not saying that everything that brings us joy is meaningless, but there is a saying out there that starts with "all good things..." and I'm sure you all know how the saying "comes to an end" (see what I did there?).

And if we can learn anything from this and even in this pandemic, it's that life never lets up. Once we've achieved whatever it was we wanted to achieve, gained whatever it was that we wanted to gain, got to wherever it was we wanted to get, there is always something else that either gets in the way, ruins it for us, or reminds us of exactly that, life just doesn't let up. It's like it's never enough, we can never have enough, we can never get enough, sometimes it feels like we can never be enough. Life just doesn't give enough and we are left unsatisfied.

We see this in the parable that we get in today's gospel lesson. This parable of the Prodigal Son or however you want to call it, speaks a lot to this "not enough" mentality. This story, as familiar as it is, has a lot of life not letting up and not turning out the way it is supposed to and how people are disappointed because of it. Every member of this small, somewhat dysfunctional family in the parable had some sort of expectation that life owes them roses, but instead life had a different idea and gave them thorns instead.

Again, we're familiar with this story, we know who the characters are and what they're about. At least, we've heard the typical interpretations before. We're the younger son who messed up but faithfully repented and the father is God who looks over the horizon for the hopeful return of the younger son and runs out to forgive him when he sees him and the angry older brother of course are those good-for-nothing Pharisees who just aren't very fair, you see. A very familiar story for sure, and there's a reason why it's one of the most, if not the most, popular parables of Jesus. It's a wonderful example of grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Except this time around for me, I heard the story a little differently. I don't know if it's because of where I am in life, how this pandemic has been treating us, or just me trying to find something new to say about this oh so familiar text, but I don't see this story as an allegory of God forgiving sinners and others who think that it's unfair, rather I see this as a story about us. Just us. We are the younger son, yes, but we are also the older son. And not just that, we're the father as well.

I know, super confusing. But hear me out, what I mean by this is that each character in this story can be representative of any one of us at any given time. The point is that each of them had an expectation, and each were disappointed. Just like what happens to us.

Life didn't let up, and life didn't give enough.

The youngest son's early inheritance wasn't enough and he spent it all too quickly and had to eat with the pigs. The older son didn't think his father's appreciation was enough as he felt like he was wronged by his brother's party. The father just wants his sons to be happy but he can't seem to please either of them enough for them to not to hate his guts. It's like a lose/lose/lose situation.

Sort of like how we find ourselves sometimes.

Our jobs aren't always enough because we want more and more money because the things that we have now aren't enough. Our relationships aren't enough because we aren't happy all the time or we find that we need to work on ourselves more than we want to. Our lives in general aren't enough because it doesn't let us live in total anarchy and do whatever we want whenever we want. We look forward to all these things that we think we're entitled life to give us but somehow we keep ending up in disappointment.

And that is the point of this parable. We're all disappointed. We all feel let down. Life doesn't seem like it's enough. But when we look at this oh so familiar parable with the not-so-familiar parables Jesus pairs it with, then we sort of start to see what I mean. The story of the woman who loses one of her ten coins and rejoices in recovering it, and the shepherd that loses one of a hundred sheep, and has a feast when it returns. Both disappointed in not that great a loss, but also almost ridiculously overjoyed at not that great a gain either.

So while there is disappointment in life not being enough, there is also great joy when we see that actually, life *is* enough.

See too often we're like the younger son thinking that his riches upon riches aren't enough or the older son thinking that his father's endless love isn't enough, but stepping away from it, we can see how both are actually amazing blessings that we can be thankful for. The woman was disappointed in losing her one coin because suddenly just 9 coins aren't enough. But upon finding just that 10% of her wealth back, she learns to appreciate the fact that she has any coins at all. And the shepherd who lost just 1% of his flock is overjoyed at the reuniting and reconciliation with the one and how his flock is whole again.

