



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

OF SOUTH BURNABY, BC

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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Fifth Sunday of Easter

April 28, 2024

Now the Feast and Celebration

This Sunday's image of how the risen Christ shares his life with us is the image of the vine. Christ the vine and we the branches are alive in each other, in the mystery of mutual abiding described in the gospel and the first letter of John. Baptism makes us a part of Christ's living and life-giving self and makes us alive with Christ's life. As the vine brings food to the branches, Christ feeds us at his table. We are sent out to bear fruit for the life of the world.

We at Grace Lutheran Church strive to reflect and proclaim the love of God shown to us by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit by providing an inclusive and supportive environment through loving care and community service.

A warm welcome to all who are worshipping with us in person or online! We appreciate your contribution to the community today: with your voice, your presence, and just the blessing that you are. May you be nurtured by God's Word, empowered by the love of Christ, and stirred by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in this service this day, for the sake of God's mission in the world.

Grace Lutheran Church worships, prays, and serves on the traditional and unceded lands and territories of the hə́nqəmíñə́m̓ (Musqueam) and Sḵw̓xw̓ú7mesh (Squamish) speaking peoples.

GATHERING

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather in this assembly to praise the Lord, who feeds and nourishes us with grace and peace. Those who praise our God span to the ends of the earth and reside in each and every nation, bowing down in reverence and worship and trust in the promise of resurrection and new life for all who fear God. And so we join in the worship and service, and proclaim God's deliverance and action in our lives, in our communities, and throughout the world. **Amen.**
Thanks be to God.

GATHERING HYMN: All Are Welcome (#641)

GREETING

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

NOW THE FEAST (p. 4)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of wonders, you make all things new in water and Word as you feed us, your children, with love, joy, and peace. Lead us always to the foot of the cross, where we can see the light of your face, shining your grace and peace upon us all. Teach us to love your promises and truth, that we might be nourished and fulfilled in life, faith, and community, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

FIRST READING: Acts 8:26-40

A reading from Acts.

Led by the Spirit, Philip encounters an Ethiopian official who is returning to his African home after having been to Jerusalem to worship. Philip uses their encounter to proclaim the gospel to him. Upon coming to faith in Jesus, he is baptized by Philip.

²⁶An angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) ²⁷So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." ³⁰So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. ³²Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.

³³In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth."

³⁴The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" ³⁵Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture,

he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" ³⁸He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. ³⁹When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 22:25-31

²⁵From you comes my praise in the great assembly;

I will perform my vows in the sight of those who fear the LORD.

²⁶**The poor shall eat and be satisfied,**

Let those who seek the LORD give praise! May your hearts live forever!

²⁷All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD;

all the families of nations shall bow before God.

²⁸**For dominion belongs to the LORD,**

who rules over the nations.

²⁹Indeed, all who sleep in the earth shall bow down in worship;

all who go down to the dust, though they be dead, shall kneel before the LORD.

³⁰**Their descendants shall serve the LORD,**

whom they shall proclaim to generations to come.

³¹They shall proclaim God's deliverance to a people yet unborn,

saying to them, "The LORD has acted!"

SECOND READING: 1 John 4:7-21

A reading from 1 John.

We love God and others because God first loved us. We cannot say we love God, whom we have not seen, while hating fellow Christians, whom we regularly see. Love toward God is to be matched by love toward others because the essence of God is love.

⁷Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

¹³By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

¹⁴And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world.

¹⁵God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. ¹⁶So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. ¹⁷Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. ¹⁹We love because he first loved us. ²⁰Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God

whom they have not seen. ²¹The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 8)

GOSPEL: John 15:1-8

The holy gospel according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

On the night of his arrest, Jesus taught his disciples about the relationship they would have with him. Those who abide in his word and love bear fruit, for apart from him, they can do nothing.

[Jesus said:] ¹"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ²He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Send your Spirit, O God, to lead and guide us through our Word, your ways, and your welcome, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Last Sunday after I got home from church, I thought it'd be a good idea to use all that free time I had to dig up our entire lawn, with the plan that we'll reseed and start the whole thing over. The lawn wasn't in great shape since the end of summer, and became more and more of an eye sore all winter (for those times that it wasn't covered by snow, at least). So really, something needed to be done and I, wanting to save money to pay someone, took it upon myself to do it even though I have like no idea what I'm doing. I did redo a lawn before with my uncle, but I was like in grade 6 at the time so I don't remember the exact process that we went through.

So I went out there armed with this mystery shovel that I found in our garage, not sure what to expect, and dug the whole darn thing up. I didn't find any treasure or anything unfortunately, aside from this random Gatorade bottle cap that promptly went into the trash. But I made sure all the surviving grass that was there was turned over and completely buried and the weeds that I could get at were taken out, as that is what seemed to make sense to me.

