



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

OF SOUTH BURNABY, BC

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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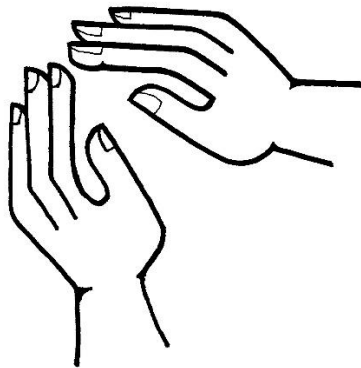
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**Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
February 4, 2024
ACS Holy Communion, Setting 12**

In Isaiah the one God who sits above the earth and numbers the stars also strengthens the powerless. So in Jesus' healing work we see the hand of the creator God, lifting up the sick woman to health and service (*diakonia*). Like Simon's mother-in-law, we are lifted up and healed to serve. Following Jesus, we strengthen the powerless; like Jesus, we seek to renew our own strength in quiet times of prayer.

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 in worship this day, to sing praises in honour of our God. The Lord rebuilds our communities and restores our lives, as we are healed and our wounds bound up. So great is our Lord and mighty in power, full of wisdom and grace, that we are lifted up, brought into community, and provided for through grace and mercy. And so in our thanksgiving, we come humbled, loved, and saved, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

GATHERING SONG: Precious Lord, Take My Hand (#773)

GREETING

The restoring grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the redeeming love of God, and the reforming fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you. **And also with you.**

SONG OF PRAISE (ACS p. 31)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Gracious God, you call us to follow you through Christ, and to spread the good news of your love to all people. Strengthen us in our lives of proclamation, that we might be a blessing to all that we meet, through Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 40:21-31

A reading from Isaiah.

The Judeans in exile have a good reason to be hopeful: the one who will bring them to freedom is the God who created the world, the God who subdues the rulers of the earth and gives strength to those who are weary.

- ²¹Have you not known? Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?
- ²²It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
and spreads them like a tent to live in;
- ²³who brings princes to naught,
and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.
- ²⁴Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,
scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,
when he blows upon them, and they wither,
and the tempest carries them off like stubble.
- ²⁵To whom then will you compare me,
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.
- ²⁶Lift up your eyes on high and see:
Who created these?
He who brings out their host and numbers them,
calling them all by name;

because he is great in strength,
mighty in power,
not one is missing.

²⁷Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,
“My way is hidden from the LORD,
and my right is disregarded by my God”?

²⁸Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.

²⁹He gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.

³⁰Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;

³¹but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 147:1-11, 20c

¹Hallelujah! How good it is to sing praises to our God!
How pleasant it is to honor God with praise!

²**The LORD rebuilds Jerusalem,
and gathers the exiles of Israel.**

³The LORD heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.

⁴**The LORD counts the number of the stars
and calls them all by their names.**

⁵Great is our LORD and mighty in power;
there is no limit to God’s wisdom.

⁶**The LORD lifts up the lowly,
but casts the wicked to the ground.**

⁷Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving;
make music upon the harp to our God,

⁸**who covers the heavens with clouds
and prepares rain for the earth, making grass to grow upon the mountains.**

⁹God provides food for the cattle
and for the young ravens when they cry.

¹⁰**God is not impressed by the might of a horse,
and has no pleasure in the speed of a runner,**

¹¹but finds pleasure in those who fear the LORD,
in those who await God’s steadfast love. ^{20c} Hallelujah!

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

A reading from 1 Corinthians.

God entrusted Paul with the responsibility of bringing the gospel to diverse people. Hence the focus of Paul's ministry is not his own rights or privileges as an apostle but the privilege of serving God by freely sharing the good news of Christ with others.

¹⁶If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! ¹⁷For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. ¹⁸What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel.

¹⁹For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. ²⁰To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. ²¹To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. ²²To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. ²³I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (ACS p. 33)

GOSPEL: Mark 1:29-39

The holy gospel according to Mark.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Everywhere Jesus goes, many people expect him to set them free from oppression. Everywhere he goes, he heals people and sets them free. Disease, devils, and death are running for their lives. The forces that diminish human life are rendered powerless by Jesus.

