



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)



Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

July 2, 2023

ELW Holy Communion, Setting Ten

The welcome of baptism is for all God's children. This baptismal gift sets us free from the power of sin and death. In today's gospel, Christ promises that the disciple who gives a cup of cold water to the little ones serves Christ himself. From worship we are sent on our baptismal mission: to serve the little ones of this world and to be a sign of God's merciful welcome.

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

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather together in the name of our Lord, to sing of God's steadfast love that has been established forever, and to proclaim God's faithfulness that is set firmly in the heavens from age to age. For God has made a covenant with us, preserving our position in God's kingdom and family for all generations. And so we rejoice and are glad as we are strengthened by God's glory and favour and watched over by the Lord, the Holy One of Israel.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

GATHERING HYMN: Look Who Gathers at Christ's Table (ACS #977)

GREETING

The lavish grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the blessed love of God, and the rewarding fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

CANTICLE OF PRAISE (p. 204)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Steadfast God, we are greeted by your love as you welcome us into your presence. May our love and welcome be a faithful reflection of you, knowing that your grace extends to all people regardless of age, gender, or class, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

WORD

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 28:5-9

A reading from Jeremiah.

Through a symbolic action Jeremiah insisted that Judah and all the surrounding nations should submit to the king of Babylon (Jer. 27). Hananiah contradicted the word of Jeremiah, who in reply insisted that Hananiah's rosy prediction should not be believed until it came true. God confirmed the word of Jeremiah and sentenced the false prophet Hananiah to death (vv. 16-17).

⁵The prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD; ⁶and the prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen! May the LORD do so; may the LORD fulfill the words that you have prophesied, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the LORD, and all the exiles. ⁷But listen now to this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. ⁸The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. ⁹As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the LORD has truly sent the prophet."

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18

- ¹Your love, O LORD, forever will I sing;
from age to age my mouth will proclaim your faithfulness.
- ²**For I am persuaded that your steadfast love is established forever;
you have set your faithfulness firmly in the heavens.**
- ³"I have made a covenant with my chosen one;
I have sworn an oath to David my servant:
- ⁴**"I will establish your line forever,
and preserve your throne for all generations.'"**
- ¹⁵Happy are the people who know the festal shout!
They walk, O LORD, in the light of your presence.
- ¹⁶**They rejoice daily in your name;
they are jubilant in your righteousness.**
- ¹⁷For you are the glory of their strength,
and by your favor our might is exalted.
- ¹⁸**Truly, our shield belongs to the LORD;
our king to the Holy One of Israel.**

SECOND READING: Romans 6:12-23

A reading from Romans.

Sin is an enslaving power which motivates us to live self-serving, disobedient lives. Sin's final payoff is death. We, however, have been set free from sin's slavery to live obediently under God's grace, whose end is the free gift of eternal life.

¹²Do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. ¹³No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

¹⁵What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, ¹⁸and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.

²⁰When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. ²²But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 205)

GOSPEL: Matthew 10:40-42

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

When Jesus sends his disciples out as missionaries, he warns them of persecution and hardships they will face. He also promises to reward any who aid his followers and support their ministry.

[Jesus said to the twelve:] ⁴⁰“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; ⁴²and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Loving God, speak your Word to us this day and send your Spirit to equip and inspire us, that your grace-filled hospitality may be at the center of our lives, through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

So it’s that time of year! School is out for the summer. I love this time of year, the weather, the longer days, the freedom that comes with not having to worry about schools, books, or teachers and their... well no offence to teachers.

Don’t get me wrong, I don’t hate school or anything. I’m not even in school. It’s just that life is tougher when our kids have school. Like their sleep schedule is my sleep schedule. Their homework is my homework. Their stresses, worries, and at times, strong dislike for school have all become mine as well. So ok, yeah maybe there are times that I hate school, but just only when it’s in session. In the summer, school is fine. I don’t mind it at all. It’s just that when it’s actually on that I have a hard time with it.

And apparently, this coming September it’s going to be different for a lot of kids in BC. Many of us remember the letter grades that we got when we were in school, the A’s and B’s and C’s and so forth. They told us who was smart and who wasn’t so much, who understood the material and who didn’t, and who might make it far in the future and who probably should keep their options open. Well, as you’ve probably heard, the BC Ministry of Education has decided to get rid of those letter grades for all students grade 9 and under, and replacing them with categories in which the student falls under: emerging, developing, proficient, or extending. And my goodness the backlash that the Ministry received for this decision.

