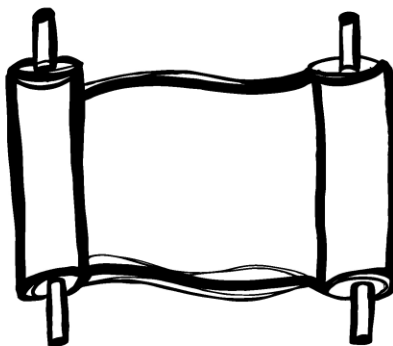


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Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost
October 29, 2023
ELW Holy Communion, Setting Eight

Jesus' summary of the law in today's gospel echoes our first reading from Leviticus. We are called not only to love God with heart, soul, and mind, but also to love our neighbor as ourselves. It is out of such deep care that Paul shares the gospel with the Thessalonian community. In the confession of sins, we acknowledge that we have not loved God, neighbor, and self; yet we gather to hear the word of forgiveness and to be strengthened by word and meal to be signs of God's love and mercy in 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 hən̓q̓əmiñəm̓ (Musqueam) and Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather in delight of God's Word and to meditate on God's teachings. For they are like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season, prospering over the wicked ways of the world. And so we stand upright in the presence of God, offering our worship to the One whose righteousness and love last forever, through the truth and wisdom revealed to us through Jesus Christ. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

GATHERING SONG: A Mighty Fortress Is Our God (#504)

GREETING

The compassionate grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the welcoming love of God, and the equitable fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

CANTICLE OF PRAISE (p. 185)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of creation, you have made us to be nourished in your care, and you grant us strength and wisdom to navigate this world and life with faith and love. Show us how to love our neighbours, and teach us to delight in all that you have made in us, through us, and all around us, for the sake of community and right relationship with you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18

A reading from Leviticus.

The Holiness Code in Leviticus urges people to be holy because God is holy. Holiness is lived out as God's people exercise justice and love in their dealings with one another. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves.

¹The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

²Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

¹⁵You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. ¹⁶You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the LORD.

¹⁷You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. ¹⁸You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 1

¹Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked,
nor lingered in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seats of the scornful!

²**Their delight is in the law of the LORD,
and they meditate on God's teaching day and night.**

³They are like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do not wither;
everything they do shall prosper.

⁴**It is not so with the wicked;
they are like chaff which the wind blows away.**

⁵Therefore the wicked shall not stand upright when judgment comes,
nor the sinner in the council of the righteous.

⁶**For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked shall be destroyed.**

SECOND READING: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

A reading from 1 Thessalonians.

Paul uses maternal imagery to depict the caring and nurturing relationship he shares with the Thessalonian Christians. When he first came to their city it was not to benefit himself but to share the gospel with them, which was his responsibility as an apostle of Christ.

¹You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, ²but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition. ³For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, ⁴but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; ⁶nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, ⁷though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. ⁸So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 188)

GOSPEL: Matthew 22:34-46

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Put on the spot by the Pharisees, Jesus displays wisdom by summarizing the law of God in just two commandments and by demonstrating the Messiah must be more than the son of David.

³⁴When the Pharisees heard that [Jesus] had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” ³⁷He said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ ³⁸This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

⁴¹Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: ⁴²“What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” ⁴³He said to them, “How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

⁴⁴“The Lord said to my Lord,

“Sit at my right hand,

until I put your enemies under your feet”?”

⁴⁵If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?” ⁴⁶No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

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

SERMON

Holy God, may your Word breathe a breath of life into our hearts and minds that we might be stirred to see the joy of your blessing and providence, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let me be brutally honest with you. I never really liked the Lutheran traditions and practices while I was growing up. But before you fire me, also know that I didn't like any Christian traditions and practices while I was growing up. And although I grew up in the Lutheran church, I've been exposed to a lot of different traditions throughout my years through visiting different churches with my friends and family. From the happy clappy singing and dancing to the reserved and reverent meditation. From the charismatic supernatural to the contemplative silence. From the speaking in tongues to the speaking in ordered liturgy. There isn't much out there that I haven't seen first hand, experienced for myself, or at least read about in the wide global Christian church.

And again, I just didn't like it. From whatever denomination or culture that I was experiencing, it always felt like it was all... well... kind of fake. Maybe even forced. It most certainly didn't feel freeing as most Christian faith would promise it would.

To me, it was like these traditions were the foundation of the denomination or expression. Like if you didn't do like they did, then you didn't belong, you didn't fit in, you weren't a true member of their group. I was even once accused of not having any faith because I didn't do as I was told, because to them, what I was told was the one *true and* only proper way to express faith.

