



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

7283 Nelson Avenue, Burnaby, BC V5J 4C2

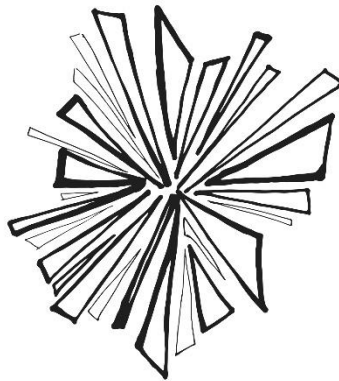
Phone / fax: 604-433-1515

Website: www.graceburnaby.com

Email: office@graceburnaby.com

pastor@graceburnaby.com

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Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 19, 2023

ELW Holy Communion, Setting Three

Baptism is sometimes called enlightenment. The gospel for this Sunday is the story of the man born blind healed by Christ. "I was blind, now I see," declares the man. In baptism God opens our eyes to see the truth of who we are: God's beloved children. As David was anointed king of Israel, in baptism God anoints our head with oil, and calls us to bear witness to the light of Christ in our daily lives.

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 hən̓q̓əmiñəm̓ (Musqueam) and Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish) speaking peoples.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather together to worship the Lord our shepherd, in whom we are satisfied. For the Lord restores us in green pastures and still waters and leads and guides us along right pathways toward peace in our communities and world, where we don't find fear but just hope in God's presence with us. Together, God anoints us with God's abundant blessing of goodness and mercy, and we shall dwell in the house of the Lord for all the days of our lives, through Jesus Christ our brother and Saviour. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

GATHERING SONG: How Great Thou Art (#856)

GREETING

The inclusive grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the eye-opening love of God, and the healing fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

KYRIE (p. 138)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O Lord, our God, bring us back into your light that your ways become visible and bear fruit in us. Change us by the power of your love, that we might find confidence in our faith and hope in your promises, through Jesus Christ, the healer and Saviour of all. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

A reading from 1 Samuel.

Samuel anointed David even though he was the eighth-oldest son of Jesse and did not match his brothers in height or other physical characteristics. With the anointing came endowment with the Spirit of the LORD, designating David as the LORD's chosen successor to Saul.

¹The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." ²Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.'" ³Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." ⁴Samuel did what the LORD commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" ⁵He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed is now before the LORD." ⁷But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." ⁸Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." ⁹Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." ¹⁰Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these."

¹¹Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest,

but he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.” ¹²He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.” ¹³Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 23

¹The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not be in want.

²**The LORD makes me lie down in green pastures
and leads me beside still waters.**

³You restore my soul, O LORD,
and guide me along right pathways for your name’s sake.

⁴**Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil;
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is running over.

⁶**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

SECOND READING: Ephesians 5:8-14

A reading from Ephesians.

Because we now live in the divine light which is Jesus Christ, we conduct our lives in ways that reflect the light of Christ, so that our activity is truly pleasing to God.

⁸Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—⁹for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; ¹³but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Sleeper, awake!

Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 142)

GOSPEL: John 9:1-41

The holy gospel according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus heals a man born blind, provoking a hostile reaction that he regards as spiritual blindness to the things of God.

¹As [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ²His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." ¹²They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

¹³They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

¹⁸The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" ²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. ³⁹Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" ⁴¹Jesus said to

them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

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

SERMON

Gracious God, shine your love into our hearts that our eyes be opened to the power of your Spirit leading us to what is good and right and true, by the glory of your name, through Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

This past week we saw the 3rd anniversary of the start of the pandemic, or at least the start of us having to move worship online because of the pandemic. I know, 3 years doesn't seem significant as that isn't exactly a milestone number or anything, but I think it's significant for us in the church, or at least us churches that follow the Revised Common Lectionary. And in case you don't know what the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) is, it's the schedule of the 4 readings that we get each Sunday for worship which pretty much maps out the whole bible centering around themes and stories from the gospels. The reason why this matters is because the Revised Common Lectionary spans over three years.

So now, as of last Sunday actually, every text and theme that we get from the RCL has been preached on under the lens of the pandemic. Not by me myself, mind you, but collectively with all who follow this scripture reading schedule. Yes, I get that even after that explanation, it still doesn't seem all that significant or at least sermon-worthy. However, I wanted to bring it up because of how this global phenomenon has seemingly changed us. I wanted to highlight on this 4th Sunday in Lent how this world-wide situation has affected us all. I wanted to talk about how this daggone pandemic has, over the last 3 years, so drastically divided us: nations, citizens, human beings. So much so it feels like we may never be able to reconcile with each other again.

