



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

Follow us on Twitter! @GraceLutBurnaby



Second Sunday in Lent

March 5, 2023

ELW Holy Communion, Setting Three

During Lent we journey with all those around the world who will be baptized at the Easter Vigil. In today's gospel Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born of water and Spirit. At the font we are given a new birth as children of God. As God made a covenant with Abraham, in baptism God promises to raise us up with Christ to new life. From worship we are sent forth to proclaim God's love for all the world.

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 Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) speaking peoples.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather together in worship, with our eyes lifted to the hills, to acknowledge all that the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth, does for us through boundless love and grace. Our God lets not our feet to be moved, watches over us when we cannot even ourselves, and acts as our rod and staff that carry us throughout our days.

For our preservation from evil and God's invitation to welcome us into life, we give thanks, we sing praises, and we give the glory due to God's name, this time forth and forevermore. **Amen.**
Thanks be to God.

GATHERING SONG: This Is the Spirit's Entry Now (#448)

GREETING

The life-giving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the empowering love of God, and the nurturing fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

KYRIE (p. 138)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God you are our help, our shade, our protector in our times of need, you are able to give life to the dead, to call into being things that do not exist. We trust in your power to make all things new; to keep us in sunlight and moonlight, along rocky paths and pathways unknown until all our going and coming bring us at last to your kingdom promised in Christ, in whose name we pray. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Genesis 12:1-4a

A reading from Genesis.

God's call of Abram and Sarai has a clear purpose—that through them all the families of the earth would gain a blessing. As they set out on their journey, they are accompanied by promises of land, nation, and a great reputation.

¹The LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

^{4a}So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 121

¹I lift up my eyes to the hills;
from where is my help to come?

²**My help comes from the LORD,
the maker of heaven and earth.**

³The LORD will not let your foot be moved
nor will the one who watches over you fall asleep.
⁴**Behold, the keeper of Israel**
will neither slumber nor sleep;
⁵the LORD watches over you;
the LORD is your shade at your right hand;
⁶**the sun will not strike you by day,**
nor the moon by night.
⁷The LORD will preserve you from all evil
and will keep your life.
⁸**The LORD will watch over your going out and your coming in,**
from this time forth forevermore.

SECOND READING: Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

A reading from Romans.

In the person and example of Abraham we discover that a right relationship with God does not involve earning a reward from God but entails trusting God's promises. Abraham is the forebear and model for both Jews and Gentiles, because we too trust that ours is a God who gives life to the dead.

¹What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? ²For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." ⁴Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. ⁵But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

¹³For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

¹⁶For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, ¹⁷as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations")—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 142)

GOSPEL: John 3:1-17

The holy gospel according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

A curious Pharisee visits Jesus by night to learn from the teacher his friends reject. Jesus speaks to him about life in the Spirit and the kingdom of God.

¹Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” ³Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”

⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” ⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

¹¹“Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

God of all wonders, we come before you seeking understanding and the new life that you offer through your Word, and by the power of your Spirit you graciously grant it to us. Illumine our hearts and minds this day, that we might see and believe the eternal life found in you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

With the pandemic, we got a lot of catch phrases that I don’t remember hearing before. Things like “social distancing”, “contact tracing”, and “bubbles”. We learned all these medical terms like “droplets”, “asymptomatic”, and “P.P.E.” We heard things coined like “fake news”, “alternative facts”, and “mainstream media”. But I think one of the phrases that scares me the most didn’t really start during the pandemic I don’t think, but it for sure gained a lot of traction because of it. This phrase scares me because it’s like no one is safe from it, anyone could get caught up in it, and it was a generally slippery slope once you’re affected by it. And no, it isn’t “speaking moistly”, but it’s this “cancel culture” that we find ourselves in now.

Basically the cancel culture gives society the right to exclude, chastise, basically *cancel* anyone who doesn’t fit the very specific mold that was set by society. While the punishments for someone cancelled wouldn’t be anything serious like jail time unless they did something actually illegal, but it was more like a social shaming, a open ousting, and a total ruin of reputation. Being cancelled usually led to internet infamy, loss of employment and likely any prospect of future employment, and just a seemingly permanent labelling as an awful person.

Getting cancelled is scary.

But you might be thinking, “you’re a pastor, you can’t get cancelled. You have to do something wrong or immoral or tweet something reprehensible, there’s no way a pastor could do that, is there?” Um... well, I might need to plead the 5th on that one (and yes, I know we’re in Canada and we don’t have the 5th here, but I’m pleading it anyway because I’m not sure what the Canadian equivalent is. Yes, I’m stalling).

The fact of the matter is, I have skeletons in my closet too. I was young and dumb at a point in my life as well. I’ve exercised poor judgement, made bad decisions, and said some pretty tone deaf and colour blind things. I’ve done these things, and I like will continue to mess up. And now I get that I’ve completely defeated the purpose of pleading the 5th, but there you go.

