



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

OF SOUTH BURNABY, BC

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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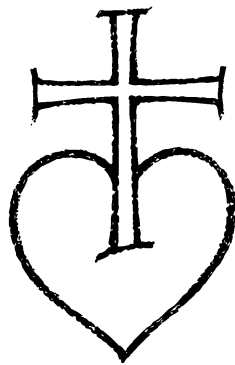
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Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 10, 2024

ELW Holy Communion, Setting Three

The fourth of the Old Testament promises providing a baptismal lens this Lent is the promise God makes to Moses: those who look on the bronze serpent will live. In today's gospel Jesus says he will be lifted up on the cross like the serpent, so that those who look to him in faith will live. When we receive the sign of the cross in baptism, that cross becomes the sign we can look to in faith for healing, for restored relationship to God, for hope when we are dying.

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 hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓ (Musqueam) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) speaking peoples.

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather in worship, giving thanks for the forever enduring good that God's mercy brings. For the Lord our God has redeemed us, welcomed us home, and delivers us from distress in spite of our shortcomings, shortsightedness, and sin. We find our healing in God's Word, our rescue in God's grace, and our peace in God's love, revealed to all through the wonderful and steadfast works that move us to joy and thanksgiving, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

GATHERING SONG: God Loved the World (#323)

GREETING

The forgiving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the redeeming love of God, and the welcoming communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

KYRIE (p. 203)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, it is through the life, teachings, and influence of Jesus that you are seen in the world. Not in condemnation, but in salvation redeeming us from our guilt, shame, and fear. Give us the courage and strength to uphold our faith, that we might boldly act as your own beloved children, welcoming all into your kingdom just as you first welcome us, through the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: Numbers 21:4-9

A reading from Numbers.

Though God provides food and water for the Israelites in the wilderness, they whine and grumble. They forget about the salvation they experienced in the exodus. God punishes them for their sin, but when they repent God also provides a means of healing: a bronze serpent lifted up on a pole.

⁴From Mount Hor [the Israelites] set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. ⁵The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." ⁶Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. ⁷The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." ⁹So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

¹Give thanks to the LORD, for the LORD is good,
for God's mercy endures forever.

²**Let the redeemed of the LORD proclaim
that God redeemed them from the hand of the foe,**

³gathering them in from the lands;
 from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.
¹⁷**Some were fools and took rebellious paths;
 through their sins they were afflicted.**
¹⁸They loathed all manner of food
 and drew near to death's door.
¹⁹**Then in their trouble they cried to the LORD
 and you delivered them from their distress.**
²⁰You sent forth your word and healed them
 and rescued them from the grave.
²¹**Let them give thanks to you, LORD, for your steadfast love
 and your wonderful works for all people.**
²²Let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving
 and tell of your deeds with shouts of joy.

SECOND READING: Ephesians 2:1-10

A reading from Ephesians.

While we were dead in our sinfulness, God acted to make us alive as a gift of grace in Christ Jesus. We are saved not by what we do but by grace through faith. Thus our good works are really a reflection of God's grace at work in our lives.

¹You were dead through the trespasses and sins ²in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 142)

GOSPEL: John 3:14-21

The holy gospel according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

To explain the salvation of God to the religious leader, Nicodemus, Jesus refers to the scripture passage quoted in today's first reading. Just as those who looked upon the bronze serpent were healed, so people will be saved when they behold Christ lifted up on the cross.

[Jesus said:] ¹⁴“Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him

may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Almighty God, by your Spirit may the world be illumined by your Word, that we might see clearly and live faithfully in the truth of Jesus, through whom we pray. **Amen.**

Anyone here the youngest in their family? It's great, isn't it? As you might know, I'm the youngest of 4 siblings, and I know I was spoiled growing up, I can admit it. I mean, I helped that I was pretty dang adorable for... well... my whole life, so my parents' friends always wanted to get me stuff and treat me different from my older and less adorable sisters and brother. It was just clear that I was the baby of the family, all the way up until like my mid-20s I think.

But as I've learned over the years, all that being babied and doted on came with a price, but it isn't what you think. It isn't that I had issues growing up, maturing, or gaining independence, no as you can see I was able to do all that just fine, thank you very much. The major consequence that I'm talking about is that my relationship with my dad suffered simply because he didn't approve of the special treatment that I got because of where I landed in the birth order. At least, that is how it was explained to me, he saw how spoiled I was and didn't like it, so he was extra strict and harsh with me over my siblings.