And in light of today's themes of reconciling, healing, and opening our eyes to see the world as God sees it, I thought it would be appropriate to talk about these things. Because really, it feels like our eyes have been covered and we've been so blinded by our own self-righteousness and arrogance that we tend to blame our problems on pretty much everything but us and that which we hold dear. I mean, let's be honest, how many of us nodded our heads in agreement when I said that it was the pandemic that divided us? How many of us shook our heads at those on the different side of the coin from us and pointed our fingers in their general direction thinking that it's them and their fault? How many of us when faced with a problem of any kind do not, can not, and absolutely will not even consider our own responsibility in instigating or at very least perpetuating that problem?

I'm not pointing my finger at any of you by the way, but rather I'm trying to see how that finger should appropriately be pointed at myself. Because I know I'm like this. I blame others when it's totally not their fault. I often think that I know better and therefore perhaps am considered as better than others. I have been blinded by my own arrogance.

This is human nature, I know. We see it in each other, those we don't even know, and even ourselves if we try hard enough. And of course, we see it in today's gospel lesson, right from the get go the disciples ask Jesus whose fault it is that this blind guy was born blind. Upon

whom can the blame for this man's plight be pinned? Where can we squarely point our fingers directly at and maybe give them a good mansplaning on what they did wrong and how they can improve for next time?

The disciples couldn't see how God's love and justice can be found even in this man. The disciples were blinded by their misguided understanding of sin and condemnation, crime and punishment, cause and effect. Their paradigms of the world and God led them to believe that anything bad that happens is at the fault of someone, likely those that just don't know as good as us.

And it wasn't just the disciples that did this, but the Pharisees as well. They wanted to get to the bottom of this healing business but to them, their inability to understand had nothing to do with their own arrogance and closed-mindedness, but everything to do with the blind man's poor attitude and his uncooperative parents. They couldn't see how this man that they've unjustly chastised because of his ailment could actually have value and worth given to him by God. They were blinded by their own power and prestige that they thought they were the ones who had the authority to declare who is right and who is wrong, who is good and who is bad, who is in and who is out. They couldn't grasp how this formerly blind man could ever be part of their community, so they drove him out every chance they got.

And if we want to be brutally picky, the parents displayed this fear of blame as well when they deflected the questions raised and weren't even able to rejoice in their son's healing but decided to play it safe and play it down instead. They couldn't see that they were trapped in this endless cycle of blame shifting and finger pointing. They were blinded by the societal rules and controlling systems in place that excluded people more and more. They were stuck in the understanding that these rules were unbreakable, their roles and positions unchangeable, and the perceived and threatened shame irreversible because of the standards that have been set for us all.

And maybe, just maybe, we might share in these attitudes of arrogance and blame shifting as well. Maybe we are blinded by our assumptions and presuppositions too. Maybe we also erroneously point our fingers at others, like who's to blame for our problems, who do we not like enough to justify us crucifying them, who can we exclude and exile because of the pandemic and any other reason that suits us.

What a mess. A real big mess. A spit in the dirt and make mud and smear it on the face of a stranger mess.

And there is good news. In that messiness, in that blindness, in that saliva-induced mud, there is healing, restoration, and the light of God's love. I know, we don't always see it. We might not always understand it. We might not even want it at times. But it is there, opening our eyes to the truth of God's grace, shining light into our lives with boundless love and blessing, and restoring us all into a community of sinful but forgiven saints of God.

My friends, in all this messiness of life, God appears to us with a hand of healing mercy. In the darkness and deep corners of life, God shines light into our souls and illumines the truth of God's promises of welcome and community. In the blaming and arrogant finger pointing, God opens our eyes to see that God isn't concerned with outward appearance, but God looks at the heart, where God resides, gives life, and brings in value and worth.

I know, it's a lot easier on our arrogance to just blame others. It gives our pride a break when we put others down instead of ourselves. It's maybe more comfortable and familiar to reside in the darkness where we could perhaps get away with a lot more than we could in the light. But it's in the light that we might see others as God does with eyes of compassion and forgiveness. It's in the healing in which we can understand how we're all equally sinful and at the same time all equally made to be saints. It's in this community in which we are all invited and welcomed where we can see how each and every one of us are loved, lifted up, and made to be children of God.