²⁹As soon as [Jesus and the disciples] left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

³²That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

³⁵In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." ³⁸He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." ³⁹And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

May we hear your voice, O God, and be led to see your hand in the world, redeeming us and saving us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Earlier this week a friend of mine sent us a dashcam video of a traffic situation that he found himself in (I was going to show the video to you all but technology doesn't always like to cooperate). The video basically raises the question of when an intersection is considered uncontrolled or not. In the video, the intersection in question had the presence of a 2-way stop (so that makes it controlled), but also covered 4-way traffic lights (which makes it uncontrolled) that were new still being installed (which is where the question remains of what takes precedence here). What the correct course of action would be at this intersection was in question, and it led to like an hour long debate between the few of us. Because there were so many variables at play, the answer wasn't exactly clear cut, not by the MVA that we looked up, not by our own interpretations and experiences with law enforcement, not even by the hive mind over at Reddit. After all was said and done, we came down to two simple conclusions: 1) there was no collision so who cares, and 2) traffic rules are confusing, man.

No wonder people get road rage around here all the time, the rules can be so muddy that disagreements happen, tempers flare, and horns get honked. I mean, sure there are the very clear no-no's like don't hit other cars or drive up onto the sidewalks, but there are also so many nuances to the rules and exceptions come at different times that changes everything. Like you're supposed to stop at a yellow light, but not always. Left turns at an intersection yield to through traffic from the opposite direction, but not always. The first person to a 4-way stop has the right-of-way and thus is the first to go, but not always. It almost gets to the point that all these rules are so frustratingly confusing that we might not want to bother following them anymore. Don't believe me? Just drive out to Richmond.

Of course, I'm just kidding. But the point is, these rules can be so grey that it's annoying. Infuriating, even. The rules are supposed to follow the general "if/then" progression. In that, "if x happens, then y must happen." Rules in science, math, and the grammar in most non-English languages all follow this principle. So when we get into the grey like we do with traffic rules at least in Vancouver, when we have the exceptions put in place, when we change the "if/then" to "if/then/unless", then we get confused, irritated, and frustrated. Unless someone explains it to us super clearly, that is.

On the most part, I think many of us run our lives with "if/then" and little room for the "unless." If there is snow on the ground in Vancouver, then traffic will be horrible. If the Superbowl is happening next Sunday, then we can't have our congregation's AGM on the same day. If someone does or says something that isn't exactly politically correct, then we better teach them a lesson, and cancel them.

These "if/then" rules are ingrained in many of us, and it's hard to waiver from them. The bad thing about it is that when we hold fast to the black and white of "if/then", we could be blinded to the "unless", where we just might be able to find grace, mercy, and redemption.

And so that, believe it or not, brings us to today, this 5th Sunday after the Epiphany that is only just a matter of days away from Lent. In my study of the gospel reading I found a number of commentators being hung up on the if/then, and mostly around that one bit about Simon Peter's mother-in-law, which says, "Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them."

So if she is healthy enough, then the woman of the house must serve the men? That's what some of the commentators were saying was the problem here. They used this simple logic to conclude that Simon's mother-in-law was under oppression, faced sexism, and was bound by the chauvinistic norms that society placed on her. And honestly, I can see that. I mean, Simon's mother-in-law is just fresh from being healed, she was just moments earlier knocking on death's door, the whole reason Jesus was even there was because she was in no shape to even be alive let alone make him lunch. And now she's serving him and his friends?

So yea, I can see how this is problematic. These days in our 21st Century thought of equality and basic human rights, I admit that this doesn't look good. It doesn't, at least, if you were looking at this with black and white, cut and dry, straight forward if/then logic.

If she is sick, which she was, then she shouldn't be serving. If she were serving, which she was, then she probably was forced to by the archaic patriarchal society. If she was a woman, which she was, then she would have been seen as lesser, not as worthy, a mere object for the convenience of men. If/then.

Unless.

Unless this was her expression of freedom from the oppression of illness she was just under. Unless serving others was her way of showing gratitude and thanksgiving. Unless this was her joy that she found in Jesus.

Yes, she was sick, but Jesus took that away. Yes, she was staring death in the face, but Jesus lifted her up out of that darkness and pain. Yes, she was in no shape to do anything for anyone, but Jesus healed her from what was oppressing her and brought her back into life, community, and freedom.

Free from the illness that was holding her back. Free from the expectation that she was limited. Free from the oppression of labels, assumptions, and projected feelings from perhaps people of her time, but most definitely from people of ours.

See she was indeed bound by the rules of science and nature, the rules of what was determined as strict truths, the rules of her time. But Jesus brought her up in the "unless," where rules and laws don't become meaningless, but are seen as a means into freedom.

This isn't to say that all rules are good and none are bad. But it is to say that what is more important than the rules themselves is what they represent: a community of people who look out for the wellbeing of each other so we can live harmoniously for the good of all. Not for the good of just those in power, those of the right birth back ground, or those of the right skin pigmentation, but for the good of all, as we are lifted up and empowered to be God's people in the world.

Have you not known? Have you not heard? This is Jesus our Lord, who heals the brokenhearted, binds up their wounds, and brings us all back into community, to the life that truly is life, to be who we are called to be: children of God and servants of the gospel.