I know, even as I say these words it sounds ridiculous. We know cognitively that it isn't our practices or traditions that defines our faith, but rather our faith that defines our faith. We proclaim that we're not saved by works, so we shouldn't be judged by them. We profess that it isn't our obedience to these customs, these rules, these *commands* that saves us.

And that's a good thing too, because if we're honest with ourselves, none of us really like to be told what to do, do we? We don't like the "we must in order that" kind of thing. We resist the oppressive oppression from our oppressors and say no, we'd much rather do what we do when we do what we do, thank you very much.

So I guess this is why I didn't like those practices and traditions as I was growing up. They felt like judgement telling me that I'm not what I'm supposed or needed to be. They felt like constraints that I had to shoe horn myself into so I could feel accepted and included. They felt like commands to participate in these unusual and unfamiliar rituals lest I be cast out into the dark abyss where there may or may not be much weeping and gnashing of teeth.

And it was uncomfortable. It didn't feel right. It just wasn't me. And it isn't easy to change just because we're commanded to change.

We're commanded a lot in the bible aren't we? We're given a lot of "do this" and "don't do this". I mean, there are those 10 that we know so well (or at least maybe around 5 of them), and we'd say that we're pretty faithful in keeping them (or at least the ones that we're familiar

with). We'd say that we're pretty obedient. We'd admit that we're pretty good Christians because we keep these rules as best we could.

Well, we can keep the easy ones anyway. Like don't murder? Yeah, the 25 to life is a pretty good deterrent as well. Don't commit adultery? That's easy to do when I have like literally no options. Keep the Sabbath holy? Ok, I guess if I *have* to make sure I take at least one day off a week, I think I can do that. These are the easy ones.

But then we get to the harder ones. Like honour your mother and father, which arguably will include in-laws, and those times that they are acting unreasonable or can't figure out that really user-friendly app on their phone. And don't lie... even when lying feels justified and better than telling the truth. And a really tough one for me is don't be jealous of those around you, even those with nicer clothes, nicer cars, and just nicer everything than I do. The commandments hit a bit closer to home for me, calling me to change parts of me that have been me for so long.

Today's first reading gets a bit into specifics too. Be holy... don't render unjust judgements... don't slander... don't hate... be holy.

Um. Mighty tall order there. I don't think anyone can follow all of these, no matter how moral or ethical or how Christian they are.

And then Jesus comes along in our gospel reading for today, not your typical Reformation gospel lesson, but one that we rarely ever get but still so appropriate for today, says that there are but two commandments: Love God, and love neighbour as yourself. On these all the commandments and laws hang.

Um, yikes?

Sure, at first we might think that it's no big deal. We can do this. But if you really think about it, can we be told to change our feelings for others? Can we force ourselves to regard someone in this way? Can we be commanded to love?

I mean, even the genie from Aladdin couldn't make people love other people, and that guy had phenomenal cosmic power, in an itty bitty living space, but still. What makes us think that we can follow this command? That we change just because we're told to? That we actually learn to love?

So yeah, I never liked the Christian practices and traditions while I was growing up, and I still don't like being told what to do. Yet, I ended up as a Lutheran pastor, this mainline denomination which arguably has among the most practices and traditions. Well, there's a story behind that. As I was in seminary, I didn't tell myself to start to like this stuff. I didn't force myself to appreciate these customs. I didn't command my heart to change to see the deep richness of the rituals, the fulfilling meaning in the mythologies, the absolute satisfaction in these sacraments, but my heart was changed anyway. The more I learned, the more I experienced, the more I just saw and recognised God in my life, in my community, and in the world, I just started to love more. Love the things we do, love the people we meet, love this thing we call life and relationship.

Now, I'm not saying that I'm the perfect Christian, not by any long shot. But what I'm saying is that this command to love God and love neighbour and even to love myself isn't really a command anymore. But it's more of a description of who I am changing to be, what I am empowered to be like, how I am being *reformed* as a beloved child of God.

See these are no longer commands that I must follow. They aren't rules that I have to keep. They aren't things I must do in order to fit in with the others. But it is how I express my faith. It's how I can see God in my life and in this place of worship and community. It's just now who I am.