After about 4 and a half hours and a popped blister the size of a Canadian quarter, I was done. Our crappy looking lawn... still looked pretty crappy. I had a long way to go. A couple days later I took the time to break up whatever clumps that were left and tried to expose all the roots of

the grass, thinking that this will kill it all and it will all break down into a nice fertilizer for the new grass that I'll eventually get to plant. It seemed like things were on track.

But then the rains came. And they stayed. Then they called some friends over and had a huge party. I was getting kind of worried as to what would happen to all the freshly dug up dirt. Like, was it going to turn into a swamp? Were more weeds going to grow? Am I going to find little critters digging holes and making a home out of what once was a dilapidated lawn?

After a few days of rain and a lot of metaphorical nail biting, the patch of dirt that was formerly known as our lawn actually looked exactly the same. Like exactly. The rain that fell didn't pool up like I kind of expected it to but it drained through pretty nicely. The piles of dirt didn't flatten out like I was kind of hoping they would but they remained the little mounds that I left them as. And much to my dismay, the remaining tufts of grass didn't die off at all, but they stayed there and maybe even grew a bit from what I could tell. Resilient little buggers, I tell ya.

Thankfully, for now it's not out of control or anything, I think I still have a handle on it, but there's just something to be said about the strength of nature. It doesn't take much to keep certain things alive as I'm sure I'll learn more about as the weeds start to sprout again. It seems to me now that the grass that I've left behind will be able to survive on its own, as long as it has its roots, some life giving water, and a connection to the soil that protects it, feeds it, and nourishes it.

Again, I'm no green thumb by any means, and I could be completely wrong with my assessment, but this is just what I've observed so far with my limited experience. I've observed that life, uh, finds a way.

So I wonder if Jesus intentionally uses his plant analogies in today's gospel reading because he has a knowledge of how all of this works. I mean, I'm pretty sure he'd know more about plant life than I do, which really isn't saying much, but what I mean is that he has more knowledge about life, life. See in this part of John, using one of the 7 identifying "I AM" statements in this gospel, Jesus calls himself the true vine and us, the branches. We are connected to this vine for life. And, much like life in nature, if we weren't connected, then we wouldn't have life. He spells all this out with this metaphor, how God is the vinegrower that cuts the non-fruit producing branches off, and how those that are cut off don't produce fruit. I should say that Jesus doesn't say this as a threat, as some might say that if you're not producing fruit, then you'll be cut off. Rather, Jesus says this because it is simply true. In order to have life, a connection must be had. It's not like a branch can force itself to produce fruit so it can remain connected. It's the connection that precedes the life.

Let's look at the Ethiopian eunuch in the first reading. He wasn't really producing any fruit. But he was connected. And while we don't know what happened to him after this episode, we know that life was brought to him through his connection, it wasn't the other way around.

Because if you think about it, he wasn't in any way the kind of person that one would think would be a follower of Jesus in those days. By all counts, he didn't fit in, didn't seem to belong, wouldn't be thought of as someone who would be welcome. I mean, he was a foreigner for one thing, don't forget that racism was alive and well even in these ancient times. He was loyal to a different throne. And he was a eunuch, making him incomplete, not whole, ritualistically unclean in the eyes of "religiously righteous."

Sound familiar?

Don't we still size people up like this? Don't we see someone that isn't from here as perhaps someone who doesn't really belong? Don't we feel awkward around people whose culture we're not familiar or comfortable with? Don't we judge people for how they decide to present themselves and give them a label that they probably don't deserve?

I would imagine Philip having similar thoughts when he encountered this chariot and saw who the Spirit was leading him to. When the Ethiopian asked what was to prevent him from being baptized, I imagine Philip biting his lip from shouting out "everything!" and citing the numerous scripture passages that preclude this impure outsider from being of the same faith as him. Philip might have stepped back from the whole situation and maybe asked how this self-mutilated man could ever have a connection with Jesus, and thus how he could ever have life.

But then, maybe Philip did see it. Just a glimmer at first, but it grew stronger with the relationship between him and this stranger. Maybe Philip saw a connection in his new Ethiopian friend's inquisitiveness, openness to learning, desire to listen and follow, and aptitude to love. This was enough.

It was enough to spark something. It was enough to reveal God's grace and mercy in this unlikely candidate. It was enough to give life, and give it abundantly.

So then when the Ethiopian asked what was to prevent him from being baptized, Philip would not have been able to say anything as there would be nothing to stand in his way toward God's welcome, care, and peace. There could be nothing that could bar him from receiving God's truth, nourishment, and Spirit. There shall be nothing that could come between him and God's inclusion, community, and connection. Connection to Philip. Connection to the greater kingdom. Connection to God's life-giving grace and love.

