



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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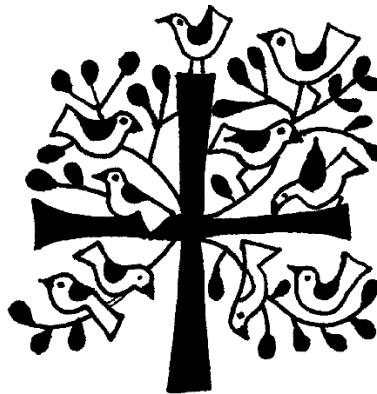
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Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

July 30, 2023

ELW Holy Communion, Setting Ten

As Solomon prays for wisdom, we seek to more deeply know the treasures of faith. In today's gospel Jesus offers everyday images that reveal to us the reign of God: a tree that becomes a sheltering home, yeast that penetrates and expands, a treasured pearl, a net that gains a great catch. Even as we seek the riches of God's reign, the great surprise is that God's grace finds us first!

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 hən̓d̓əmíŋəm̓ (Musqueam) and Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) speaking peoples.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather together to learn of and obey God's wonderful decrees that give us light and understanding. We long for God's Word and grace, and we wish no iniquity to have dominion over us. But we are rescued out of oppression as God's face shines on us, teaching us, and lifting us up in joy and peace, to worship God's name always.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

GATHERING HYMN: Gather Us In (#532)

GREETING

The surprising grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the steadfast love of God, and the soothing communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

CANTICLE OF PRAISE (p. 204)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Holy God, our hope is in your promise of a world made whole, a heavenly realm that is near in heart and close at hand, a place where we all find welcome and belonging. May our acts of courtesy and charity be transformed by your love, that they might grow abundantly and contribute to your kingdom for all, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

WORD

FIRST READING: 1 Kings 3:5-12

A reading from 1 Kings.

Because Solomon did not ask for long life, riches, or the defeat of his enemies, God gave him what he asked for: wisdom to govern the people well.

⁵At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." ⁶And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. ⁷And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. ⁹Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?"

¹⁰It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, ¹²I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you."

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 119:129-136

¹²⁹Your decrees are wonderful;
therefore I obey them with all my heart.
¹³⁰**When your word is opened it gives light;
it gives understanding to the simple.**
¹³¹I open my mouth and pant
because I long for your commandments.
¹³²**Turn to me and be gracious to me,
as you always do to those who love your name.**
¹³³Order my footsteps in your word;
let no iniquity have dominion over me.
¹³⁴**Rescue me from those who oppress me,
and I will keep your commandments.**
¹³⁵Let your face shine upon your servant
and teach me your statutes.
¹³⁶**My eyes shed streams of tears,
because people do not keep your teaching.**

SECOND READING: Romans 8:26-39

A reading from Romans.

These words celebrate the depth of God's actions for us. Through Christ's death for us and the activity of the Spirit praying for us, we are fused to God's love poured out in Jesus Christ. Nothing, not even death itself, is able to separate us from such incredible divine love.

²⁶The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

²⁸We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

³¹What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written,
"For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 205)

GOSPEL: Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Throughout Matthew's gospel, Jesus and his disciples proclaim the good news that "the kingdom of heaven is near!" Here, Jesus offers several brief parables that explore the implications of this announcement for people's lives.

³¹[Jesus] put before [the crowds] another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³²it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

³³He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

⁴⁴"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

⁴⁷"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹"Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." ⁵²And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Lord God, may the unfolding of your Word give light and wisdom to all who seek your truth, that our minds and hearts be opened by the presence of your Spirit, and we be able to see your kingdom throughout our lives and community, in Jesus Christ. Amen.

You know, I just love talking with my kids. And not just because they're at about the same maturity level as me, but because they're so honest and willing to be vulnerable and able to admit when they just don't understand. I'm being truthful here too, I'm not even trying to be funny.

I mean, just the other day, one of our kids was watching one of the newer Marvel properties that has somewhat of a complicated plot, one that I don't even know if I would have understood that well if it weren't for my vast comic book knowledge. So I asked if they understood what was going on, and they were like, "uh, no." And you all know how much I love to talk about this stuff so I very happily explained it to them... not just the plot, mind you, but the backstory of the characters, a complete commentary on the story's nuances and overarching themes, and even how it fits in the larger continuity of the whole Marvel universe.

After I was done, like some 15-20 minutes later, I asked, “you know what I mean?”

And their very innocent response was, “uh, no.” And that’s just music to my ears because now I can explain it all over again. So yeah, I love talking with my kids.

