



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

OF SOUTH BURNABY, BC

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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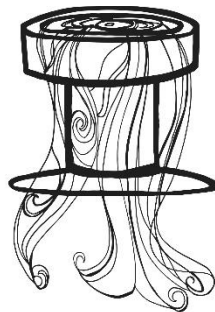
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Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 5, 2024
Now the Feast and Celebration

This Sunday's image of the life the risen Christ shares with us is the image of friendship. We are called to serve others as Jesus came to serve; but for John's gospel, the image of servanthood is too hierarchical, too distant, to capture the essence of life with Christ. Friendship captures the love, the joy, the deep mutuality of the relationship into which Christ invites us. The Greeks believed that true friends are willing to die for each other. This is the mutual love of Christian community commanded by Christ and enabled by the Spirit.

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

GATHERING

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather in worship, singing songs of praise to our Lord who has done marvelous things, whose right hand and holy arm have defeated death and offers us eternal salvation in God's community and kingdom. For our God has made known this victory and has revealed to us all righteousness and peace, through steadfast love and faithfulness. So we shout with joy, we lift our voices, and we sing with rejoicing with all of God's people, with all the saints, throughout all of creation, through Jesus Christ our Saviour and friend. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

GATHERING HYMN: Build Us Up, Lord (#670)

GREETING

The everlasting grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the steadfast love of God, and the faith-filled fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

NOW THE FEAST (p. 4)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Everloving God, we know that your regard for us is gracious and never ends, as it motivates us to regard others in love and grace. Allow us to see the joy that comes from your abiding with us, that we might draw strength from your promises and peace from your truth, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

FIRST READING: Acts 10:44-48

A reading from Acts.

While Peter shares the good news of Jesus with a Gentile soldier and his family, the Holy Spirit comes upon them. Recognizing that the Spirit works inclusively in the lives of both Jews and Gentiles, Peter commands that these Gentiles also be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

⁴⁴While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. ⁴⁵The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, ⁴⁶for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷"Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" ⁴⁸So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 98

¹Sing a new song to the LORD, who has done marvelous things,
whose right hand and holy arm have won the victory.

²**O LORD, you have made known your victory,
you have revealed your righteousness in the sight of the nations.**

³You remember your steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel;
all the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.

⁴**Shout with joy to the LORD, all you lands;
lift up your voice, rejoice, and sing.**

⁵Sing to the LORD with the harp,
with the harp and the voice of song.

⁶**With trumpets and the sound of the horn
shout with joy before the king, the LORD.**

⁷Let the sea roar, and all that fills it,
the world and those who dwell therein.

⁸**Let the rivers clap their hands,
and let the hills ring out with joy before the LORD, who comes to judge the earth.**

⁹The LORD will judge the world with righteousness
and the peoples with equity.

SECOND READING: 1 John 5:1-6

A reading from 1 John.

God's children believe that Jesus is the Messiah and love God by keeping God's commandments. Thus the world is conquered not through military might but through love and faith.

¹Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. ²By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. ³For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, ⁴for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. ⁵Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

⁶This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 8)

GOSPEL: John 15:9-17

The holy gospel according to John.

Glory to you, O Lord.

On the night of his arrest, Jesus delivers a final testimony to his disciples to help them in the days ahead. Here, he repeats the most important of all his commands, that they love one another.

[Jesus said:] ⁹"As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹²"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶You did not choose me but I chose you. And

I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

May your Spirit, O God, be poured out upon us this day, filling us with the knowledge of your love and grace, through the embodiment of your Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

There is this trend going around on TikTok and other social media platforms right now where a woman is asked if they find themselves alone in the woods for whatever reason, would they rather run into a random man... or a bear. On the flip side, men are also asked which they'd prefer for their female spouse or daughter or whatever female they care about. And it seemed like more often than not, regardless of who was asked, the answer was the bear.

And I get it, because truth be told, I'd probably choose a bear as well. Not just for my wife or daughter, but even for myself. I mean, bears, on the most part, are pretty predictable and can be dealt with if you took proper precautions and were smart about it. But a man? A man can be completely unpredictable and more dangerous than a wild animal. Bears really will only hurt humans if they're protecting themselves or if they're angry or maybe even hungry. But people can hurt other people simply because they want to. And that's scary.