So now that you have my incriminating confession, should I be cancelled now? Should I be driven out of my job as a pastor, role as a father, and position in society? Do I need to be condemned for my sin?

That’s what this cancel culture demands these days, isn’t it? Cancelling those who did something that shouldn’t have been done? Since the before the pandemic we’ve seen politicians being cancelled for appearing racist, we’ve seen celebrities being cancelled for taking advantage of their celebrity-ness, and unfortunately we have seen clergy being cancelled for doing something immoral. But now it seems like just being associated with something that might press the hot topic button is grounds for being cancelled.

Now, I’m not at all saying that what these people have done is ok, nor am I condoning the notion that we should be able to do whatever we please without consequence or repercussion, but what I am wondering about on this 2nd Sunday in Lent is if this cancel culture that we find ourselves in really the only appropriate response to people’s transgressions? Is it within our rights as fellow humans on this planet to cancel others because we don’t like or disagree with what they’ve done and said or even who they are? And what does Jesus say about it all?

Well, nothing specifically, mostly because the term “cancel culture” wasn’t even a thing yet, but we can get an idea from Jesus’ teachings. Take today’s gospel lesson for example, as with many of these colourful characters we get in John’s gospel, we’re pretty familiar with Nicodemus. We’re familiar with his seemingly pompous attitudes of “knowing” this and that. We’re familiar with his inability to understand what Jesus means by being born from above. We’re familiar with his coming to Jesus at night for a whole variety of speculated reasons but I think perhaps the most likely reason judging from the context is that Nicodemus here didn’t want to be cancelled by being seen galivanting with the so-called enemy.

We’re also familiar with Jesus’ on-again/off-again relationship with these Pharisees, how they might think they’re right all the time but Jesus continually just puts them in their place through absolutely ingenious ways. Being seen to be on Jesus’ side wouldn’t have been a good look for a Pharisee in those days, as Jesus broke pretty much every mold that they’ve made for themselves and each other, molds that they held very dear and near to their hearts, molds that were thought to make them righteous, faithful, and the pietistic marvels that they saw themselves as. No, being seen with Jesus would have gotten him cancelled for sure.

And this attitude of the Pharisees that I just described, doesn’t it seem kind of familiar? Sure, we in the church who follow Jesus frown upon it because we know that Jesus didn’t like it, but

how often are these attitudes adopted in our lives or in the lives of those that we look up to? This attitude of “I’m right so you’re wrong and deserve to be cancelled”? This attitude of drawing hard and fast lines between opinions, viewpoints, and paradigms? This attitude of exclusion, segregation, and condemnation?

Yup, it’s this cancel culture that we’re in. And I should be clear, I’m not saying that the cancel culture is a liberal thing or a conservative thing, it isn’t a religious thing or a political thing, and it certainly isn’t an exclusively “woke” thing. But in my opinion, it’s a self-righteous thing, it’s a hate thing, it’s a sin thing. And the fact of the matter is, we all have sin. We all might not have cancelled someone out of our lives or participated in ruining someone because of what they’ve done, but I think we can say that we all have sin. We might not have boycotted someone because of their beliefs or past tweets, but I think we’ve all made assumptions about others and put labels on them because of what we’ve heard about them. We might not have condemned others because of our disagreement with them, but I’m pretty sure we probably really really wanted to.

But even in our self-righteousness, Jesus humbles us with grace and mercy and shows us how we’ve been redeemed by God’s own doing. Even in our hate, Jesus reveals to us through the resurrection how much we are loved and cherished by God. Even in our condemning of others, Jesus proclaims that we are *saved*.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Hear that? God didn’t send the Son to condemn, exclude, or cancel, but instead so the world can be saved. Reminds me of a meme I saw, “If Jesus didn’t come to condemn the world, I doubt he sent you.”

Right? Who made us the morality police? Who said we’re the authorities on what is right and wrong? Who gave us the right to cancel and condemn? Well, no one. Not God at least. We just gave it to ourselves, just like how the Pharisees did.

And so what should we do then? Cancel those who cancel? Condemn those who condemn? Hate those who hate? It’s like it just turns into a vicious cycle of exclusion and self-righteousness. But I think the answer is in that first part of that very famous passage I just quoted, about God *loving* the world. And maybe we should follow that example. Love the world as God loves the world. See the world as redeemed as we see ourselves as redeemed. Don’t condemn the world as even Jesus wasn’t here to condemn, but to save. So let us see the life brought into the world by the Spirit. See the joy that comes from God’s gracious forgiveness. See the love shown to us by Jesus, this non-condemning, saving, welcoming and inclusive love.

So let’s let go of the pressures of managing the world. Let’s let go of the self-given responsibility to fix the world. Let’s let go need to cancel and condemn, and embrace the grace and mercy given to us all by a benevolent God, maker of heaven and earth.