Now, I should say that I'm aware that there was probably a lot more that contributed to our somewhat broken relationship, like my rebelliousness, my bad attitude, and my slight tendencies to feel entitled. Apparently no amount of adorable can hide all those, make no mistake. These are the woes of being the youngest, because I think a lot of my bad habits and mentalities came from that. I'm not saying that I don't have any fault in how my dad and I were, but I'm just saying that it wasn't 100% my fault. Maybe just 99%.

But it wasn't until my dad's funeral that our relationship really came into perspective. My mom had asked each of the 4 of us to give a speech about him, and I didn't know what I'd say. Then when I heard what my siblings said their speeches, how he was so caring, loving, and present with them, I couldn't help but wonder who on earth they were talking about. I mean, was this the same guy we were commemorating? Because he wasn't any of those things to me. So much not that I couldn't even fathom what that would even look like.

But my siblings weren't lying. These were their genuine experiences. It just so happened that they were completely different from what I had experienced growing up.

So it came down to a matter of perspective. This was indeed the same man we were talking about, I double checked, but we saw him so differently. We were raised under the same roof, ate the same food, and harshly disciplined by the same rules. Yet we remember our childhoods differently, we interpret our memories differently, we perceive this man whose DNA we share very differently.

And that's the funny thing about perception, isn't it. Things completely change depending on where you're looking at it from. The image of the landscape shifts depending on what window you're looking out of. Your perspective of whatever it is you're looking at, can vary greatly depending on what piece of the puzzle you're holding. Just like that Hindu story about the unagreed on number of people in a dark room with an elephant. Or maybe they were blind, there are many different versions. Either case, everyone in the room was able to experience only one part of the elephant also in the room, and depending on which part they had access to only through touch, they all had very different opinions of what this elephant even was.

We see this change in perspective in all of scripture. In fact, one might even say that the whole point of scripture to begin with. And so today's texts are no exception. These passages should be familiar, they all have some kind of big symbol in them. Like John 3:16 is like the most recognisable passage in the world. Ephesians 2:8 is a pretty popular one too, especially in Lutheran circles, it's like our theme verse. And of course the serpent on a pole has evolved into our common symbols for healing and medical assistance.

Interesting, huh? That the symbol of two intertwining snakes is known for something positive. But it wasn't always that way, was it. Right before the serpent was lifted up and became a symbol of the cure, the serpent was the thing that they needed a cure from. These snakes started as a fearsome messenger of death, what with their venomous bites and slithery scariness. I'd imagine getting bit by one of those things wasn't pleasant, especially when you see others around you getting bit and dying from it. And now Moses wants them to change their perspective and see these satan incarnates as something that can help? Something that can heal? Something that can be trusted?

That must have been difficult to do. Even in these "cancel culture" days, just suggesting to look at your source of trauma as a place of healing would be unheard of, seen as ridiculous, it might even be seen as offensive. And that is what God chose to do to bring healing, to welcome the people back into wholeness, to change their perspective on the black and white evils in the world.

And so in his explaining of salvation to Nicodemus, Jesus alludes to this lifting up of the serpent because he too, must be lifted up. Not to bring glory to himself, mind you, but that the perspective that the Pharisees and religious leaders had of him might change. Their perspective that he was a fraud, a charlatan, a lunatic that thinks that he could be anything more than a poor carpenter's boy, needed to be transformed to see how he is actually the Messiah, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world.

But that perspective didn't change, right away. Instead, they got the ball rolling to have Jesus tried for sedition, which in those days was grounds for capital punishment. And they succeeded. They were able to convince the officials, the masses, and even his disciples that Jesus wasn't worth their allegiance, their devotion, even their admission that they were his

students and friends, and had him hung on a cross, the symbol of condemnation, shame, and death.

At least, that is how the people at the time would have seen the cross. But Jesus changes that perspective. Instead of a symbol that struck fear in the hearts of anyone who would look at it, the cross became a symbol of love and grace and welcome for all who would accept it. See the cross itself didn't change, but the people's position changed, allowing them to see the cross differently. Instead of looking at the cross from a place of oppression, brokenness, and fear, we can now look at it from a place of community, wholeness, and love.

For God so loved the world.