As you would imagine, this trend brought out a flurry of reactions, mostly from men. Men who jumped at the chance to defend all of menkind in saying that men wouldn't be as dangerous as bears and are kinder than bears and are able to be reasoned with more than bears would be. And that brought out a bunch of counter-reactions from the women and some sympathetic men, which brought out counter-counter reactions, and the cycle of gaslighting, hurt, and even hate continued on and on between the two or more sides to this simple question.

I'll admit, this was a hard pill for me to swallow. It hits hard as a father to our 10-year-old daughter, as a husband to my wife, and as part of a long line of women in my family. It made me lament the kind of world that we've fostered, the type of environment that we're leaving behind, the attitudes and perceptions that we've perpetrated over the years in society. It makes me sad.

But I know, most men often mean well, but we can't deny that there are men out there that purposely hurt others. Most men don't want to act maliciously or sadistically, but we need to recognise that there are men who do. Quite often men wish to treat others with respect and consideration, but the kind of evil that would make the general populace prefer the company of a bear over that of a random man continues to run rampant around the world.

And we are baffled with how these evil people could live with themselves, how they could be so blind to the hurt and pain they cause, how they could have so much hate for those around them. So yeah, it makes me sad that even though these types may be far and few in between, it's enough for us to continue to live in fear and worry. It's enough for us to know to be cautious. It's enough to perhaps hate them back.

This makes Jesus' words in today's gospel lesson all the more difficult to hear and even attempt to follow. Love each other? Are you serious? How can we do that when there is so much evil, so much to be afraid of, so much hate and divide over anything that any of us could ever imagine? The world just gives us too much reason to hate, and not enough to love. But Jesus is clear, he asks us to love each other, without much regard as to how impossible that is in reality.

I mean, dangerous men aside, people in general can be so hard to love. We know that people can have a great tendency for evil. We know that people can have an aptitude to do wrong in the eyes of the law and basic common sense. We know that people can be so different, so opposing, so not us that we can't help but to distrust, point fingers, and choose that bear all day long.

And even in that whole bear question, there is so much reason to be angry. Angry at the truth it points to. Angry at the lies it uncovers. Angry that someone could be on the other side of our argument and viewpoint and disagree with us.

Because really, how dare they?

How dare they hold such outlandish opinions? How dare they think in such a way that we don't like? How dare they be born in such a place, time, and culture that would give us so much reason to disagree, to be different, to dislike each other so much?

Well, putting it that way, it doesn't make much sense, does it? Maybe it never did. I mean all the reasons that we have to pit them against us, they aren't exactly rational, are they? Sure, they might be emotional, but can they be intellectually justified? Should how one votes cause us to hate them? Can one's preference in sports team sway our relationship? Would a variance on what one believes to be right or wrong in terms of what is more dangerous between a man and a bear actually determine whether or not you could love them?

I'm not talking about a romantic love by any means, I'm pretty sure Jesus didn't either. Nor are we talking a "phileo" love, which is a love between close friends. But rather, the love that I'm talking about and the love that Jesus is asking of us is an "agape" love, which is a respect for the other, a recognition of our shared humanity, a regard of this other human who is also a child of God. This agape love, sometimes referred to as a universal love, is the love that God shows us, that God empowers us with, and is what God just is. Agape love is what we are called to.

This doesn't mean that we should go trouncing into the woods with a strange person or even a bear for that matter, but it does mean that while we can still hold our own opinions and viewpoints, those who don't agree with us don't have to be hated on, pigeon-holed as an enemy, or even seen as beneath us. Disagreements don't need to separate us. Difference in opinions shouldn't define us as worthy of love or not, whether it be from us, or from God.

Rather, we can see each other as worthy of love because we are all graciously recreated by God to be worthy of love. God, who is love, formed us with this love, by the power of this love, and as a product of this love. It is what we are called to do, what we are meant to be, who we even are at the core of our very being. This agape love, I believe, is the whole point of all that we are, all that we do, and all that we'll ever be.

And I know just saying these words won't make it easy. In fact, it might make it harder as the world seems to have hijacked the word love and made it into a selfish emotion. The world tells us that we should get love when we want it, that we deserve love because we're entitled to it, that we are defined by love because we've earned it. Those are lies. The agape love that we're given, the love that we're called to recognise, the love that we're empowered to show, comes not from want, entitlement, or earning, but it comes from the understanding and realisation that it is through grace that we are loved, and through this love we are saved and brought into the welcome and belonging in God's kingdom.