It’s different with most adults though. Most adults would probably be like, “oh yeah yeah, I get it, just stop talking my ear off about it.” Which is fine, not everyone has the culture and class and sophistication of a comic book nerd such as myself. But really, don’t a lot of us just say “yes, we understand,” when we really mean, “no, we don’t understand but we’ll say yes because we don’t want to look dumb or uninterested or maybe we just want to change the subject”?

Believe me, I’ve been a pastor for a long time now and I’ve had a looooot of conversations with folk over the years, and I can tell when people lose interest (like pretty much every Sunday). But they’ll politely nod, give a knowing look, and maybe even say “good sermon pastor.” I often am tempted to ask “oh yeah? What was your favourite part?” just to catch them off guard a little. But I don’t. I don’t want to embarrass anyone and quite frankly, I don’t know if I really want to hear about my sermon.

See, I do it too.

I think we all do. Because we like to look like we’re in the know. We like to seem learned. We want others to think that we have profound understanding and can easily comprehend complex concepts and subjects. Or maybe we just don’t want to look dumb.

Take the people that Jesus is talking to for example in today’s gospel reading. Jesus goes all rapid fire in the parable department today, like 5 one-liners in total. And while parables are supposed to make things easier to understand, quite honestly these ones don’t really seem to do that. But that didn’t stop the people from replying to Jesus’ question, “Have you understood all this?” with “Yes.”

Because no you didn’t! Don’t lie. Ain’t no one understand what Jesus was saying here.

Why not? Because these parables don’t make any sense. I mean, ain’t no birds making no nests in no mustard plants. For that matter, ain’t no mustard plants being a great shrubs either. Ain’t no woman making that much bread. Ain’t no dude buying a whole field because some treasure was in it. Ain’t no merchant selling everything to buy some pearl. And sure as heck ain’t no net catching every fish from the evil to the righteous one, with the evil being thrown in some furnace where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. I mean, when have you ever seen a fish weep? They ain’t got no tear ducts!

So you see what I mean? And don’t you just say “yes” now to get me to shut up. These parables really don’t make any sense. They aren’t likely or even probable situations that anyone would be able to relate to. They aren’t, in any way whatsoever, bringing us any closer to understanding the kingdom of God.

So what’s the point of all of them? Why did he tell so many so fast? Why is each one more confusing than the last and not actually helping us to understand this kingdom of heaven?

Well, maybe that is exactly the point. Maybe we aren't supposed to understand. Maybe we aren't supposed to be able to relate. Maybe the kingdom of heaven actually doesn't make any sense.

I mean, why would it? We live in a world that is run by power and greed, systems of oppression and exploitation, and we're taught basically our whole lives how to be materialistic, selfish, and to look out only for ourselves and our own best interests. But the kingdom isn't like that at all. The kingdom teaches us how we can treat each other with grace and mercy. The kingdom shows us how we are loved and forgiven and motivates us to, in turn, love and forgive. The kingdom reveals to us the joy of living in God's righteousness and community.

So according to what we know of the world, it doesn't make sense. Because of how we're taught to operate in the world, it's hard for us to understand Jesus' words and ways of being. And with how the world just is, it just doesn't jive with kingdom living and God's wisdom and teaching around relationship, community, and joy.

But we'd like to understand, don't we? We'd like to be shown exactly what the kingdom looks like so we can recognise it when we see it, we can emulate it if we wanted to, we can be it according to our call. And maybe above all, we want to know exactly what we need to know, so we can tell others what they should know and point out what they don't. Unfortunately that's where the church in all directions, whether left or right, seems to be headed. That seems to be the M.O. of those with strong political stances, those with their self-defined educations, those armed with their own brand of infallible knowledge. That seems to be where many of us might be, standing with those people hearing Jesus' words for the first time, perhaps responding with "yes" when asked if we understand. Because maybe, hopefully, by pretending that we understand, we might eventually understand.

But in light of all this, maybe it's ok to not understand. Maybe it's ok to not get it. Maybe it's ok to just continually ask questions and learn and see new viewpoints and be innocent and vulnerable like a child who just wants to know more about comic book and super hero movie plots. Because I think if we become more sure in our understanding and in our knowing and perhaps our possible arrogant conclusions, we lose some of the magic and mystery of the kingdom. We lose some of the fluidity and flexibility of what God's love and mercy could look like in and around our lives. We lose some of the gospel and grace of the joy of being God's people in this mixed up world.

As we heard before, the opposite of faith isn't doubt, but it's certainty.

