



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 and e-transfers: office@graceburnaby.com

Pastor's email: pastor@graceburnaby.com

Follow us on Twitter! [@GraceLutBurnaby](https://twitter.com/GraceLutBurnaby)



Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

July 16, 2023

ELW Holy Communion, Setting Ten

God's word is like the rain that waters the earth and brings forth vegetation. It is also like the sower who scatters seed indiscriminately. Our lives are like seeds sown in the earth. Even from what appears to be little, dormant, or dead, God promises a harvest. At the Lord's table we are fed with the bread of life, that we may bear fruit in the world.

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping in-person and on-line with us today! Here at Grace Luthera 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 hən̓q̓əmiñəṃ (Musqueam) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) speaking peoples.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather in worship of our God, who cares for us and abundantly provides for our need, watering us with love and grace and nourishing us with God's very Word. For our God is full of goodness, whose paths overflow with plenty. So we are clothed with the joy bestowed upon us by our salvation, and we live in community and relationship with all of God's people, shouting for joy and singing to God's name, through Jesus Christ our Lord, now and forever.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

GATHERING HYMN: Great Is Thy Faithfulness (#733)

GREETING

The inclusive grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the welcoming love of God, and the open-armed fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

CANTICLE OF PRAISE (p. 204)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, your mouth opened and your Word and message of love and peace and creation sprang forth in abundance. Let our hearts be opened to accept your grace, that we be satisfied by your goodness and reflective of your inclusive character in the world, through Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 55:10-13

A reading from Isaiah.

God's word to Israel's exiles is as sure and effective as never-failing precipitation. Their return to the Holy Land in a new exodus is cheered on by singing mountains and by trees that clap their hands.

¹⁰For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,

giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

¹¹so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;

it shall not return to me empty,

but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,

and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

¹²For you shall go out in joy,

and be led back in peace;

the mountains and the hills before you

shall burst into song,

and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

¹³Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;

instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;

and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial,

for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 65:9-13

⁹You visit the earth and water it abundantly; you make it very plenteous; the river of God is full of water.

You prepare the grain, for so you provide for the earth.

¹⁰**You drench the furrows and smooth out the ridges;
with heavy rain you soften the ground and bless its increase.**

¹¹You crown the year with your goodness,
and your paths overflow with plenty.

¹²**May the fields of the wilderness be rich for grazing,
and the hills be clothed with joy.**

¹³May the meadows cover themselves with flocks, and the valleys cloak themselves with grain;

let them shout for joy and sing.

SECOND READING: Romans 8:1-11

A reading from Romans.

There is no condemnation for those who live in Christ. God sent Christ to accomplish what the law was unable to do: condemn sin and free us from its death-dealing ways. The Spirit now empowers proper actions and values in our lives and gives us the promise of resurrected life.

¹There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. ³For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, ⁸and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 205)**GOSPEL: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

In Matthew's gospel, both Jesus and his disciples "sow the seed" of God's word by proclaiming the good news that "the kingdom of heaven is near." Now, in a memorable parable, Jesus explains why this good news produces different results in those who hear.

¹That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹Let anyone with ears listen!"

¹⁸"Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

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

SERMON

God, your Word lands on various types of landscape, and it is seen and heard in surprising ways. Soften our hearts to see and hear you this day, that we might see and hear you in all our days, in all people, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I think It's pretty safe to say that we're all Lutherans here, right? Or at least we're Christians of some kind? Or at very least, we've all darkened the doorway of a church at one point in our lives... like today. Or at least logged into our website or YouTube channel for that matter. The point is, we all have some kind of experience with this Christian faith. We all have some sort of prior knowledge that we gained from various sources and times that changed us to the point that led us to be here today. We are drawn to church, we are drawn to this community, we are drawn to some sort of gathering and meeting of people who might be looking for something, expecting something, and perhaps hoping for something.

And so let's be honest, if this was your first time in a church, is this the face that you were expecting to be up here? It's ok, I get it. I'm not your typical pastor. I'm not your typical Lutheran. I'm not even your typical Christian. I get that a lot. People are like "you???" when they hear that I'm a pastor. I mean that's pretty much the reaction I get from people visiting the church during the week, I get that from other pastors from pretty much any denomination that I haven't met before, I get that from the cops pretty much whenever I get pulled over and I tell them in hopes that I'm let off with a warning. Not that I condone that kind of activity.

