



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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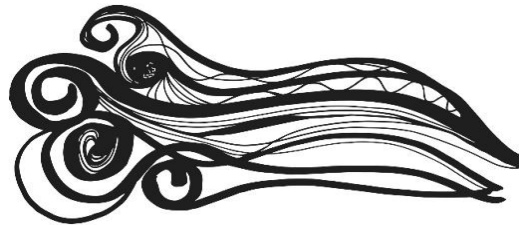
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Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 14, 2023

Now the Feast and Celebration

Hymnal Supplement (1991)

Jesus does not abandon his followers. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus comes to abide with his disciples of every generation. As Pentecost draws near, we are reminded that the risen Christ dwells in us as the Spirit of truth. We receive this Spirit in baptism and pray that in our gathering around the Lord's table the Spirit will transform us to be the body of the risen Christ in 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 hə́nqəmíə́m̓ (Musqueam) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) speaking peoples.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather in worship as God's people to bless our God with our praise and prayers. For though we are tested throughout life, we face trials and troubles, and carry heavy burdens on our backs, our God invites us, welcomes us, and receives us with an unending grace and mercy in this house. And so we call out to God with our mouths and praise our Lord with our tongues and pray to God with our hearts, for we are heard by God's grace, blessed by God's mercy, and united in community by God's love, through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

GATHERING HYMN: Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (#631)

GREETING

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The blessed grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the abiding love of God, and the inclusive fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

NOW THE FEAST (HS p. 4)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Loving God, in you we live and move and have our being, and by your help we choose life in your kingdom and community, that we may see and recognize the work of Jesus in the world, follow the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit, and witness to the hope that you give, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Acts 17:22-31

A reading from Acts.

In Athens, Paul faces the challenge of proclaiming the gospel to Greeks who know nothing of either Jewish or Christian tradition. He proclaims that the "unknown god" whom they worship is the true Lord of heaven and earth who will judge the world with justice through Jesus, whom God has raised from the dead.

²²Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. ²³For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. ²⁶From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, ²⁷so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.'

²⁹Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. ³⁰While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 66:8-20

⁸Bless our God, you peoples;

let the sound of praise be heard.

⁹**Our God has kept us among the living
and has not allowed our feet to slip.**

¹⁰For you, O God, have tested us;
you have tried us just as silver is tried.

¹¹**You brought us into the net;
you laid heavy burdens upon our backs.**

¹²You let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and water,
but you brought us out into a place of refreshment.

¹³**I will enter your house with burnt offerings
and will pay you my vows—**

¹⁴those that I promised with my lips
and spoke with my mouth when I was in trouble.

¹⁵**I will offer you burnt offerings of fatlings with the smoke of rams;
I will give you oxen and goats.**

¹⁶Come and listen, all you who believe,
and I will tell you what God has done for me.

¹⁷**I called out to God with my mouth,
and praised the Lord with my tongue.**

¹⁸If I had cherished evil in my heart,
the Lord would not have heard me;

¹⁹**but in truth God has heard me
and has attended to the sound of my prayer.**

²⁰Blessed be God, who has not rejected my prayer,
nor withheld unfailing love from me.

SECOND READING: 1 Peter 3:13-22

A reading from 1 Peter.

The author of 1 Peter encourages Christians to remain faithful even in the face of defamation and persecution. In baptism we are made clean to act in accordance with what is right.

¹³Who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? ¹⁴But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, ¹⁵but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; ¹⁶yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. ¹⁸For Christ also suffered for sins

once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit,¹⁹ in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison,²⁰ who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.²¹ And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (HS p. 8)

GOSPEL: John 14:15-21

The holy gospel according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

In final words to his disciples on the night of his arrest, Jesus encourages obedience to his commandments and speaks of the Spirit, who will be with them forever.

[Jesus said to the disciples:]¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.¹⁷ This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

¹⁸ “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.¹⁹ In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.²⁰ On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.²¹ They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

God, may your Spirit, our helper and advocate, open our hearts and minds this day, that we might be enticed by your Word and your message of love for the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

So as you all know, today is Mother’s Day, and I hope everyone hearing these words is able to take some time today to appreciate their own mother or the mother figures in their lives, for the sacrifices they made for our benefit and all that they’ve contributed to help make us who we are today. Mother’s Day is a great reminder for us to reflect on all that mothers do and the role they play in our lives, as regardless of who you are or where you’re from, you will have a mother of some sort.

Now, I can’t speak for all mothers, but I can say from just out of my own personal experience that my mother and the mother of my children (who are two different people, in case that wasn’t clear) do way more for their kids than their respective baby daddies (who are also

different people). Maybe your experience with your mother was the same, but it just seems like that mothers in general are more nurturing, more supportive, and more likely to go ballistic in protecting their kids from any kind of threat whatsoever, even if that threat is a well-meaning dad that cracked one joke or pulled one prank too many. Ask me how I know...