And as I see this, as I see how God intersects with the world, in the church, and throughout my life, I can see how this God has lifted me up, washed away my iniquities, and declared me as beloved. And so can I then see this regard and love God has for others, reminding me that just as the very flawed human being that I am can be loved, so can all people. Loved by God. Loved by me. Loved through the welcome and inclusion in this kingdom with wide open doors, as we are all equally sinner and saint, fallen and forgiven, wretched and redeemed.

Friends, this is the message I believe is at the heart of the Reformation, that we observe today. It is a message of welcome, grace, and love. A message that tells us that it is not our practices and customs that define our position as members in God's family, but it is by God's sole action of deciding that we are worthy of salvation that brings us together as a community, a church, a mass of God's beloved and valued children.

Truly, this "love God and love neighbour as yourself" thing isn't so much a command as it is a description of who we are, how we're created, and what we're being reformed to be throughout this crazy journey we call life, now and forever.

On this Reformation Sunday, a day that we remember the unending change but also the unchanging ends of life, may we see our continual reforming as God's redeemed children: welcomed and blessed as citizens of God's kingdom, and the graciously given love and peace that surpasses all understanding. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Here I Am, Lord (#574)

CREED

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

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

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

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Called to love God and neighbour, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, “by your loving mercy, O God,” and you are invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. By your loving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you counsel us in your righteousness and lead us to walk on paths of truth and peace. Strengthen us to follow your ways of loving service, and may our lives be effective in the positive change in the world. We lift up in prayer our neighbouring faith communities; those that use our building for worship, work, and play; our partners Anglican Church of Canada and Moravian Church in Canada; and the bishops, rostered leaders, and ministries of the ELCIC. In particular we pray for St. Peter’s Estonian Lutheran Church in Vancouver and their interim pastor Andres Rebane; and for Peace Lutheran Church in Vernon and their pastor David Hunter. By your loving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, we see your good order in the laws and teachings in creation, that flourishes and prosper by your grace. May our stewardship of all that you have made be pleasing to you, and may this world continue to serve as our source of life for generations. By your loving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you are the ultimate judge between the upright and the wicked, and you determine for us what is right and wrong. Grant all world leaders, politicians, and people of influence this discernment, that we all might be able to work together toward true community in your kingdom. We pray for peace in the world, especially the areas that currently face war, violence, and turmoil. We also pray for those that we’ve sponsored to come into this country: Abraham Barhane; and Solyana Amanuel; as well as for those who have not yet arrived: Maেকেle Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; and Filimon Abraha. By your loving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you are righteous and kind and you bring us healing and welcome us back into wholeness. Be with those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your love for all people continue to shine through our hearts and our community. We pray especially for Beulah; Bev and family; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bryan and Chona; Sukhwant; John; Cari; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Will; Chris; Larry; Walter; Piet; Allen; Matt; Lucas; and all we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...
By your loving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you destroy in us the wickedness of our sin, and you bring us into your kingdom to live with you and all the saints. May the lives of faith of the past remind us of our calling and inspire us to heed it, that our lives be a reflection of your love and grace in the world. By your loving mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

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

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

MEAL

DIALOGUE

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

PREFACE

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
that we should at all times and in all places
give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God,
through our Saviour Jesus Christ;
who leads us in your truth and righteousness,
revealing to us all the ways of your love,
which invites us to join 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. 190)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

O God, you are holy and mighty, and in you we find joy and hope. You teach us to love you and your commandments that inspire us to see the value and worth in each other and in ourselves, drawing us together as a community of your people. And when the time was right, you send to us your Son, Jesus, to lead us further into your truth of righteousness and peace.

For on the night that he was betrayed, Jesus full of love and grace, sat with his friends for a meal knowing that they will soon abandon him. He took some 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, he took the common cup that they shared, 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."

So it is in this bread and cup that we are reminded of the nourishment we receive from your community, the feeding we get from your truth, and the love we are given by your Word, moving us to together 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 in you we are made to be saints, forgiven and love, redeemed and saved, through the power and teaching of Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered into one 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, this is God's love poured out for you.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 191)

My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less (#596)

For by Grace You Have Been Saved (#598)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, we give you thanks for all that you have done, all that you do, and all that is to come. For in you we see the value and worth given to us all, moving us to be your people in the world, reflecting your love onto all whom we encounter, through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord.
Amen.

SENDING

BLESSING

May the God who created you bless you and keep you,
the God who saves you shine on you and be gracious onto you,
the God who makes you holy look upon you with favour, and give you peace.
Amen.

SENDING SONG: Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (#631)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, love God, love neighbour, love yourself.
Thanks be to God.