



**GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH**

**EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA**

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**First Sunday in Lent  
February 26, 2023  
ELW Holy Communion, Setting Three**

Today's gospel tells of Jesus' temptation in the desert. His forty-day fast becomes the basis of our Lenten pilgrimage. In the early church Lent was a time of intense preparation for those to be baptized at the Easter Vigil. This catechetical focus on the meaning of faith is at the heart of our Lenten journey to the baptismal waters of Easter. Hungry for God's mercy, we receive the bread of life to nourish us for the days ahead.

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 hən̓q̓əmiṇəm (Musqueam) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) speaking peoples.

## GATHERING

### CALL TO WORSHIP and INVITATION TO LENT

Today with the whole church we gather for worship and enter into the time of remembering Jesus' passover from death to life, as our life in Christ is renewed. We embark into this season by acknowledging our need for repentance and for God's mercy. We start this season by recognizing the joy we are given in communion with God, in loving one another, and in living in harmony with all of creation. We begin this season by admitting to and repenting from our sinful rebellion that separates us from God, our neighbours, and creation, so much so that we do not and cannot enjoy the life as it is meant to be enjoyed.

So as disciples of Christ, we answer the call to a discipline that contends against evil and resists whatever leads us away from love of God and neighbor. This worship service that we are participating in today is our invitation to the discipline of this season of Lent—self-examination and repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving and works of love—strengthened by the gifts of word and sacrament. So we together embark on this journey through these forty days to the great Three Days of Jesus' death and glorious resurrection. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

**GATHERING SONG:** I Want Jesus to Walk with Me (#325)

### GREETING

The strengthening grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the sacrificing love of God, and the sojourning fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

**KYRIE** (p. 138)

### PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of heaven and earth, as we dive into these forty days of discipline and repentance, shape us by your Holy Spirit into the image of Christ, that we might be, by your grace, ready to confront the power of death with the promise of eternal life, through Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

## WORD

### FIRST READING: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

A reading from Genesis.

*Human beings were formed with great care, to be in relationship with the creator, creation, and one another. The serpent's promise to the first couple that their eyes would be opened led, ironically, to the discovery only that they were naked.*

<sup>15</sup>The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. <sup>16</sup>And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; <sup>17</sup>but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

<sup>3:1</sup>Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" <sup>2</sup>The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; <sup>3</sup>but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" <sup>4</sup>But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; <sup>5</sup>for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

<sup>6</sup>So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes,

and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. <sup>7</sup>Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**PSALM: Psalm 32**

<sup>1</sup>Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven,  
and whose sin is put away!

<sup>2</sup>**Happy are they to whom the LORD imputes no guilt,  
and in whose spirit there is no guile!**

<sup>3</sup>While I held my tongue, my bones withered away,  
because of my groaning all day long.

<sup>4</sup>**For your hand was heavy upon me day and night;  
my moisture was dried up as in the heat of summer.**

<sup>5</sup>Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and did not conceal my guilt.

I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.

<sup>6</sup>**Therefore all the faithful will make their prayers to you in time of trouble;  
when the great waters overflow, they shall not reach them.**

<sup>7</sup>You are my hiding-place; you preserve me from trouble;  
you surround me with shouts of deliverance.

<sup>8</sup>**"I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go;  
I will guide you with my eye.**

<sup>9</sup>Do not be like horse or mule, which have no understanding;  
who must be fitted with bit and bridle, or else they will not stay near you."

<sup>10</sup>**Great are the tribulations of the wicked;  
but mercy embraces those who trust in the LORD.**

<sup>11</sup>Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the LORD;  
shout for joy, all who are true of heart.

**SECOND READING: Romans 5:12-19**

A reading from Romans.

*Through Adam's disobedience, humanity came under bondage to sin and death, from which we cannot free ourselves. In Christ's obedient death, God graciously showers on us the free gift of liberation and life.*

<sup>12</sup>Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—<sup>13</sup>sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. <sup>14</sup>Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

<sup>15</sup>But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. <sup>16</sup>And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. <sup>17</sup>If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace

and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

<sup>18</sup>Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. <sup>19</sup>For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

The word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION** (p. 142)

**GOSPEL: Matthew 4:1-11**

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

*Jesus experiences anew the temptations that Israel faced in the wilderness. As the Son of God, he endures the testing of the evil one.*

<sup>1</sup>Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup>He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. <sup>3</sup>The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." <sup>4</sup>But he answered, "It is written,

'One does not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'

<sup>5</sup>Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup>saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you,'  
and 'On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'

<sup>7</sup>Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

<sup>8</sup>Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; <sup>9</sup>and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." <sup>10</sup>Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

'Worship the Lord your God,  
and serve only him.'

<sup>11</sup>Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

The gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

**SERMON**

O Lord, may your Word be our daily bread, leading us by your Spirit along your ways of truth, life, and love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

There is this somewhat popular mobile game that my kids have been playing on and off for years. Maybe you've heard of it, come across it, or even played it or one of its knock off imitations. It's called "Akinator" and all it does is guess whatever character, object, or animal that you're thinking about by asking you a series of yes or no questions. It claims to be able to read your mind, when really it's just a pretty good algorithm that narrows down your character through it's questioning. But I'll have to admit, it's pretty darn accurate.