And I think that is why kids, my kids seem to be drawn more to their mom than to me, which I recognise might not be the case for all kids out there. While I can be more playful and make the kids laugh more than their mom, I see that they continue to gravitate toward her as the source of their nourishment, care, and love. Of course, I'm aware of how the roles aren't set in stone at all, but I'm just saying that is the case in our family, and perhaps in others out there as well. I'm not saying that it has to be or should be the case, but just in my experience, that is what it is.

And whether or not these roles are similar in your family or the families around you, I think there is one driving force in all of us that pushes us toward these parental figures in our lives. And that is that we don't like it when we don't have all what mothers or our parental figures generally provide. What I mean is, we don't like to not be nourished or cared for or loved. We don't like to not be watched over or protected. We don't like to feel like we don't belong or are alone.

Trust me, as an Asian born in Canada at a time when there weren't too many Asians born in Canada, I've had a lot of time to feel alone, left out, and not belonging. Heck, even now as an Asian pastor in the Lutheran Church at a time when there aren't too many Asian pastors in the Lutheran Church, I feel it. A lot. I don't blame anyone for this, mind you, I recognise that it really just is what it is. I just think it's important to note these strong feelings in many, if not all, of us of needing that belonging, that community, that love in our lives.

"I will not leave you orphaned, I am coming to you." Interesting words that Jesus chose for this Mother's Day. It's like he knew. Either case, this passage comes right after last week's passage, so we are still in Jesus' farewell discourse to his disciples. So while he probably wasn't talking about Mother's Day, he was talking to that need to be loved and belong, and the fear of loneliness. Because let's not forget what Jesus' farewell discourse is all about, it's about him saying farewell. His time with them in the flesh is drawing to a close, so he's just tying up all the loose ends and preparing them for his departure.

Well, it didn't go so well, did it.

The disciples were left afraid. Confused. To the point that each one of them, not just Judas and Peter, betrayed and denied Jesus just through their inaction, confusion, and fear. Jesus said he won't leave them orphaned, but in those first few days at least, they sure seemed like they were. And after the way they totally abandoned Jesus? They probably would have had it coming.

So their sense of being abandoned was real. Their apprehension of being alone was legit. Their fear of not being loved was understandable... and relatable.

I don't know how many of you have lost a parent, but I'm pretty sure you know that my dad passed almost 6 years ago now. If you knew that, then you probably also knew that my dad

and I didn't get along very well. We were just too different... or maybe we were too alike. I don't even know to be honest as I still, to this day, don't even really know him.

But even in that? Even in the strained, barely present, dysfunctional relationship I had with him, I was still scared of him dying. I was afraid of him leaving our family and me. I didn't want to feel... I don't know... orphaned. I know, my mom is still around, but I never lost a parent before so I wasn't sure what it'd be like.

And I'd imagine any of you who lost a parent went through similar feelings. Or I'm sure any of you who lost a close loved one that you looked up to as a source of love and care maybe felt like this. Or maybe perhaps even the disciples felt like this, once they caught an inkling of what Jesus was talking about in not being with them for much longer.

So Jesus' "I won't leave you orphaned" was meant to comfort, to console before the fact, to counsel them in what is yet to come. Even though the disciples probably didn't know exactly what Jesus was talking about, they probably understood that change was upon them, that things will be different soon, that Jesus wasn't going to be around forever.

Or was he?

Before this part in the story, Jesus told them that he'll be sending them an advocate, which we understand to be the Holy Spirit. This advocate will be with them and us forever, leading and guiding us to show God's love to all people. But the interesting part of this is that Jesus doesn't say that he's sending just any old advocate, but another advocate. As in, an advocate in addition to himself, who also will continue to act as an advocate.

Imagine that. Jesus, alongside the Holy Spirit, with us always. Jesus, with the Holy Spirit, leading and guiding us forever. Jesus and the Holy Spirit together, preparing a house for us with many rooms, welcoming us in the pen of Jesus' flock, watching over us and protecting us from the dangers that may come.

I know, this doesn't always seem to be the case. In fact, probably for most people it seldom seems to be the case. What, with the world going in the way that it's going, with wildfires burning up forests, people polluting the world with nary a second thought, and the quest for power constantly being so all-consuming in the countries, governments, and individuals, it really seems like we have, in fact, been left orphaned.

But let's not forget this house that we talked about last week. This flock that we talked about the week before. The welcome and belonging of the Spirit that we talk about pretty much all the time.