We know all this. I'm not telling you anything new. But I believe the message in these texts is that while Jesus and God had changed our perspective on these objects that were to be detested into symbols that we could lift up and revere, perhaps our perspective on ourselves need change as well. Perhaps how we regard ourselves could be tweaked by God's grace and love. Perhaps the opinions that we hold of our own identities, our value, and what we can contribute to God's mission need to be more aligned with how God sees us: as beloved people worthy of being healed, forgiven, and saved.

See just as the serpent and the cross now mean different things to us through God's grace, so are we different in our perspective, how we are perceived, and where we stand with God and in this body of Christ. And as we look at the cross and God's love from a different angle, not from a place of being condemned but from a place of being saved, then we can see more fully just how God's wisdom, that which seems like foolishness to the world, is the key for us to live the life that truly is life. That is, the life that is full of community, service, and love.

So as we near the end of this season of Lent, may we continue in our contemplation of the cross and the shame that it tries to bring, and turn our heads to be reminded of the emptiness of the cross, that we might see, in spite of death, the glorious resurrection that is to come. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: In the Cross of Christ I Glory (#324)

CREED (p. 105)

With eyes fixed on the cross of Christ, 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 live in the confidence of our faith, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "Lord, in your strengthening mercy," and you are invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. Lord, in your strengthening mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, your goodness and mercy that endure forever, and we are witnesses of your redemption, grace, and mercy. Free us from our fears and anxieties in our ministry, that there be no limits to the reach of your message. We lift in prayer this day 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 Faith Lutheran Church in Powell River and the pastors and leaders that help them there; and for Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Prince George and those who assist them in their transition. Lord, in your strengthening mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, your love is seen in all of creation, in the east, west, north, and south. May your love be reciprocated in our care for this planet, and may we be mindful of what we are leaving behind for our children and the future generations. Lord, in your strengthening mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, although we can be a rebellious people, you continue to deliver us from our distress. Impart your wisdom on all world leaders and politicians, that their governing of the world might be for the good of all. We pray for the continued support for those that we've sponsored to come into our country: Abraham Barhane; and Solyana Amanuel; as well those that have not arrived: Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; and Filimon Abraha. Lord, in your strengthening mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you send forth your word to us and you heal us from our afflictions and you save us from what ails us. Make this especially apparent among those of us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that none might forget your gracious promise. We pray especially for Bev and family; Beulah; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bryan and Chona; Sukhwant; John and Betty; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; William; Chris; Walter; Larry; Piet; Allan; Matt; Lucas; Julie and family; Hwee Yang; Jeanette; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time... Lord, in your strengthening mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, your love is steadfast and your works are wonderful for all the world. Remind us of our connection to you and all the saints of the past and present, that our collective faith might increase in our proclamation of your Word and ministry of your gospel. Lord, in your strengthening mercy, **hear our prayer**.

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

PEACE (p. 143)

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

MEAL

DIALOGUE (p. 144)

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 provides for us the way to salvation through your grace and steadfast love,
joining us together with all the choirs of angels,
with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven,
in praising your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 144)

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

O Lord we give thanks to you, for you are good and your mercy endures forever. We proclaim your gracious redemption to all the lands, strengthened by your deliverance from our rebellion and sin. And you have sent to us your Son Jesus, your very Word, to heal us and rescue us from the grave.

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

Then after they ate, 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 heavenly food that we share that we see God's wonderful works and steadfast love, even as we proclaim this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

O God, to you we give our thanksgiving. To you, we shout for joy. To you, belong all honour and glory, through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER (p. 145)

Gathered in the boldness of 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 goodness and grace.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION**COMMUNION HYMNS:** Lamb of God (p. 146)

For by Grace You Have Been Saved (#598)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Merciful God, in your great compassion you have again fed us with this bread and cup of life, nourishing our souls and strengthening our faith. May we look ahead to what the future may bring with boldness, leaning on your truth and trusting in your love, through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Redeemer.

Amen.

SENDING**BLESSING**

May the love our Creator God bless you and keep you,
the grace of the Christ God shine on you and bring you hope,
and the light of the Comforter God look upon you with radiance and peace, now and forever.
Amen.

SENDING SONG: O Christ, Our Hope (#604)**DISMISSAL**

Go in peace, share the gift of God's grace and love to all people.

Thanks be to God.