This pandemic hasn't been easy. Even though it's pretty much wound up we are still affected by it in so many ways. But the divisions and disagreements didn't start with the pandemic. It might have exasperated them but it didn't start them. It's been a part of us since the beginning of time. But it is in God's love and grace where we can end the division. It's in understanding our connection to God and each other where we can see our unique giftings and how we can work together as the body of Christ in the world. It's in the healing power of the Spirit where we can see the light of God shining in and through us, bringing us together in spite of difference and showing us how to live in peace, joy, and hope.

As we near the end of Lent, may we look forward to the shining light of the resurrection, bringing forth God's glory into our lives and in the world, revealing to all the endless love, grace, and mercy of Jesus our Saviour, through the power of the Spirit. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness (#843)

CREED (p. 105)

With all those lifted up 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

Led by the light of Christ, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, “by your shepherding mercy, O God,” and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. By your shepherding mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you provide for our needs and you satisfy our hunger and thirst for righteousness. Give us faith to trust in you and your promises, that we be strengthened to serve you with love and joy. We pray for our neighbouring faith communities; our partner Anglican Church of Canada, their bishops, their pastors, and all their members; and for our own bishops Kathy, Larry, Sid, Jaason, Michael, and Susan, all the assistants to the bishops, and all the congregations of the ELCIC. In particular, we pray for St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in Prince Rupert and their pastor Diana Edis; and for Our Saviour Lutheran Church in Richmond and their pastor Christoph Reiners. By your shepherding mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, your creation in all its beauty, in the grand mountains to the green pastures, to the raging rivers to the still waters, to the vast skies to the deepest valleys, your faithfulness is revealed and our souls are restored. May we always be mindful of our care for this planet, that its restorative beauty be a benefit to all the generations to come. By your shepherding mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, in your name we shall fear no evil of the world, for your rod and staff protect and comfort us as you shepherd us into your justice and peace. Be with all world leaders and politicians as they learn to work together to bring about a better future. We pray for those areas of the world that face war, violence, or political turmoil, that all citizens might find safety and security in their communities. We also pray for those that we’ve sponsored to come into our country: Solyana Amanuel; and Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children. By your shepherding mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you feed us with your healing and you nourish us with your abundant anointing and blessing. Be with those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your gracious love never feel too distant from us. Especially we pray for Bryan and Chona; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bev and family; Sukhwant; Winn; 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 shepherding mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you bless us with your goodness and mercy and you welcome us to live in your house with you and all the saints forever. May the lives of faith of the past always serve as inspiration for us as we continue to lead our own lives of faith, and hopefully inspire those that come after us through the goodness and grace of your loving invitation to be part of this eternal body of Christ. By your shepherding mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your healing grace shown to us 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 shows to us all the ways of your gracious healing and abundant blessing, opening our eyes to our being joined 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

Yes, Lord, you are holy and mighty and every good and perfect gift comes from you. You open our eyes by your love to see your gracious light shining in our lives, joining us together regardless of who we are or where we come from, revealing to all the ways of your mercy and community. And when the time was right, you sent to us your Son Jesus to walk among us as one of us, bringing to us teachings of your healing and mercy.

For on the night that he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus sat with his friends for a meal, where he took the 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 shared it, Jesus took the common cup, 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."

For it is in this bread and cup that we receive the gracious healing and welcome of God, joining us together in light, even as we proclaim this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

For this community that you welcome us into, O Lord, for your unending love and mercy, for this blessed meal, we give you thanks and praise for all our days through the light of Christ living in us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, now and forever. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER (p. 145)

Brought together to see the light 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 unending welcome and love.
Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 146)
Beautiful Saviour (#838)
Oh, Sing to the Lord (#822)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

O God, you have again fed us with your truth and nourished us with your light, and you have revealed to us the ways of your grace and mercy. Strengthen us in our community and lift us up for your service, for the good and healing of the world through Jesus Christ.
Amen.

SENDING

BLESSING

May the love of God pursue you, the light of Christ enfold you, and the Holy Spirit keep you, as you dwell in the house of the Lord your whole life long.
Amen.

SENDING SONG: I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light (#815)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, live in Christ's light of love and welcome.
Thanks be to God.