See there is a beauty in not fully understanding but believing anyway. There is a freedom in knowing something to be true without being certain that it's true. There is a joy in seeing life as a gift, where things needn't always make sense for it to be full of grace, mercy, and love.

This is the kingdom. This is where we as God's people reside. This is where we see God's face in each other and in our relationships and community, where we aren't driven by knowledge and understanding, but by love and grace and faith in God's Word and promises. Yes, we'd like to know, I get it. But let's turn our focus and goal to be love over knowledge, forgiveness over understanding, and faith over certainty.

So the kingdom isn't something that makes much sense in the world, but it makes perfect sense when seen through the eyes of grace and peace, giving us the hope and joy in our Lord Jesus Christ, the one who gives us strength and leads us down paths of relationship, community, and love.

In this season after Pentecost, let's bring down the walls of our arrogant understanding and certainty, and learn how to learn with humility, as God continues to shower us with grace, love, and faith, and leads us to live in community in this kingdom of heaven. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less (#596)

CREED (p. 104)

With all of God's people in God's kingdom, 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 community in God's realm, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "God in your surprising mercy," and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. God in your surprising mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord your decrees are wonderful and we try to follow them with all our hearts. You show us the ways of your righteousness and love and they inform us of our own living in community and service. Strengthen us in our ministry, that that your wisdom and peace might shine through all that we do. We lift up in prayer all those who use our building for worship, work, and play; our neighbouring faith communities; our partners Anglican Church of Canada and Moravian Church in Canada; and our own ELCIC and all our bishops, pastors, and congregations. In particular we pray for Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church in Langley and their pastor Kristen Steele; and for all the hospital chaplains and their ministries in our Synod and country. God in your surprising mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, in the beginning you created light and it expanded our understanding of you and the love you have for us, shown to us through all that you have made. May we reflect this love back to you and onto others through our care of this planet and everything in it, that all might see and learn from the relationship that you have with us and this planet. God in your surprising mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, we long for your commandments and you are gracious onto us when we stumble and fall, and you inspire us with your love. May all world leaders and politicians also be inspired by this love and grace to govern wisely and fairly throughout the nations, especially among those that face war and violence. We also pray for those that we've sponsored to come into our country: Solyana Amanuel; and Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; and Filimon Abraha. God in your surprising mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you rescue us from oppression and you heal us into wholeness. Be with those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely that your love and grace might fill all our lives with peace and hope. Especially we pray for Bryan and Chona; Beulah; Bev and family; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Sukhwant; John; Cari; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; William; Chris; Larry; Walter; Piet; Allen; Matt; Lucas; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time... God in your surprising mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, let your face shine on us, your servants, for you welcome us into your kingdom and community with you and all the saints forever. May the lives of those that we've loved and lost inspire us in the faith, that our lives in turn can be inspiring to others as we are connected together as the one body of Christ. God in your surprising mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your eternal love and welcome, revealed to us through 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 reminds us of your unending love and grace that surpass understanding, joining us with the choirs of angels, the hosts of heaven, and the church on earth as one body and community, together praising your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 207)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

Holy and almighty God, we give you thanks for all that you have done, are doing, and will do to reveal to us our place in your kingdom through your surprising welcome and steadfast love. And when the time was right, you send to us Jesus, your Son, to further our knowledge and understanding of your ways of righteousness and peace.

For on the night that he was betrayed, your Son Jesus sat with his friends for a meal, and he took the bread, gave thanks, broke and shared it and said, "Take and eat, this is my body broken for you, do this for the remembrance of me."

And after they ate it, Jesus took the common cup, gave thanks, and 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 his bread and cup that we see how wide and welcoming the kingdom is, surpassing understanding but still grounds us together through this, 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, bringing us together in community into your kingdom, living and breathing at the one body of Christ, who shines on us with your grace and mercy together with your Holy Spirit, as you reign as one God throughout all the earth, now and forever. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER (p. 112)

Gathered into the kingdom of God 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 God's surprising welcome and grace.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 208)
Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling (#608)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, we give you thanks for continually feeding and nourishing us with your Word and welcome, and blessing us with your steadfast love. Strengthen us in our lives and communities, that as we go from this place we might see your face in the ordinary and extraordinary places in life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

May the God of creation bless you and keep you,
the God of liberation shine on you and be gracious onto you,
the God of illumination look upon you with favour, and give you peace.
Amen.

SENDING HYMN: Guide Me Ever, Great Redeemer (#618)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, with your feet guided by God's wisdom and goodness.
Thanks be to God.

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