So I get it. You think pastor and you have a certain image in your head, an image that I don't fit into. Like, I'm too young, I'm too cool, I'm too good looking. But I'm the exact right amount of humble though, so that's good. And as I've learned throughout seminary and various conventions and other wider church events, I'm not a typical Lutheran because I'm not

connected to the church through my ancestors enough, I'm not steeped in the liturgy and traditions enough, but the biggest and saddest reason is that I'm just not European enough. I've mentioned this a few times, but I'm the first and currently the only Canadian born Asian male clergy in the whole ELCIC. So I understand how it's a surprise when you first see me and learn what I do for a living.

But don't get me wrong, I'm not blaming anyone for this, it is just the unfortunate byproduct of our times, our context, and the way our church is with our history. People are used to what they're used to, and when something doesn't fit into that, then it's just kind of disorienting.

But this kind of prejudice isn't anything new. In fact, I think it started since the beginning of time. Since the creation of human beings, we have been sizing each other up, making assumptions based on appearance and background, and pretty much drawing lines in whatever sand that would even slightly suggest that a line can be drawn in it.

And through it all, it is always us, the line-drawers, that are on the "right" side of that line. We are always on the "good" side of history. We are always the ones that know better, can see better, and just in general are better. We can't help it, this mentality is ingrained in us, in our upbringing, in the very fibre of our society that makes us who we are.

For example, let's take Jesus' parable that we hear today. A very familiar parable that has been talked about in bible studies and sermons over the ages. But while Jesus in this passage does kind of explain what it means... we continue to hear the typical interpretations over and over, automatically cause us to relate to one of the two obvious characters in the story.

If you're anything like me, upon first listen we'd probably think that we're the good soil. You know, the ones where the Word took hold, grew into this nice plant, and was fruitful in who we are as people of God. I mean, why else are we here, right? We heard the message, accepted it, and now we're living it. We're good soil. Of course we are. At very worst we'd be one of the slightly harsher terrains but mostly good soil. That is probably the most common and automatic interpretation.

But then there are others who would relate to the sower, the one who haphazardly throws those seeds everywhere almost with not a care in the world. What we learn from the sower is that we are to just go and love everyone, regardless of how receptive they seem or don't seem to be. We go out, minister, share God's love, and be generally good people because again, we're the good guys in this story. We have the message that needs to be told, and it's up to the people, or the "ground", to decide if they'll listen to our good message or not. That seems to make sense too, right?

I mean, there really are only those two-ish characters in the story that we could relate to, and they're both pretty good. Either we're the ground or we're the one tending to the ground. If we're the ground, we make sure that we're the good ground that listens. Check, we've done that. If we're the one tending to the ground then make sure we're aware of how different types of ground react differently to the message that we're sharing. Check, we've done that too.

So we're good then, right? We know all there is to know about this sowing game?

Well, I actually think there is a third character in this parable that we might not have realised from the start. I think there is a third party that is present in this story that we might not have noticed because of our own “good guy” mentality. I think there is a third personality in the parable that we could and perhaps should relate to most and learn from.

And that third person is the observer. The one watching and seeing what is going on. Just the one outside of the story, hearing what is happening, and dealing with their own feelings about it. Basically, it’s the one who is left thinking “what the heck is this crazy sower doing?”

I mean, it doesn’t make sense to waste seed on anything but the good soil. It doesn’t make sense to haphazardly throw way good resources on ground that any experienced sower would know isn’t very receptive to those good resources. It doesn’t make sense to not size up the ground and judge what is good soil and what isn’t. Anyone could tell you that.

Because that’s exactly what we like to do, right? We size people up all the time and decide for ourselves what their worth is. We label people by their appearance, their political beliefs, and their religious affiliation. We categorize people by their gender, their ethnicity, their ability or lack thereof to be more like us. I mean, since we usually see ourselves as the protagonist, we’ll always have that power and privilege to make those distinctions.

But Jesus tells us through this parable that God sees it different. In this story God is the sower. The one that treats all types of ground the same, all worthy of hearing and accepting the message of grace and love. The world is the ground of different types and terrains that hears and processes this message differently and in its own way. And we are the ones watching this, seeing how God loves all, challenging our presumptions and paradigms, and called to stop the prejudice and hate towards those who we think aren’t worthy, aren’t open to hearing, aren’t like us.

