



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

OF SOUTH BURNABY, BC

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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Second Sunday of Advent

December 10, 2023

Tree of Life

John calls people to repent, to clear the decks, to completely reorder their lives so that nothing gets in the way of the Lord's coming. The reading from Isaiah gives the context for this radical call: the assurance of forgiveness that encourages us to repent; the promise that the coming one will be gentle with the little ones. Isaiah calls us all to be heralds with John, to lift up our voices fearlessly and say, "See, your God is coming!" We say it to one another in worship, in order to say it with our lives in a world in need of justice and peace.

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 hən̓q̓əmiñəm̓ (Musqueam) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather to worship our gracious Lord, who restores us, forgives our iniquity, and blots out all our sin. And so we listen to what the Lord God says, speaking peace to our hearts and increasing our faith. For God's salvation is near, full of steadfast love, faithful righteousness, and the peace that surpasses understanding, preparing the pathways of our hearts to see God's love, know God's truth, and recognize God's presence in the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

LIGHTING OF ADVENT WREATH

And so then as we light the second candle of this wreath, we are reminded of the light of God entering into the world, surrounding us with hope and peace, and filling us with meaning and purpose. We humbly ask for God's blessing upon this circle of life, as we look forward to the joy and love that Christ brings to our hearts, our community, our world, through the promise of God, by the power of the Spirit. **Amen.**

Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah (#240) verses 1-2

O God of peace, come.

Let us walk in faith of the Lord. Amen.

GATHERING SONG: On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry (#249)

GREETING

The unexpected grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the abundant love of God, and the inclusive communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

HYMN OF PRAISE (p. 6)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Loving God, our hearts are prepared to see you in this place as you call us to repentance and lead us down your paths of righteousness. Strengthen us to live lives of hope and peace, spreading your good news of salvation and welcome to all, through Jesus our Lord and Saviour. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 40:1-11

A reading from Isaiah.

In grand, flowing, poetic lines, the prophet announces that the exile of God's people in Babylon is over. God will deliver Israel and will care for her as a shepherd cares for the sheep. This word can be trusted, because the only enduring reality in life is the word of God.

¹Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.

²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

³A voice cries out:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

⁵Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

⁶A voice says, “Cry out!”
And I said, “What shall I cry?”

All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.

⁷The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.

⁸The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand forever.

⁹Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
“Here is your God!”

¹⁰See, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.

¹¹He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

¹You have been gracious to your land, O LORD;
you have restored the good fortune of Jacob.

²**You have forgiven the iniquity of your people
and blotted out all their sins.**

⁸I will listen to what the LORD God is saying;
for you speak peace to your faithful people and to those who turn their hearts to you.

⁹**Truly, your salvation is very near to those who fear you,
that your glory may dwell in our land.**

¹⁰Steadfast love and faithfulness have met together;

righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

¹¹**Faithfulness shall spring up from the earth,
and righteousness shall look down from heaven.**

¹²The LORD will indeed grant prosperity,
and our land will yield its increase.

¹³**Righteousness shall go before the LORD
and shall prepare for God a pathway.**

SECOND READING: 2 Peter 3:8-15a

A reading from 2 Peter.

This short letter deals with pressing concerns regarding the final advent of Jesus, especially concerns that could arise over its apparent delay. The author of the letter calls on Christians to anticipate the promised coming of the Lord through conduct dedicated to God.

⁸Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. ⁹The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.

¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

¹¹Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, ¹²waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? ¹³But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

¹⁴Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; ^{15a}and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 10)

GOSPEL: Mark 1:1-8

The holy gospel according to Mark.

Glory to you, O Lord.

The Gospel of Mark does not begin with a story of Jesus' birth but with the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord.

¹The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

²As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;

³the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,'"

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after

me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Almighty God, send your Spirit in this place to speak peace in our hearts, that your presence among us be revealed, recognised, and cherished, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Well, my back is pretty much better. It didn't actually take that long, pretty much exactly 8 days. I just woke up Wednesday morning and the pain was mostly gone and I could stand up straight, walk, and even dance around a little bit like a dork. I even found the strength to go skating with our daughter's class field trip on Friday. I was on the ice for 10 minutes or so, and my back was fine. My feet on the other hand...

In case you don't know what I'm talking about, last week I shared about how I threw out my back by contorting my body in a way that wasn't all that smart while carrying something that wasn't all that light. So for much of the week and even during that sermon, I was in a lot of pain. And now, apparently, I'm better. Not sure if I'm any wiser, mind you, as I did notice that I haven't exactly changed my "pick up heavy things" posture. I mean this tree wasn't going to put up itself. But I guess I'm at least more aware? *shrug* Either case, although it just took about 8 days for the pain to subside, honestly it felt a lot longer than that.