Still, these days we are bound by rules. We are told that we must act a certain way, do a certain thing, believe a certain belief. But instead of just seeing the rules as oppressive if/then conditions, we can see the rules in the “unless” that allows us the freedom to be loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and full of self control. See these are the fruits of the Spirit and against such things there is no law, there is no rule, there is no oppression that we face forcing us to be this at all. We just are.

We just are, at least, until we’re told otherwise. Told otherwise by our own inability to live up to this standard, by others who would like to point out our faults and keep us down, by this “if/then” mentality that would disqualify us from God’s promises. If we don’t live up to these standards, then we must not be God’s people.

Unless.

Unless we are forgiven, redeemed, and saved by the love of God in the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit.

And thanks be to God, we totally are. Saved from the guilt of not being able to follow all the rules, saved from the shame of not being perfect all the time, saved from the oppression of expectation and presumption, and made to be free. Free to be God’s people in the world, living full of the fruit of the Spirit, part of the wider church and body of Christ, welcoming others just as we have been welcomed with grace, compassion, and love.

So as we near the end of this season after the Epiphany, may we always see how we are lifted up from the oppressive black and white of the “if/then” mentality, and know the freedom in the “unless” that is ruled by God’s grace, and empowers us to be beloved and redeemed people of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: What a Fellowship, What a Joy Divine (#314)

CREED

Together with all those who proclaim God’s love, 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

Brought into wholeness by the Spirit of God, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, “by your healing mercy, O God,” and you are invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. By your healing mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, it is good to sing your praises, there is pleasure in honouring you for all that you have done in bringing us together and building up your church in service to your name. May our ministry to others be pleasing to you, and may we faithfully proclaim your good news to all. We pray for 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 ministers, congregations, and ministries of the ELCIC. In particular, we pray for St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in Maple Ridge and the pastors and leaders that serve there; and for Matsqui Lutheran Church in Matsqui and their interim pastor Art McCaughan. By your healing mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you created the stars in the sky and the sands of lands, and you know them all by name. Strengthen our stewardship of your creation, and may its beauty be appreciated and enjoyed by all. By your healing mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you are great and mighty in power, and we submit to your wisdom and strength. Be with all politicians and world leaders, that they be able to work together for the healing of the nations and peace for all regardless of background and what borders they find themselves behind. We also pray for the continued support of those that we’ve sponsored to come into our country: Abraham Barhane; and Solyana Amanuel; as well as for those that have not yet arrived: Maekelle Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; and Filmon Abraha. By your healing mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you lift us up in healing, and you bind up what might be ailing us as we lean on your strength and might. Be especially with those among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, and restore us all to you. We remember in prayer Beulah; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bryan and Chona; Bev and family; Sukhwant; Cari; John and Betty; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Will; Chris; Walter; Larry; Matt; Lucas; Piet; Dan; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...

By your healing mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, your love is steadfast and you provide all we need for life. You welcome us into your community and kingdom to live with you and the saints forever. May we always rely on this promise, that we be reminded of the eternal connection we have with you and all those we’ve loved and lost. By your healing mercy, O God, **hear our prayer**.

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your healing and redemptive grace found in 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 places give thanks and praise to you, O God, through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who lifts us up and restores us to you and in your community, joining us 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 (ACS p. 36)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

Yes God, you are holy and mighty, and we sing praises to your name, for you heal us and rebuild our hearts with love and grace, bringing us together as a community in worship of your name. You lift us up out of the depth of our isolation and loneliness, and you provide all that we need for relationship, redemption, and life, through the ministry of Jesus our Lord...

...who, on the night that he was betrayed, sat with his friends for a meal where he took the bread, gave thanks, broke and shared it saying, "Take and eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

And then after they ate it, he took the 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 this bread and cup that find healing, know community, and see the connection that we all share in your love, even as we together proclaim the mystery 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 your love is steadfast and your wisdom is strong and unending, giving us reasons to live and serve, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER (ACS p. 39)

Gathered into wholeness 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 love and strength healing us all.
Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (ACS p. 40)
Beautiful Saviour (#838)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

We sing to you with thanksgiving, O God, for you have again fed us with your love, wisdom, and healing, and you bring us together in wholeness, bind up our brokenness, and strengthen us to serve and be served, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

May God our Shepherd bless you and keep you,
God our Saviour shine on you and heal your wounds and brokenness,
God the Spirit take your hand and lift you up and bring you back into wholeness and peace.
Amen.

SENDING SONG: Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness (#843)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, proclaim the good news to all.
Thanks be to God.