And as it is for us, it only takes a small connection at first. Through this connection we see how we are welcomed, brought to live with each other and the saints in community, and led into right relationship and service. And we see how we are given life. Even when our world is turned around, it seems like everything is against us, and we can't see how or where we'll fit in, God continues to reach God's hand out to us, allowing us to take root in truth and grace, and be nourished by the Word through our connection through the Spirit to the one body of Christ, strengthening us to be God's beloved and saved people in the world.

I know life is tough. I know the times we live in seem uncertain. I know we as a people seem so divided and oppressive. But as John says in our second reading from today, God loves us and because of this truth we can in turn love each other. This doesn't mean that we'll always get things right, but it does mean that God has welcomed us, God empowers us, and God connects us all through the Spirit of life, love, and peace.

In this season of Easter, when we are reminded of resurrection and new life, may we embrace the life that is given to us through the connection of community, relationship, and love. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (#631)

CREED (p. 9)

Together with all of God's people equally loved and welcomed, 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 into community and connection with the true vine and all its branches, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "God, by your ever-present mercy," and you may respond with **hear our prayer**. God, by your ever-present mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, in our assembly we offer you our praise and worship, for you have fed and satisfied us with your grace. May our gathering in your name be pleasing to you, that it reflect to the world your boundless love. We lift up in prayer our neighbouring faith communities; our full communion partners: the Anglican Church of Canada and the Moravian Church in Canada; and our bishops; rostered ministers, congregations, 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 Peace Lutheran Church in Vernon and the pastors and leaders that help out there. God, by your ever-present mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you have created all life from here to the ends of the earth, and organized us into families and communities. May we remember how you have entrusted to us all that you have made, that we all might bow before you in our service and stewardship. God, by your ever-present mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, dominion belongs to you and you rule over the nations with grace, mercy, and love. May all our world leaders and politicians be made aware of your presence with us, that they might be able to love and guide their people into peace. We pray for the continued support of those that we have sponsored to enter our country: Abraham Barhane; and Solyana Amanuel; as well as those who have not yet arrived: Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; and Filimon Abraha. God, by your ever-present mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, we kneel and bow before you in worship, for you lift us up out of our brokenness and death and bring us into life and wholeness. Be with all who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, that your love might bring healing in mind, body, and spirit. Especially we pray for Beulah; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bev and family; Bryan and Chona; Kathy and Raj; Phil; John and Betty; Sukhwant; Kristen; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Will; Chris; Larry; Walter; Piet; the family and friends of Jeanette; Pat and Patty; Hwee Yang; and all whom we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...

God, by your ever-present mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, as did our ancestors, so shall we serve you and proclaim your name for the generations to come. You continually welcome us into your kingdom to be joined with you and all the saints, granting us life eternal in your love. Remind us always of this promise and inspire us to live in ways that are becoming of Easter people. God, by your ever-present mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in the empowering word of the true vine, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

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 your Son Jesus Christ, who joins us together in welcome and love, revealing to all the joy of your salvation, leading us to, with all the choirs of angels, the hosts of heaven, and the church on earth, praise your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 11)

GREAT THANKSGIVING

O God in this assembly we praise you through our worship and our actions, for you nurture us with your Word and satisfy our every need. Your love and mercy reaches all the ends of the earth and resides in all families and communities. We bow before your dominion, your rule, and your grace that lifts us up and joins us together as one body serving you, and one voice proclaiming your goodness to the generations, for you have acted and sent to us your Son Jesus, to walk among us to teach us your ways of righteousness and faith through word and example.

For on the night that he was betrayed, Jesus sat with his friends for a meal, where he in thanksgiving took some bread, 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, he in the same way took the cup, and still with thanksgiving he passed it around the table for them to drink from and said, "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."

For it is in this life-nourishing food we have been given that we see our connectedness to the true vine, even as we declare this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

Be present among us, O God, give us the strength and courage to be your people in this difficult time and fill us with the grace to treat others with the love that you have shown us, through Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER (p. 13)

Joined together on the vine of life 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 welcome and grace.

Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 14)

I Come with Joy (#482)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, you have again fed us with your Word and satisfied us with your truth through your gracious welcome into community, strengthening us to serve you and all people for the sake of your kingdom on earth, through Jesus Christ and by the power of the Spirit. **Amen.**

BLESSING

The God of mercy hold you and enfold you,
the God of love lift you up and join you with all people,
the God of welcome bring you blessing and peace, now and forever.

Amen.

SENDING SONG: Where Charity and Love Prevail (#359)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, God abides with us all.

Thanks be to God.

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