So long, in fact, I was starting to think that the hobble was my new walk and that I was doomed to never be able to sit for more than 10 minutes at a time. I was beginning to believe that this was just my life now: unable to do the things that I used to, like carry oversized cabinets out to the alley anymore. I was really feeling a bit lost, like I was no longer myself, and maybe a bit like I was stuck. Not just stuck in that slightly bent over position because my back wouldn't allow me to stand up straight, but stuck in the pain, stuck in the sadness and despair of the situation, stuck in my own personal wilderness in which I couldn't really get out of.

I know, I know, dramatic. After last week's service many of you came up to me with a knowing look, a reassuring word, and a slight bit of an eye roll letting me know that I ain't seen nothing yet. But it's just how I felt, it's what I was going through, it's just my way of relating the text to my life so I have something to talk about in these Advent sermons that always seem to give me some trouble.

Because we hear about this wilderness in today's texts, don't we. We hear about the awful and displacing wilderness that the Israelites were exiled to when they got kicked out of their home and promised land. We hear about the odd and unusual wilderness where John the baptizer lived by choice perhaps for its abundance of locusts and stray camel hair. And we hear about metaphorical wildernesses that we might find ourselves in, through the low parts of life, through the trials we face, through the things that just happen.

And it's kind of lonely out there, isn't it?

I'm sure you all know what I'm talking about. And if by chance you don't, then believe me, you will. Life just isn't always peachy keen, a bed of roses, sunshine and rainbows, or whatever.

No, life can get hard, really hard, and when it is, we can find ourselves feeling just as I described: lonely in our own wilderness of despair.

Well, this turned out to be a great topic for this 2nd Sunday of Advent, am I right? See what I mean about these sermons giving me trouble?

Because the 2nd Sunday of Advent is the week we talk about peace. Not as in a piece of pie, although I could go for one right now, but peace as in calm, contentment, *shalom*. The peace that comes with our faith. The peace that is promised to us. The peace that surpasses understanding. But if we're honest with ourselves, we don't often see or feel it. Quite the opposite, really. Whatever peace we do feel doesn't surpass any kind of understanding, really, in fact it's totally understandable, as in it's usually weak, unsubstantial, pretty much non-existent. As I said, we're much more akin to be in our own wildernesses, where we see our troubles and our sorrows like no one knows.

No one, but Jesus.

See much like the lyrics of that Louis Armstrong classic, Jesus knows what we go through, knows the pain, knows the difficulties we face. And don't forget that we'll read about Jesus encountering a wilderness journey himself. Jesus knows these troubles because he had them too. He knows the sorrow because he felt them as well. He knows what we go through because he is among us as one of us.

And as one of us, we know that he can give us the support, comfort, and *hope* that whatever it is that we are going through will pass. Knowing that Jesus feels our pain, we see how we're not alone, how we are all connected, how we can find *peace*.

This is what Isaiah was talking about with the whole "prepare a way out in the wilderness" thing. This is what John the baptizer was talking about when he says someone more powerful than him is coming. This is what the gospel of Mark is talking about when it says that this is the beginning... the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Because really, this is good news. This is comfort and peace in knowing that God is with us in the person of Jesus. This is gospel.

Still... we don't feel it that much do we. Maybe we have pockets of peace here and there, where we're finally content with everything just at that moment, but then before you know it, the next bill comes, the baby wakes up crying, or the police lights flash in your rearview mirror. Sure we can have peace but we never stay there. We can be content, but something happens again soon enough. We can know that we are cared for and not alone, but before too long we find ourselves feeling lonely yet again and right back there in the wilderness.

And that's ok. I mean, the ups and downs of life is just that: up and down. So there has to be a down before we can really feel the up. There first has to be pain and some kind of brokenness before we can have comfort and healing. There needs to be turmoil and hardship before we can feel peace.

This isn't to say that we should look for trouble or go get hurt on purpose. This doesn't mean that we should live carelessly so we'll find peace faster. I'm not telling anyone to just stop

looking before leaping because God will save us anyway. Rather, I'm saying that when the trouble comes, which we know it will, we can have hope that comfort will come as well. When we're in pain from whatever we're hurting from, maybe a broken relationship, a broken dream, or a broken back, we can have hope that we will be given healing. When life has us feeling like we're wandering aimlessly in the wilderness and alone, we can have hope that the good news the form of a child destined to save us, will reveal to us a peace that isn't just a state of emotion, but a state of mind. A state of mind that reminds us that no matter what we are going through or what troubles we've seen or what sorrow we might face, we are not alone but are held in the understanding arms of love. Glory, hallelujah.