See we often forget our position in God's kingdom because we equate it with how the world treats us. We often lose sight of the promises of welcome and inclusion in God's house because we don't always feel welcome and included in the world. We often feel like we've been abandoned and orphaned by God because that's how the world often has us feel.

But Jesus reminds us that we aren't actually alone. We aren't in fact abandoned. We aren't even close to being orphaned. But we have the Spirit of truth on our side, abiding with us

throughout our lives, joining us together in community, welcoming us from all walks into the everlasting house of God.

My friends, this is the point of Easter. This is the point of the gospel. This is the point of the life and ministry of Jesus, to show us this love and peace that surpasses all understanding, stretching throughout this broken and hurting world to encapsulate us all, revealing to us a belonging that even death cannot put to an end.

It's true, Jesus has not, does not, and will not leave us orphaned. Rather he continues to live in us and through us and often in spite of us, showing us and reminding us of God's gracious and everlasting love and welcome, calling us into a life full of belonging and meaning.

As we come close to the end of the Easter season, may we always be reminded of our welcome into God's kingdom and family, that no matter what the world might throw at us, we might hang onto the promise that we will always be loved, always be welcomed, and never be left orphaned. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Abide with Me (#629)

CREED (HS p. 11)

Together with all of God's beloved people, let us confess the Christian faith with the Apostle's Creed:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Led into God's love by the Holy Spirit, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with "by your abiding mercy, O God," and you all are invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. By your abiding mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

Blessed God, we praise your name for keeping us part of your community and kingdom and welcoming us into your gracious arms of love. May our ministry to the world reflect this truth, that all might know of your blessing and mercy. We remember in prayer our neighbouring faith

communities; our partner Anglican Church of Canada; our national church, the ELCIC, and all our bishops, pastors, and congregations; as well as the congregations and ministries of our own BC Synod. In particular, we lift up Grace Lutheran Church in Victoria and the pastors and leaders that serve there; and for Mount Olive Lutheran Church in Surrey and their interim pastor Lori-Anne Boutin-Crawford. By your abiding mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

Welcoming God, you invite us into your house and bless us with your creation, and you entrust all that you have made into our care. Strengthen our stewardship of this planet, that its health and beauty be restored, and all people may continue to see your face in and through it all. We pray especially for those living in areas prone to natural disasters and harsh weather, that they might find safety from all danger. By your abiding mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

God of justice and peace, we face trials and tests throughout our lives in the world, yet you deliver us from our burdens and lead us down paths of righteousness. May all world leaders and politicians learn from your wisdom, that their service to the countries and nations be pleasing to you. We pray for the areas of the world that face violence, war, and political turmoil, and we especially lift up those that we've sponsored to leave those areas to come to our country: Solyana Amanuel; and Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children. By your abiding mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

Healing God, we call out to you with our mouths and we praise you with our tongues for you have heard us and help us in our times of need. Be with all among us who mourn, who are ill, or who feel lonely, that your love shine in and through us all in your kingdom. We especially pray for Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bev and family; Bryan and Chona; Sukhwant; Winn; John; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; William; Chris; Walter; Larry; Piet; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...

By your abiding mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

Eternal God, you do not reject us or withhold your unfailing love from us, but you invite us in to live with you and all the saints forever. May we always remember our everlasting connection with you and each other, that our faith and appreciation of your blessings grow daily. By your abiding mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

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

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

MEAL

DIALOGUE

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 places give thanks and praise to you, O God, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who reminds us of our connection and belonging in your kingdom with all the saints, joining us with the choir of angels, the hosts of heaven, and the church on earth in praising your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (HS p. 15)

GREAT THANKSGIVING

O God you are holy and mighty, and you welcome us into your fold as your children. You lift us up out of our guilt and shame and you bless us with your unending love and grace. And when the time was right you sent to us your Son Jesus to live among us as one of us, revealing to all the very nature of your community and kingdom.

For on the night that he was betrayed, you Son Jesus sat with his friends for a meal, where 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 then after they ate, he similarly 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 see God's presence among us, joining us together, and increasing our trust in this basis of our 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 all that you have done, all that you are doing, and all that you will do for the good of the world through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER (HS p. 18)

Gathered together as one 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 we are united in God's love.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (HS p. 18)

Guide Me Ever, Great Redeemer (#618)

O Christ, Our Hope (#604)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, again you have fed and nourished us with your Word and truth, and you strengthen us to follow you and your wisdom throughout our days. Remind us always of the work you set out before us, that we might always see and recognize your hand at work in us, through us, and in spite of us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

May the God who creates, redeems, and sustains keep you steadfast in faith, buoyant in hope, and abounding in love, and may the blessing of God, Shepherd, Saviour, and Spirit, abide with you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

SENDING SONG: Build Us Up, Lord (#670)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, be eager to do what is good.

Thanks be to God.