We've tried to stump it with really random and obscure people, lesser known characters from different shows and movies, specific and less popular Youtubers, and it even guessed the king of spades from a deck of cards. Sometimes it takes like a hundred questions before the algorithm succeeds, and we do succeed in stumping it maybe once every 30 times we play, but the funniest experience had to be this last week when we were playing it.

I wanted to see how quickly it could guess something, so I decided that I will just answer "yes" to every question it asks regardless of what its asking. After I think it was around 10 questions, it guessed "Ashley WSFD." We laughed at the result but we had no idea who Ashley WSFD was. So we did what any sane human being would do, we asked Alexa who she is. Alexa, of course, being Amazon's smart home/virtual assistant AI/vocal search engine when we're too lazy to pick up our phones. And the answer Alexa gave us was, "a weird girl who pops up on Akinator when you press only yes."

These developers think of everything.

So I'm pretty amazed at how it knows how to ask the right questions, narrow down the answers, and ascertain who it is that we're thinking about. It's pretty cool how its database of answers just keeps growing with everyone who uses it and it just improves its accuracy. And even if it doesn't get specific names for people who don't have their own Wikipedia page, but it will have answers like, your dad, your younger sister, or even your pastor (if you answer honestly enough).

But that begs the question, are we that predictable as to who we are, that pretty much anyone can be named through the means of creative coding, AI algorithms, 1s and 0s, and a series yes's and no's? Are our traits, attributes, and histories enough to determine who we actually are? Can we be defined by what we do, what we've done, and what we're known for? Is our identity really that easily identifiable?

While we might want to say no, I think the world tells us different. While we might want to have a degree of unpredictability and perhaps spontaneity to our lives, the world would rather keep us in a nice neat box of statistics and demographics. While we might want to have more than one facet to who we are, the world seems to want to pigeon hole us into labels, categories, and very narrowminded classes in order that we might be organized, controlled, and maybe even manipulated to be exactly what the powers that be preordained as the correct order of things.

I know, this might sound kind of conspiracy theory like, but that's not the point. The point is that no matter what the reasons might be, whether they be innocent or more malicious, whether they are intentional or just happen to be that way, whether it is natural or forced somehow, it still seems that we are all put into some kind of predetermined division or league where and only where we can enjoy the rights and privileges of said division or league. We are all subject to these labels and prejudices that fit us into what the world decides what those labels and prejudices mean and look like. We are all given these identities and are told to play our part in them lest we go against the flow, upset the boat, and throw the whole system in for a loop. And sadly to say, it seems like we, more often than not, give in to these demands and maintain that status quo.

And that is what the readings today tell us that the adversary wants, regardless of what our preconceived notions of what the devil is about might be. But the devil as described in these passages doesn't just want us to be bad and do bad things, but rather to maintain the status quo, to follow along with the systems of the world, to fall into line be only what the world expects us to be according to the label that we've been categorized in.

"If you are the Son of God..." we're told the tempter would start with Jesus. I mean, I guess in those days anyone who's anyone would know what the Son of God would be like, right? Don't need some fancy AI like Akinator to tell you that. The Son of God is a wise, influential, powerful, reigning miracle worker, right? Why else would he incite so much joy in downcast, so much peace in the troubled, so much hope in the hopeless? For the good of all, Jesus, show the world what you can do and put an end to the tyranny, the oppression, and while you're at it, maybe do something about this snow?

I mean, you *can* do that, Jesus, that is... *if* you're the Son of God. See the temptation isn't just on Jesus here to prove to everyone who he is, but it's also on us to want him to do it. We're like, c'mon Jesus, fix the weather, let me win the lottery, help me find a parking spot. Or maybe even more real, we might expect Jesus to end hunger, stop war, and maybe heal our loved ones.

C'mon Jesus, do what you said you'll do, be what we want you to be, fit into the box that we've created for you so we can predict what will come next for us and how we can better fit in our role here in this system of predictable status quo and elite oppression.

This is the temptation that the world faces when trying to organise itself by drawing lines and creating for itself a system of power and prestige and importance apart from the ways of God's righteousness.

This is the temptation that we face day after day as people in this world trying to figure out who we are as defined by what we know and believe.

This is the temptation that Jesus faced right after his baptism when he was declared God's beloved Son.

The good news is that Jesus remembered who he is and was able to rise above the temptations and live in the ways of God's righteousness.

And while we might think that the point of these stories is to give us an example to follow, especially throughout this season of Lent, I actually think it's something else. I think the point of these stories isn't to teach us how to resist temptation, how to quote scripture at the appropriate times, or even how to recognise temptation in our lives. Rather, I think the point is to remind us that being a child of God doesn't protect us from the world. It isn't some magical force field that blocks all harm from us. It isn't some kind of pass that allows us to walk through the world unscathed.