Then when we see how much we are agape loved, then perhaps we can learn to show it to others. We can begin to regard others with this respect that we are given. We might be able to set aside all those reasons to hate, and make room for and uphold all the reasons to love. Which, first and foremost, is because God has always deemed us worthy to be loved.

So you see, our God that is agape love has brought us together as the one body of Christ, connected and supporting, abiding and caring, lifted up and reflecting on the world this love. In that while we all have our faults and sins, they will never disqualify us from our position and identity as God's people, not us, not them, not anyone in all of history. For God's grace wills it, fulfills it, and makes it so. In, around, and through us, now and always.

In this season of Easter, the season of resurrection and belonging, may we continually see the love that has been graciously given to us, that we might in turn know how to give it to others. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: What Wondrous Love Is This (#666)

CREED (p. 9)

With all of God's beloved people from every time and place, 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 share in the love of Christ, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. Each petition will end with, "Lord, in your loving mercy," and you are all invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. Lord, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you have done marvelous things and we sing your praises, for you have revealed to us your righteousness and love. May our ministry similarly reveal your righteousness and love to the world, that you be magnified throughout the nations. We pray especially for our neighbouring faith communities; those that use this building for worship, work, and play; 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 Lutheran Church of the Cross in Victoria and their pastors Lyle McKenzie and Lyndon Sayers; and for all the prison ministries and chaplains that we are connected to. Lord, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, all the lands shout with joy as we rejoice and sing of the marvels of your creation. May our stewardship of all that you have made be faithful and pleasing to you, that what you have entrusted to us might continue to flourish as we live in mutual respect and care. Lord, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you judge the world with righteousness and you see people with equity, yet we continue in selfishness and sin. May the leaders and those in power of this world learn from your righteous judgments that we might together move toward harmony and peace. We 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 who have not yet arrived: Maekele Kiflu, Selam Haile, and their children; and Filimon Abraha. Lord, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, in our times of difficulty we turn to you and your healing love. Be with us who are ill, who mourn, or who feel lonely, and may we always remember that there is wholeness in your name. We pray especially for Beulah; Bev and family; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Bryan and Chona; Kathy and Raj; John and Betty; Kristen; Sukhwant; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Will; Chris; Larry; Walter; Piet; Pat and Patty; Hwee Yang; Ephraim; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...

Lord, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you welcome us into your eternal kingdom and community with all the saints. May the time we have in this life be informed by the faith of those in the past, that we all might learn to work together to lovingly create lasting change in a hurting world. Lord, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in the unending love shown to us by 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, though your Son Jesus Christ, who joins us all together as one body in the world, blessing others as we have been blessed, as we, with all the choirs of angels, the hosts of heaven, and the church on earth, together praise your name with this unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (p. 11)

GREAT THANKSGIVING

O Lord, we sing to you a new song, for you have done marvelous things. You are victorious over death and shame and you welcome us all from the ends of the earth into your steadfast love and faithfulness. And in the fullness of time you sent to us Jesus, your Son, to be with us as one of us, revealing to all the boundless grace of your love.

For on the night that he was betrayed, your Son Jesus sat 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 given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

Then after they ate, he took the common 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 food that we can see your righteousness and equity, even as we declare this mystery of faith:

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

All honour, glory, and power are yours, O God, as you continue to bless us with your gracious love and mercy, through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER (p. 13)

Gathered together to abide in God's love, 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 abiding with us in love and grace.
Thanks be to God.

COMMUNION

COMMUNION HYMNS: Lamb of God (p. 14)
Blest Be the Tie That Binds (#656)
Ubi caritas et amor (#642)

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Holy God, again you have provided for us, fed us, and nourished us with your love, and you empower us by calling us your friends through the words of Jesus Christ, your Living Word, the one who saves us all. **Amen.**

BLESSING

May the righteous fairness of God that regards us with equity,
the loving friendship of Christ that saves us from sin,
and the gifts of the Holy Spirit that empowers us to be God's people in the world,
bless you in all that you do, all that you say, and all that you are, now and forever.
Amen.

SENDING SONG: Abide with Me (#629)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, live confidently in the joy of Christ's love.
Thanks be to God.