Now, I’m not an expert in education whatsoever, all I know is from my own experience from being in school for like 39 years or something like that. But what I noticed with the letter grades, which is what I think the Ministry is trying to battle against, is that the students would aim just for that grade, and not the actual learning and education and the improving of the self. Like they would go through the motions, temporarily memorize the facts, and complete just what they needed to do in order to meet whatever requirement is needed to get that A.

“Work hard,” they’d tell us. Read, study, interact in class. And if you can regurgitate what they teach you to the standard that they set, then you’ll be rewarded with an A. And I’ll admit, getting those A’s really were a bit intoxicating. Maybe it’s because I received so very few of them throughout my student career, but they really did make me feel special.

And I guess that is where the backlash came from. If we don’t recognise our kids for their achievements, are we teaching them that they don’t matter? If there is no prize for following the rules and meeting the standards, why should they even bother? If they aren’t rewarded for their hard work, why should they work hard?

So then is removing this grading system that tries to keep our kids hard working and disciplined, detrimental to their development? Is changing this system of checks and balances developing a generation of mediocrity? Is taking away the reward of early education effectively taking away the motivation to do well?

Looking at today’s gospel text, it would seem like Jesus wouldn’t be in favour of removing rewards. I mean, Jesus says the actual word for “reward” like three times in as many verses. So it would appear that rewarding the work of his followers is an important thing. And as it should be, right? Who doesn’t like to be rewarded? Who doesn’t enjoy being recognised? Who wouldn’t work harder knowing there is a prize at the finish line as opposed to there just being a general “proficient” classification?

Of course, being who we are, following who we follow, and believing what we believe, we would understand this reward to be eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. We know this reward to be God’s gracious forgiveness from sin. We have faith that our reward is surely life in God’s kingdom, God’s community, in God’s arms of love forever.

So in these motivational and encouraging words that Jesus gives to his disciples as he’s sending them out, he seems to be reassuring them that they will be rewarded for all they do for him, they will be rewarded for their hard work, they will be rewarded for their discipline and faith. And good for them. Good for them for doing what is right. Good for them for being those pillars of the faith and examples for us all. Good for them for earning their reward, which as Paul tells us in today’s second reading, is “the free gift of God.”

Wait, what? Hang on a sec.

Paul says that this reward, as we understand it, is God’s free gift. A free gift? I know these days of super discounted shopping sites and apps like Wish and Temu, we know that the term “free” gift can be super convoluted and perhaps even misleading. With them, to get your “free” gift you need to spend a certain dollar amount, you need to invite a certain number of your uninterested friends, you need to give up a certain percentage of your personal information. By then, the gift isn’t really free anymore, is it? I mean, by definition any gift should be free, otherwise it ceases to be a gift. It becomes a purchase, a prize that we have to work for, a reward for fulfilling some sort of requirement, meeting some sort of standard, reaching some sort of goal.

Oh my this just got confusing.

So if salvation is God's free gift, how can it be a reward? Well, in my opinion, it can't be. Salvation is God's free gift, we cannot earn it. Grace is God giving us what we don't deserve, so we cannot win it. Eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord is something that is given to us without requirement, stipulation, or condition.

But if that's the case, if salvation isn't our reward, why should we even bother listening to what Jesus has to say? Why do we ever need to follow God's call? Why do we need to work hard in our welcoming of others?

Well that's the thing, our salvation isn't dependant on what we do, who we are, or how welcoming we may or may not be. Our salvation is a free gift, that is sure. But the reward that Jesus is talking about is still a reward, it just isn't what many of us might automatically think it is. See, our reward for being welcoming is that we will be welcoming. Our reward for loving others is that we become loving people. Our reward in receiving and putting our faith in the promises of God is that we recognise God's promises that give us hope, we are strengthened in our faith, and we can more fully and clearly see others as God sees them: as individuals in need of community, as people who need to be seen and heard, as sinners in need of forgiveness.

See we cannot be rewarded with a free gift, but we can be rewarded with right relationship that we work for, a strong community that we commit to, and recognition of our citizenship in God's kingdom in which we find our belonging, our purpose, and our connection with all people, mutually loved and given value and worth through the grace shown to us by Jesus our Lord.

