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Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost
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ELW Holy Communion, Setting Eight

In today's first reading God uses the Gentile ruler Cyrus to accomplish divine purposes. When the Pharisees try to trap Jesus, he tells them to give the emperor what belongs to him and to God what belongs to God. To gather for worship reminds us that our ultimate allegiance is to God rather than to any earthly authority. Created in the image of God, we offer our entire selves in the service of God and for the sake of the world.

A warm welcome to those who are here worshipping 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 hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓ (Musqueam) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather together to sing to our Lord a new song throughout the earth, to bless God's holy name, and declare the glorious salvation that we are given. For the Lord is great and worthy to be praised, so we ascribe to God all majesty and magnificence, honour and power, and we humbly offer here our worship, in the beauty of God's holiness. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

GATHERING SONG: God of Grace and God of Glory (#705)

GREETING

The complete grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the encapsulating love of God, and the full communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

CANTICLE OF PRAISE (p. 185)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Holy God, you have made us in your image as your own children. We offer ourselves, our time, and our praise to you and your service, that the glory of your realm be seen by all and bring peace to all who suffer. We pray this in Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 45:1-7

A reading from Isaiah.

The prophet announces that Cyrus the Persian emperor is the one the LORD has anointed to end Israel's exile. The LORD makes this choice so that the whole world will recognize this LORD as the only God. Persia had a god of light and a god of darkness; the LORD claims sovereignty over both light and darkness.

- ¹Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus,
whose right hand I have grasped
to subdue nations before him
and strip kings of their robes,
to open doors before him—
and the gates shall not be closed:
²I will go before you
and level the mountains,
I will break in pieces the doors of bronze
and cut through the bars of iron,
³I will give you the treasures of darkness
and riches hidden in secret places,
so that you may know that it is I, the LORD,
the God of Israel, who call you by your name.
⁴For the sake of my servant Jacob,
and Israel my chosen,
I call you by your name,
I surname you, though you do not know me.
⁵I am the LORD, and there is no other;
besides me there is no god.
I arm you, though you do not know me,
⁶so that they may know, from the rising of the sun

and from the west, that there is no one besides me;
I am the LORD, and there is no other.
⁷I form light and create darkness,
I make weal and create woe;
I the LORD do all these things.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 96:1-9

¹Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
²**Sing to the LORD, bless the name of the LORD;
proclaim God's salvation from day to day.**
³Declare God's glory among the nations
and God's wonders among all peoples.
⁴**For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised,
more to be feared than all gods.**
⁵As for all the gods of the nations, they are but idols;
but you, O LORD, have made the heavens.
⁶**Majesty and magnificence are in your presence;
power and splendor are in your sanctuary.**
⁷Ascribe to the LORD, you families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD honor and power.
⁸**Ascribe to the LORD the honor due the holy name;
bring offerings and enter the courts of the LORD.**
⁹Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness;
tremble before the LORD, all the earth.

SECOND READING: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

A reading from 1 Thessalonians.

Most likely this letter is the first written by Paul. Paul gives pastoral encouragement and reassurances to new Christians living in an antagonistic environment. Their commitment of faith, love, and hope makes them a model for other new Christian communities.

¹Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace to you and peace.

²We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly
³remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and
steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by
God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only,
but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of
persons we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶And you became imitators of us and of the
Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, ⁷so
that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸For the word of
the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your
faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. ⁹For the people of
those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned

to God from idols, to serve a living and true God,¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 188)

GOSPEL: Matthew 22:15-22

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

After Jesus begins teaching in the temple, religious leaders try to trap him with questions. First they ask if God's people should pay taxes to an earthly tyrant like Caesar.

¹⁵Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap [Jesus] in what he said. ¹⁶So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. ¹⁷Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" ¹⁸But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" ²¹They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." ²²When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Holy God, strengthen us with your Word and truth and empower us to be your people, bearing your gospel and love for all the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

So this war going on is pretty horrible. What perhaps is even more horrible is that anyone who heard me say this can honestly ask, "Which one?" and it wouldn't even be a joke, and I don't even mean the two big ones that we see in the news now. A quick Google search tells me that there around 30 some odd wars going on right now. That's a lot of violence, a lot of death, a lot of brokenness.

I'm reminded of a scene from the TV show M*A*S*H that I saw earlier this week. The crew is working together performing an operation when Hawkeye mentions how there's always a war going on and another person mentions that war is hell. Hawkeye refutes that with, "No, war is war, and hell is hell. And of the two, war is worse." And he goes to explain that only sinners go to hell, so in hell there are no innocent bystanders. But in war, all but a select few of those involved are innocent.