Instead, it is to tell us that we are, as Jesus is, identified as a child of God. That doesn't mean that we are perfect and fit into a box of telling us what a "good Christian" should look like, or that we must follow a set of rules in order to keep our "Jesus cards", or that we need to maintain some good order and status quo. Rather, being a beloved child of God mean that we are imperfect but redeemed, we are sinners but determined to be saints, we are who we are and God loves us for it anyway. The identity isn't something we aspire to or try earn, but it was

is graciously given to us through the mercy of cross, unable to be changed or redefined by anything the world might throw at it.

See, Jesus was declared God's Son with whom God is well pleased, and he faced these temptations. We too, are declared as beloved children of God, and we will face these temptations. But facing them doesn't change who we are. Falling for them doesn't change whose we are. Not even our failure to recognise these temptations in our lives doesn't change our identity as God's people in this world.

So in this season of Lent and beyond, may we be constantly reminded of our unchanging identity in God's love, that our temptations to believe that we can be redefined by the world are replaced with confident righteousness and service to God and all those around us, by the power of the life and teaching of Jesus our Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.

**HYMN OF THE DAY:** When We Are Tested (ACS 922)

**CREED** (p. 105)

With all of God's people embarking on their Lenten journey, let's 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 world to live by the Spirit, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "by your guiding mercy, O God," and you all may respond with **hear our prayer**. By your guiding mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you have forgiven us all of our transgressions and you impute no guilt on us, leading us into worship and service. May all that we do be pleasing to you, that our lives be faithful reflections of your love and grace. We remember in prayer our neighbouring faith communities; our partner Anglican Church of Canada; our bishops Kathy, Larry, Sid, Jason, Michael, and Susan, and all the assistants to the bishops across all the Synods; and for all our

congregations of the ELCIC. In particular, we pray for Christ the King Lutheran Church in Surrey and their pastor Nicholas Alexandre; and for all our Lutheran clergy who are serving Anglican parishes. By your guiding mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, we confess that we have not been faithful in our care of this planet and all that you have made, and you continually forgive us the guilt of our sin. May we move into the future with newfound responsibility and stewardship for all that you have entrusted to us, that our connection to you through nature be strengthened. We also pray for those who are living in areas of harsh weather and prone to natural disasters, that they find safety and peace. By your guiding mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you are our hiding place and you preserve us from trouble and deliver us from the evils of this broken world. Be with all politicians and people of influence, that their leading of nations and communities be moved by your love and grace. We pray especially for the areas of the world that face war, violence, and political turmoil, that peace may reign in all our hearts. We also pray for those that we've sponsored to come to our country: Solyana Amanuel; and Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children. By your guiding mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, when we face the tribulations of life, you embrace us with your mercy and lead us into peace. Be with those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your presence in our community and world may never be forgotten or overlooked. We pray especially for Bryan and Chona; Bev and family; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Suhkwant; Winn; John; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Cindy; William; Chris; Walter; Larry; Piet; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...  
By your guiding mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, your righteousness makes us glad and we rejoice in your eternal truth, which connects us with you and all the saints living in your kingdom and in our hearts. May the inspiration of the lives of those we've loved and lost remain alive in our community, that we all be strengthened in faith and service to you and neighbour always. By your guiding mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your leading and guiding throughout life and community, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

#### **PEACE (p. 143)**

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.**



## **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, almighty and merciful God, through our Saviour Jesus Christ; who by your power has overcome death and the grave, opening for us the way of everlasting life with you and all the saints, joining us with the choirs of angels, the hosts of heaven, and the church on earth in praising your name with this unending hymn:

## **HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 144)**

### **THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE**

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, for your everlasting mercy and faithfulness. We praise you for all that you have done in creation, for leading and guiding us into peace and saving us from the guilt and shame of our sin. And when the time was right, you sent to us your Son Jesus to reveal to all the boundless grace found in your love.

For on the night that he was betrayed, your Son Jesus sat with his friends for a meal, where he took some bread, thanked you for it, and broke and shared it saying, "Take and eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

Then after they ate, he took the common cup that they shared, gave thanks, and gave it 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's in this bread and cup that we remember Jesus' Passover from death to life, even as we proclaim the mystery of our faith:

**Christ has died.**

**Christ is risen.**

**Christ will come again.**

Pour your Spirit on this meal and into our hearts, that we be blessed with your presence among us, revealed in our community and relationship. And so with all people joined together by your love, we praise you, O God, for feeding us with your salvific truth and grace, through Jesus Christ our Saviour, who lives with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

## **LORD'S PRAYER (p. 145)**

Led into trusting God and the 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 joining us together in love and grace.

**Thanks be to God.**

### **COMMUNION**

**COMMUNION HYMNS:** Lamb of God (p. 146)

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

For by Grace You Have Been Saved (#598)

### **PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Compassionate God, you have fed and nourished us with the heavenly food of your truth and you lead us into righteousness by your grace. Sustain us as we begin this Lenten pilgrimage, that we might grow in our faith and hunger for justice, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

### **SENDING**

#### **BLESSING**

May the steadfast love of God surround you,  
the love of Christ protect you,  
and the leading of the Spirit guide you through these forty days and into everlasting life.  
**Amen.**

**SENDING SONG:** Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling (#608)

#### **DISMISSAL**

Go in peace, strengthened to worship, serve, and love our God.

**Thanks be to God.**