Because in actual fact, all of us... ALL OF US... are sinners yearning for a Saviour. All of us have fallen short and are in need of forgiveness. All of us, each and every one of us, have a reason to be seen as anything but the protagonist of the story of life. But at the same time, all of us... ALL OF US... are equally regarded and loved by a benevolent God. All of us are invited and welcomed in God’s kingdom of acceptance and forgiveness. All of us have been lifted up out of condemnation, given value and worth, and saved from our own guilt and shame.

See all of us can be seen as that rocky and unyielding terrain upon which the seed has been thrown. All of us at some point could very easily have been regarded as not worth it or cost effective. All of us throughout our lives could have been sized up by others who thought “You??? You are loved and cherished by God?”

And thanks be to God, we, all of us, totally are. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Light Dawns on a Weary World (#726)

CREED (p. 104)

Together with God’s diverse good soil, 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 to see and recognise God's inclusive love in the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "by your inclusive mercy, O God," and you all may respond with **hear our prayer**. By your inclusive mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, we give you thanks for the love you show us and the providence that you give, allowing us to live in community with you and each other without reservation. Remind us always of the goodness that you bring to us, and may it be reflected in our ministry, service, and interactions with others. Especially we pray for our neighbouring faith communities; those that use this building and space for worship, work, and play; our partners Anglican Church of Canada and Moravian Church in Canada; and our own church the ELCIC. In particular, we pray for: Hills of Peace Lutheran Church in Kamloops and their pastor Jane Gingrich; and for our Global Mission companion, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Peru. By your inclusive mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you have created this earth and you water it abundantly, making it plenteous and enough to feed and provide for us all. We pray for this planet and everything in it, that we all continue to learn to live in harmony and mutual respect. May your hand of blessing and love and healing rest upon all that you have made. By your inclusive mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you smooth out the ridges of our rough edges and you soften our hearts with your abundant blessing. Lead and guide us in our nations behind our borders, that we might be able to reach out and see how we are but one people under you. Until then, we continue to pray for all areas that are affected by war, violence, and turmoil, and especially for those that we've sponsored to come into our country: Solyana Amanuel; Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; and Filimon Abraha. By your inclusive mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you give and you heal abundantly, and we are clothed with the joy of your love. Be especially with those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your presence with all of us can be seen and felt. We pray in particular for Bryan and Chona; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bev and family; Beulah; Sukhwant; John; Cari; Laura; Kandie; Thomas;

Willaim; Chris; Walter; Larry; Piet; Allen; Matt; Lucas; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts...

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

O Lord, we are the sheep of your flock and because of your eternal welcome and steadfast love, we cannot help but sing for joy with all of creation. May our connection with you and all the saints be always on our minds, that we might be inspired to live lives of faith and service in your holy name. By your inclusive mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in the truth and love taught to us by Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

PEACE (p. 106)

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, whose love for us all makes no distinction but is given freely, and it joins us as one church on earth, praising your name with the choirs of angels and the hosts of heaven with this, their unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 207)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

O Lord you are mighty and holy, and in you we know the goodness of love and grace. You bring us together to live as a community in your kingdom, and you remind us that we are equal in your eyes of mercy. So much so that when the time was right you sent to us Jesus, who never regarded equality with you as something to be exploited, but to live among us as one of us, showing us the ways of your righteousness and peace.

For on the night that he was betrayed, Jesus sat with his disciples for a final meal together, 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 took the common cup, gave thanks, and passed it around the table so they could drink from it 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 how we are equally deprived but also equally provided for, equally broken but equally healed, equally sinner but equally made to be saint, as we together recognize and proclaim the 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 do in your welcome and grace, showing us our inclusion into your kingdom, your community, your family, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER (p. 112)

Gathered as one people loved by 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 love for all people of all time.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 208)

When the Poor Ones (#725)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, we give you thanks for again feeding us and nourishing us with your Word and truth, showing to us our inclusion into your kingdom and community. Be with us as we move out into the world, that our lives reflect your light and justice and love onto all that we meet, through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Spirit. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

May the Creator God bless you as you go out in joy,
the Christ God shine on you and bring you back in peace,

and the Comforter God fill you with grace and lead you into singing, now and forever.
Amen.

SENDING HYMN: Canticle of the Turning (#723)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, see God's steadfast love available for all people.

Thanks be to God.

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