In this season of Lent, may we see God’s love for this world, changing us by grace, redeeming us by mercy, and giving us life through the reforming birth from above. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Womb of Life and Source of Being (ACS 948)



1 Womb of life and source of be - ing, home of ev - 'ry rest - less
2 Word in flesh, our broth - er Je - sus, born to bring us sec - ond
3 Brood - ing Spir - it, move a - mong us; be our part - ner, be our
4 Moth - er, Broth - er, ho - ly Part - ner; Fa - ther, Spir - it, On - ly



heart, in your arms the worlds a - wak - ened; you have
birth, you have come to stand be - side us, know - ing
friend. When our mem - 'ry fails, re - mind us whose we
Son: we would praise your name for - ev - er, One - in -



loved us from the start. We, your chil - dren, gath - er
weak - ness, know - ing earth. Priest who shares our hu - man
are, what we in - tend. La - bor with us; aid the
Three and Three - in - One. We would share your life, your



round you, at the ta - ble you pre - pare. Shar - ing
strug - gles, Life of life and Death of death, ris - en
birth - ing of the new world yet to be, free of
pas - sion, share your word of world made new, ev - er



sto - ries, tears, and laugh - ter, we are nur - tured by your care.
Christ, come stand a - mong us, send the Spir - it by your breath.
ser - vant, lord, and mas - ter, free for love and u - ni - ty.
sing - ing, ev - er prais - ing, one with all, and one with you.

CREED (p. 105)

With all those brought into life by the grace of God, 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 into new life with God and each other, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with “by your life-saving mercy, O God,” and you all may respond with **hear our prayer**. By your life-saving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, we lift our eyes and see you as our help and we are comforted and brought into peace. May this peace be reflected in our ministry and service to others, that all might find the joy in your name. We lift up in prayer our neighbouring faith communities; our partner Anglican Church of Canada; our bishops Kathy, Larry, Sid, Jason, Michael, and Susan, all the assistants to the bishops, and our companion congregations in the BC Synod and all of the ELCIC. In particular, we pray for Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Penticton and the pastors and leaders that serve there; and for Trinity Anglican and Lutheran Church in Port Alberni and their pastor Brenda Nestegaard Paul. By your life-saving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you have made heaven and earth, and you continue to watch over and provide for us throughout all of creation. Help us in our stewardship of this planet, that our care for it be reflective of your care for us. We pray especially for those living in areas prone to harsh weather and natural disasters, that all may adjust to the climate that they find themselves in. By your life-saving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you keep us and watch over us and preserve us from the evils of the world. May all world leaders, politicians, and people of influence learn to work together to bring out true peace for the benefit of all. We pray for those areas of the world that continue to face war, violence, and political turmoil, that all people might be treated fairly and equally. We also pray for those that we've sponsored to come into our country: Solyana Amanuel; and Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; that they might be able to enter soon. By your life-saving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you keep our lives and lead us into wholeness with you and each other in community. Be with all among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your love might shine in and through us all. Especially we pray for Bryan and Chona; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bev and family; 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 life-saving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you watch over us and keep us from this time forth and for all eternity with you and all the saints. May we always remember our connection to them and to you, that our lives be

inspired to be lived faithfully and full of your grace. By your life-saving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your wisdom and ways of righteousness, taught to us by 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 us the ways of your truth and righteousness, recreating us as your people that we might join with the choirs of angels, the hosts of heaven, and the church on earth in praising your name and join their unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 144)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

Yes Lord, you are holy, mighty, and merciful, and you bring us into your kingdom to live as your people, redeemed, restored, and reborn. And through the life and teachings of your Son Jesus we see the ways of your everlasting life, full of grace, love, and hope, that we might live lives worthy of your children, proclaiming this good news to all the world: the good news of your unending mercy and forgiveness.

For on the night that he was betrayed, your Son Jesus was with his friends for a final meal together, and he took some bread, gave thanks, broke 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 cup that they all 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 is in this bread and cup that we see our connection to you and each other, filling us with your grace even as we proclaim this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

So it is to you, O God, that all honour and glory belong, for you have brought us up out of the depths of our guilt and shame and feed us with this blessed food, full of your Spirit, nourishing us with your Word and truth, and bringing us together as a community of your people through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord, living and reigning with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER (p. 145)

Brought into new life 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 that God is good to us all.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 146)

By Your Hand You Feed Your People (#469)

Here Is Bread (#483)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, we give thanks for feeding and nourishing us with the bread and cup of life, filling us with your truth and grace as we navigate this world. Continue to strengthen and empower us to be your people, that our lives of faith might be a testament to all of your unending love and mercy, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

SENDING

BLESSING

May God bless you and keep you by sunlight and moonlight,
Christ encompass you with love and grace,
and the Spirit watch over your coming and going and empower you with new life,
this time forth and forevermore.

Amen.

SENDING SONG: Go, My Children, with My Blessing (#543)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, trust that God loves this world.

Thanks be to God.

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