So I see Jesus responding to the not-so-fair-you-see Pharisees in their grumbling about him welcoming the so-called sinner with these parables saying that we needn't worry about the fairness of God's grace, for there is plenty to go around for all. I see Jesus telling all who might complain about life never letting up that perhaps if we shift our perspective a bit, that while yes life throws us a number of curve balls, we can also see that we continue to have a lot to be thankful for. I see Jesus reminding all of us whenever we think that we don't have enough, that God overflows our cups of blessing with an abundance of love, mercy, and forgiveness.

And so I believe this is especially poignant for us in Lent, this time in which our spiritual discipline calls us to fast, to reflect, and to repent. That instead of lamenting the giving up of something that we love or thoroughly enjoy, we can be thankful that we even have something to give up to begin with. Instead of grumbling about how we don't always get what we want, we can rejoice in the times that we do get what we want. Instead of wallowing in our sorrow about how life isn't enough, we can joyfully remember how God totally is.

As we approach the end of this season of Lent, may we continue in our self-reflection and repentance, that we might be reminded always of God's unending and steadfast love. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Precious Lord, Take My Hand (#773)

CREED

With all who have been reconciled by God's grace, 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

Called and welcomed into God's everlasting arms of love, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "Lord by your loving mercy," and you all may respond with **hear our prayer**. Lord, by your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, we are made glad through your forgiveness and you put away our sin. You call out to us and bring us into your community and kingdom. May our welcome of the stranger and wayward be as gracious as yours, that the news of your love might spread across the nations. Lord, by your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you impute no guilt on us, although we have sinned against you in thought and word, for your graciousness is beyond measure. Teach and guide us to reflect your love and grace to all people in our ministry and in our lives. 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 Living Faith Lutheran Church in Sechelt and their interim pastor Richard Hergesheimer; and for Lord of Life Mission in Sandspit and their interim pastor Jim Whaley. Lord, by your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, our sins against your creation are apparent and the effects weigh heavily on us. Help us in our continued stewardship and open our eyes to the ways in which this planet can be restored in its beauty and wonder. Lord, by your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, our guilt and shame are great and cannot be concealed, but you choose to forgive our transgressions anyway. Reveal your grace to all the nations of the world, that world leaders and politicians might end the fight for power and instead work toward peace. We pray especially for an end to the conflict in Ukraine and other parts of the world that are suffering, as well as for those that we've sponsored to come into our country and away from danger: Solyana Amanuel; and Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children. Lord, by your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, we pray to you in our times of trouble and we trust that we will not be drowned in them. Be with all among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your grace that covers us all might be apparent and strengthening for us. Especially we pray for Diana; Beulah; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Paula; Bev and family; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; Linda; Charolotte; William; Jenny; Christ; Mr. Cifuentes; Min; Katherine and family; Jessica; Lynn and Marie; those who have been affect by COVID 19; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...

Lord, by your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, we are glad and we rejoice in you, for your welcome is expansive and complete as you bring us into your kingdom with you and all the saints. Remind us always of our connection

with those that we've loved and lost, and allow their continued faith inform our own faith and love throughout our lives. Lord, by your loving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your steadfast love and mercy shown to us by Jesus Christ our Saviour. **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, 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 just how wide and how deep your love and welcome are.

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, and shared it saying, "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 it to them to drink from saying, "This cup is the new covenant in me 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 that we share that has been offered to all people that we see how welcome we are in God's presence, 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, through Jesus Christ our Saviour, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered together in the house of God, 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 everlasting grace.
Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMN: Lamb of God (p. 146)
Give Me Jesus (#770)
What Wondrous Love Is This (#666)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, you have again fed and nourished us with your truth and promises, welcoming us together as your children in your kingdom. May our satisfied souls faithfully reflect your steadfast love in all the world, through the life and teachings and guidance of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

SENDING

BLESSING

The God of reconciliation bless you and keep you,
the God of restored hearts shine on you and be gracious unto you,
the God of renewed lives look up you with favour, and give you peace.

Amen.

SENDING SONG: Drawn to the Light (#593)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, be ambassadors of Christ living with new life.
Thanks be to God.