So under this light, I honestly don't care if my kids get a letter grade or not, because that isn't their reward for education. Their reward is learning and learning how to learn, not a piece of paper that may or may not get them a job. My work as a pastor isn't motivated by whatever you might see as riches in heaven or anything like that, but it is the honour to help build community and help all of us to see who we are and whose we are as people of God. My being a person in this world isn't about trying to be loved by God, but it's figuring out how I can reflect God's love that has been first given to me onto all those that I encounter.

Yes, we are saved, this is true but it isn't our reward for faith, but it is the reason for it. We are loved, but not because of what we have done or can do, but it is our motivation to go and do. We are welcomed into God's kingdom, but not because we have earned it by also being welcoming, but it is our strength and example for how we can be more welcoming by the grace of God, in the name of Christ, by the power of the Spirit.

So in this season after Pentecost, may we continue to reflect God's love onto others, motivated not by gain or reward, but by the grace and love that God had first shown us, granting us peace and joy, now and always. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Take My Life, That I May Be (#583)

CREED (p. 104)

Together with all of God's people welcomed into God's community, 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 graciously welcome and serve, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "Lord, in your steadfast mercy," and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. Lord, in your steadfast mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God, we sing of your love and proclaim your faithfulness throughout our worship and ministry, and we commit to reflecting your shining light out into the world. Strengthen us in the work that you call us to do that we might be a blessing on all whom we encounter. We lift up in prayer our neighbouring faith communities; our partner Anglican Church of Canada; and all the congregations, pastors, and our bishops Kathy, Larry, Sid, Jason, Michael, and Susan, of the ELCIC. In particular, we pray for out of our own BC Synod: Benediction Lutheran Church in Delta and their pastor Thomas Keeley; and King of Life Lutheran Church in Coquitlam and their interim pastor Dorothy Chu. Lord, in your steadfast mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God, your faithfulness is set firmly in the heavens and your love is established forever in all of creation. May our stewardship of this planet be pleasing to you and our care for all that you have made be a testament for all that you give us. We pray for those that are living in areas prone to harsh weather or natural disasters that be safe and shielded from the elements. Lord, in your steadfast mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God, you have made a covenant with us and have promised to save us and welcome us into your community with grace and love. May this grace and love touch the lives and hearts of all the nations, that we might collectively learn to live in peace. We pray especially for the areas of the world that face war, threat, and strife, that your hand of healing be upon them all. And we also pray for those that we've sponsored to come into our country: Solyana Amanuel; Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; and Filimon Abraha. Lord, in your steadfast mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O God, you welcome us to walk in the light of your presence and we rejoice daily in your name. Be with those among us who are ill, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your love might shine

in and around our lives always. Especially we pray for Bryan and Chona; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bev and family; Beulah; Sukhwant; Cari; John; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; William; Chris; Larry; Walter; Piet; Allen; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...
Lord, in your steadfast mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God, you are our king and you strengthen us with your glory and exalt us as your people in the world, as you include us in your kingdom with all the saints of all times and places. May our connection to you and each other always be on the forefront of who we are, that we might faithfully proclaim your love and grace to all. Lord, in your steadfast mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your gracious welcome and inclusion, shown 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, to at all times and places give thanks and praise to you, O God, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who comes to us with welcome and grace, and joins us together with the choirs of angels, the hosts of heaven, and the whole church on earth in praising your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 207)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

Yes Lord you are holy and mighty, and in you we put our trust. For you reveal to us how we are all connected to you and each other, lifting us up in grace and redeeming us with your love. And you send to us your son, Jesus, to lead and guide us in your ways of truth and righteousness.

For on the night that he was betrayed, your 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 took the cup, gave thanks, passed it around the table for 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 therefore that we see how we are all joined together as we are, equally welcomed and included in God's family, moving us to live inspired by this foundation of our faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

So it is to you, O Lord, that all honour and glory belong, 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)

Welcomed into God's kingdom 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, the blessing of relationship and love.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 208)

We All Are One In Mission (#576)

Here I Am, Lord (#574)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, you have again fed and nourished us with your love and truth and you fill us with the promise of grace and new life. Be with us as we go from this place, and move us to live lives of faith as we are loved and redeemed by the glory of your name, through Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

May the one who creates, redeems, and sustains you grant you the grace of peace, holiness, and eternal life, now and forever. **Amen.**

SENDING HYMN: To Be Your Presence (#546)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, blessed by the Spirit of freedom, joy, and love.

Thanks be to God.

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