Poor eschatological theology aside, Hawkeye has a point about war. If we think about all the wars that have happened in our lifetime or even in all of history, rarely, if ever, is it for the benefit of those fighting. There is always some political agenda behind it, whether it stems from religion, money, or just the want for more power. So it's never about what they tell us it's

about, whether they say it's to stop terrorism, to stamp out evil, or ridiculously enough, for peace.

All war ever is, is a violent way of getting more power. Because really, power is what makes the world go around. Whether it be power in politics, power in influence and control, power even in religious authority. It's this power that we as a species want, need, and would even kill for if it came down to it. And probably the most prevalent and apparent measure of that power in society now is in our pocketbooks.

Yup, money makes the world go round. Because to us, money controls, money rules, money is where the power is.

This reminds me of another meme that I saw earlier this week that had a quote from Lester B. Pearson that read, "If a man has an apartment stacked to the ceiling with newspapers, we call him crazy. If a woman has a trailer house full of cats, we call her nuts. But when people pathologically hoard so much cash that they impoverish the entire nation, we put them on the cover of Fortune magazine and pretend that they are role models."

That is the power that money has. It throws away good reason, morals and ethics... and even identity. For many of us, money is what makes you who you are, what defines you as a person, and what categorizes you in value and worth to society. We've been accustomed to think that the more money you have, the better you are, the happier you will be, and the more power you have. So, no wonder people fight over this so much now and throughout history.

This is the political landscape that provides the backdrop of today's gospel lesson. Throughout this time in history, you probably know that Israel was under Roman rule. And while on the most part, Rome couldn't give two shakes of a lion's tail about this small, backwater, hick town of Israel, the Israelites still had to do their part and pay their taxes to keep the rulers ruling. And so roughly once a month the people of Israel had to pony up some of the Roman currency to keep the Romans occupying their land.

I don't know, it sort of sounds like extortion to me. Like "protection" money, where they pay Rome a certain amount every month, and nothing bad happens to them. Rome had the muscle, the means, and the moral depravity, in other words, the power, to actually do something about whatever threat might come their way.

And at this point in time, the Pharisees and Herodians see Jesus as a threat. They had to get rid of him. So a trap was set. A trap that pulled on the people's heart strings. A trap about money and power.

The Pharisees had no love for this Roman government and their responsibility was to the true Israelite people. They knew that if Jesus would tell people to pay the tax, then the people would see him as a Roman sympathizer and would turn on him. The Herodians, however, we don't know much about. But just by their name we can assume that they actually are Roman sympathizers, perhaps some that were put in power by the Romans in order to keep Israel in check. They knew that if Jesus said not to pay the tax, they could arrest him for treason and have the government deal with his traitorous ways.

A win/win situation for these Pharisees and Herodians, two groups that we don't hear about working together at all, but are able to put their differences aside for this one plan. They just wanted to get this Jesus character out of their hair. This was their play to regain the perceived power that Jesus had and put it back in their own hands. This power that Jesus garnered from the people by spouting crazy ideas of equality and compassion and community.

And we know how the story unfolds. Jesus points out the image of the current emperor on the coin and tells them to give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.

While that just sounds like it makes sense to us, maybe because we've heard this story so many times, we might not see the absolute genius in this response. In a matter of a few words, Jesus dismantles the hierarchy of money, the constructed structures of control, the whole system of power. In a short sentence, Jesus reimagines the way that we see community, life, and the kingdom of God to which we all belong.

Jesus recognises the feelings the Israelites feel whenever they have to hand over that coin with the image of a false god on it. Jesus knows the hurt that the nation has from being occupied in their own God-given land. Jesus understands the struggle the commoners go through from not having any power of their own. And in that, he almost comically asks, "what power?"

This coin? It's just some metal that is bent out of shape. These rules of society? That's just some structure made up by those who have in attempts to put those who have-not in their place. This image of power? Caesar can keep his image of intimidation and threat and violence, but God will keep the image of compassion, love, and peace.

Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.

Give to the world its image of greed, inequality, and unfair power structures. Give to God the image of generosity, service, and love. The image of the world is all around us, in money, in society, and in these struggles for more power through war and other acts of violence. The image of God is harder to find, but can be in community, relationship, and in each of us, just as we are, lovingly made. The image of the world is what we're taught to strive for, what controls us, and what calls the shots. The image of God is what is given to us, welcomes us, and empowers us... not to do, but to *be*.