This is the progression through the themes of Advent. First, we have the hope in knowing that we aren't alone in our hardship and pain, and then we see that even in all of that we are given peace. Peace in our faith. Peace in community of love and support. Peace in the good news of Jesus Christ, that begins in the wilderness of life, the darkest moments, the times that we need it the most. This is the peace that surpasses understanding, in that no matter what life might throw at us, we can still be content in holding onto the love of God, the promise of salvation, and the knowing that we have been, are, and will always be welcomed parts of this universal body of Christ that spans all time and space. This is the peace that is offered, the shalom that promised, and the love that carries us as God's people, in this life and the next.

So as we continue through this season of Advent, may we increase in the faith of Jesus, keeping our hope in the peace that transcends everything will continue to enter into our lives, filling us with joy and love through the promise of this good news that starts in each of our wildernesses. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: He Came Down (#253)

CREED (p. 12)

Together with all those residing in the peace of God, 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 to see and recognize God in our midst, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with “in your mercy and peace, O God,” and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. In your mercy and peace, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you have forgiven our sins and blotted out our offenses, and in thanksgiving we proclaim to the world all that you have done. May our faithful witness to your works accurately reflect your love and grace to all people. 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; our bishops, rostered leaders, congregations, and ministries of the ELCIC. We also pray for out of our own BC Synod: Chetwynd Shared Ministry in Chetwynd and all the pastors and leaders that serve there; and for Christ Lutheran Church in Chiliwack and their pastor Dean Andersen. In your mercy and peace, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, your glory is present throughout the lands and your very creation speaks of your salvation. May we properly care for all that you have entrusted to us, that this world might continue yield its increase and be restored to its natural beauty. In your mercy and peace, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, teach the leaders of the world to listen to what you’re saying, for you speak peace to all and lead us in your justice. May this peace be realized in the world, not just between nations but between neighbours, family members, and communities. We especially pray for this peace in those areas currently facing war, violence, and political turmoil. We also pray for the continued support of those that we’ve sponsored to come to this country: Abraham Barhane and Solyana Amanuel; as well as those that have not yet arrived: Maekele Kiflu, Selam Hailie, and their children; and Filimon Abraha. In your mercy and peace, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, your steadfast love and faithfulness have met as you show us your righteousness and peace. Look down from heaven upon us, for we are in need of your healing. We pray especially for those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your love and peace rest upon them as we together journey toward wholeness. In particular, we pray for Beulah; Bev and family; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bryan and Chona; Sukhwant; Cari; John; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Will; Chris; Larry; Walter; Matt; Lucas; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...
In your mercy and peace, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, just as John the baptizer pointed to the Messiah, may we see how the saints have pointed toward you, preparing a pathway for you into our hearts. Remind us of the lives of faithfulness that have gone before us, that we be inspired by their examples of love and service. In peace, O God, **hear our prayer**.

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in the coming and present Messiah, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**.

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

MEAL

DIALOGUE (p. 14)

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 place give thanks and praise to you, Holy and almighty God, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, whom we look to and who is present among us, joining us with 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. 14)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

O Lord, you have been gracious to us and you welcome us and restore us in your community. For you have shown us grace and forgiveness, and you speak peace to us as your people in the world, freely saving us with your steadfast love and faithfulness that fills this land with your glory. And through your Son Jesus, you have revealed your righteous and your ways of truth and peace.

For on the night that he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus gathered with his friends for a meal, where 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."

Then after they ate, he took the cup, gave thanks and shared that 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 with this food graciously given to us that prepares a pathway in our hearts for God, even as we declare this basis of our faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

O Lord, your grace and mercy are endless and you shower us with love and you bring us peace. May we accept these gifts you give and be strengthened for your ministry in the world, through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER (p. 17)

Gathered in peace by the 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 presence and peace with us.
Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 17)
Prepare the Royal Highway (#264)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Lord, we give you thanks for Christ entering into the world in the past, present, and future, meeting us where we are and nourishing us with your Word and truth. May we be strengthened by your love, that we might go forth in your name, living in confidence by your peace, through Jesus Christ.
Amen.

SENDING

BLESSING

May faithfulness spring up from the ground and righteousness look down from heaven as you walk in the way of peace, and may the blessing of God, Shepherd, Saviour, and Spirit, be with you now and always.
Amen.

SENDING HYMN: All Earth Is Hopeful (#266)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, strive to live in hope and peace.
Thanks be to God.