You see, the power that the world promises if we follow the world's rules is a power of might, intimidation, and materialism that doesn't last. Things that we are conditioned to think we need in order to "make it" in this life. But the power of God allows us to see who we are and whose we are, with the ability and drive to have compassion, serve our neighbours, and live in community. We are given the power to be God's children in the world, anointed and strengthened to see the value and worth in each other and in all people, who we are together brought to live in the kingdom filled with God's steadfast and eternal love.

So in the face of war, the power mongering, and the greed, we can reject the image of the world and embrace the image of God, and be reminded of our collective call to be God's people, joined by the grace of God as the body of Christ, reflecting the love of God onto all people by the righteousness, faith, and good news of God.

In this season after Pentecost, may we be reminded of the image of God in our communities, in our relationships, and in our hearts, that we might be empowered to strive toward compassion, justice, and peace for the sake of this broken world that continues to be dearly loved by the God who created it. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Lord of Glory, You Have Bought Us (#707)

CREED

Empowered with all of God's 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

Called into recognition and appreciation of God's goodness, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "by your saving mercy, O God," and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. By your saving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, all the earth sings to you a new song of blessing and proclaims your salvation from day to day. May our witness to your righteousness and grace be effective in revealing your love in and for the world. We lift up in prayer our neighbouring faith communities; those who use our building for worship, work, and play; our partners Anglican Church of Canada and Moravian Church in Canada; and our bishops, rostered leaders, and congregations of the ELCIC. In particular we pray for Oakridge Lutheran Church in Vancouver and the pastors and leaders that serve them; and for Redeemer Lutheran Church also in Vancouver and their pastor Katrina Vigen. By your saving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, your glory is declared among the nations and your wonders are reflected in all that you have made. May our appreciation for your creation be apparent in our care of this planet and all living creatures, that your love and trust given to us be seen in all that we do. We pray for the parts of the world that face harsh weather and natural disasters, and any who live there find safety. By your saving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, throughout the nations we find images of idols and evidence of greed, but your image of gracious Creator of the heavens and earth resides in all of our hearts as we dwell in the majesty and magnificence of your presence. May all world leaders and politicians ascribe to the image of you in us all, that their work in their kingdoms be for the good of all. We especially pray for the areas of the world that face war, violence, and turmoil, that your hope of love and peace might penetrate all hearts. We also pray for the continued support of those that we've helped to come into our country: Abraham Barhane and Solyana Amanuel; and for those that have not yet arrived: Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; as well as Filimon Abraha. By your saving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, we know that your power and splendor are found in your sanctuary, as ascribe to you the honour due to your holy and healing name. Be with those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your image imprinted upon all of us might never be forgotten or unseen. We pray especially for Beulah; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bryan and Chona; Bev and family; Sukhwant; John; Cari; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Will; Chris; Larry; Walter; Piet; Allen; Matt; Lucas; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time... By your saving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, we will worship you in your holiness as you welcome us into your courts of praise, to be with you and all the saints forever. May we always be reminded of our connection with you and each other, that we might see your image in the face of even the stranger, that your love for us all be reflected in all that we do and how we treat each other. By your saving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your care and compassion, shown to us through Jesus Christ our Saviour and 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 in all places
give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God,
through our Savior Jesus Christ;
who reveals to us who we are and whose we are, welcoming us to join
with all the choirs of angels,
the hosts of heaven,
and the church on earth,
in praising your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 190)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

Holy and merciful God, you have created us and rightfully claimed us as your own. And when we fall astray, you pick us up and remind us of your love and grace, welcoming us back into community with you and each other forever. And when the time was right, you sent to us Jesus, your Son, to set an example for us of just how far and wide your steadfast love goes.

For on the night that he was betrayed, Jesus sat with his friends that betrayed him, and started a meal together by taking some bread, giving thanks, and breaking it for all of them to share saying, "Take and eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

And after they ate it, he took the cup that they'd all share, gave thanks, and passed it to them to drink from saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me."

It is in this bread and cup that we are reminded of our connection in community, our relationship to each other, and our welcome into God's kingdom as we declare this basis of our faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

So it is to you, O God, that we ascribe all glory and majesty, knowing that you are the one who created us, saves us, and imprints an image of love and mercy in our hearts, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered into God's steadfast love 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

Take and eat, see God's face in each of our hearts.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 191)

Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love (#708)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, again you have fed and nourished us with your Word and truth, and you remind us of who we are and whose we are. May this food for our souls strengthen us for your service, that your love, blessing, and welcome for us all can be seen in all that we do, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

May the God who made us bless you and keep you, the God who saves us shine on you and be gracious onto you, the God whose image we bear in our hearts look upon you with favour, and give you peace.

Amen.

SENDING SONG: Christ, Be Our Light (#715)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, declare God's glory through what you do and who you are.

Thanks be to God.