



GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

OF SOUTH BURNABY, BC

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

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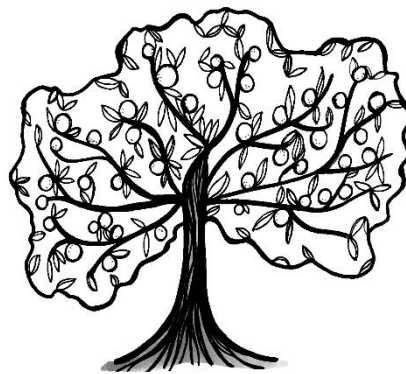
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Third Sunday in Lent

March 23, 2025

ELW Holy Communion, Setting Three

The warnings are plentiful and blunt on the third Sunday in Lent. Cut it out or get cut down! The warnings are accompanied by God's invitation to attentiveness: "Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live." The landowner's ultimatum is forestalled by the gardener's readiness to till the ground one more year. That is good news for all of us. Thanks be to God!

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 hən̓q̓əmi̓n̓əm̓ (Musqueam) and Sk̓wx̓w̓ú7mesh (Squamish) speaking peoples.

GATHERING

GATHERING SONGS: Guide Me Ever, Great Redeemer (#618)
Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me (#623)

GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

KYRIE (p. 203)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Eternal God, your kingdom has broken into our troubled world through the life, death, and resurrection of your Son. Help us to hear your word and obey it, and bring your saving love to fruition in our lives, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

WORD

FIRST READING: Isaiah 55:1-9

A reading from Isaiah.

To those who have experienced long years in exile, the return to their homeland is a celebration of abundant life. God calls them into an everlasting covenant of love. Those who return to God will enjoy new life and forgiveness, because God's ways are not our ways.

¹ Hear, everyone who thirsts;

come to the waters;

and you who have no money,

come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk

without money and without price.

² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread

and your earnings for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,

and delight yourselves in rich food.

³ Incline your ear, and come to me;

listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant,

my steadfast, sure love for David.

⁴ See, I made him a witness to the peoples,

a leader and commander for the peoples.

⁵ Now you shall call nations that you do not know,

and nations that do not know you shall run to you,

because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel,

for he has glorified you.

⁶ Seek the LORD while he may be found;

call upon him while he is near;

⁷ let the wicked forsake their way

and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.

⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM: Psalm 63:1-8

¹O God, you are my God; eagerly I seek you;
my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no
water.

²**Therefore I have gazed upon you in your holy place,
that I might behold your power and your glory.**

³For your steadfast love is better than life itself;
my lips shall give you praise.

⁴**So will I bless you as long as I live
and lift up my hands in your name.**

⁵My spirit is content, as with the richest of foods,
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips,

⁶**when I remember you upon my bed,
and meditate on you in the night watches.**

⁷For you have been my helper,
and under the shadow of your wings I will rejoice.

⁸**My whole being clings to you;
your right hand holds me fast.**

SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

A reading from 1 Corinthians.

Paul uses images from Hebrew Scriptures and prophecy to speak the truth of Jesus Christ: He is our rock, our water, our food, and our drink. Christ is the living sign of God's faithfulness.

¹I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ²and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. ⁵Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

⁶Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did.

⁷Do not become idolaters as some of them did, as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play." ⁸We must not engage in sexual immorality, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. ¹⁰And do not complain, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come.

¹²So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. ¹³No testing has overtaken

you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (p. 142)

GOSPEL: Luke 13:1-9

The holy gospel according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Asked about current tragic events, Jesus turns a lesson about whether suffering is deserved into a hard call to obedience. He then tells a parable that holds out hope that the timeline for ultimate judgment will be tempered by patience.

¹At that very time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.² [Jesus] asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?³ No, I tell you, but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. ⁴Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the other people living in Jerusalem? ⁵No, I tell you, but unless you repent you will all perish just as they did.”

⁶Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. ⁷So he said to the man working the vineyard, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ ⁸He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. ⁹If it bears fruit next year, well and good, but if not, you can cut it down.’ ”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Be revealed, O God, through the truth of your Word, through the power of your Spirit, and through the reach of your love that satisfies our very souls, through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Some of you know that I have been trying to learn German through this language learning app that I don't want to say the name of because I don't really know much about copyright laws. Anyway, I've been using this particular app because my kids have been at it for a few months already and so I decided to jump on that old bandwagon. And my experience with it has been up and down, so it's a good thing I didn't name the app because I don't know much about defamation laws either.

The good thing about the app is that it teaches you the language in an easy to follow manner. Like, there is a lot of repetition and practice and stuff, and they do it in a fun way. It is very creative in its use of games and stories and so on and so forth.

But the bad part about it is... well... it encourages you to be really competitive. Which might not be a bad thing in general, but it seems like it is for me in this language learning scenario. Because while you can't sabotage other users or anything like that, it feels like my motivation turned away from just learning the language and went more toward earning experience points, reaching milestones, and collecting badges that give you gems which help you to earn more experience points, reach more milestones, and collect more badges that give you more gems. And the cycle continues. So instead of the sense of achievement that comes from learning something new, this app gives a false sense of achievement in the form of virtual prizes, generic pre-determined notes of encouragement from faceless avatars, and ranking you up or down in these leagues that really don't mean anything at all.

At least, that's how my experience with this particular app has been going. In the beginning, I was all gung ho about learning a new language and I was legitimately working hard for those achievements. Now? I've gone so far as to find a glitch that would gain me maximum experience points with minimal amount of effort. That means that I've been scoring really high in the weekly rankings and been promoted to the highest league, but I haven't really been learning very much at all. It has gone from a helpful tool to just another meaningless game in my arsenal of boredom killers that take up storage space on my phone.

So I wonder why I even bother. My learning has plateaued, it's become more of a chore than a joy, and I'm not really any closer to being able to read the full volumes of Luther's Works in their original language. Don't get me wrong though, I'm not going to stop. I mean I can't give up my super high ranking and streak just because I'm losing interest.

See, while I'm rewarded for going through these motions, I'm also punished whenever I'm not. The little fire icon that tells me I'm on fire, can get snuffed out. The characters in the app give me dirty looks when I make mistakes. And I could actually get demoted and drop down a league making it look like whatever progress I've made goes away as I regress in my learning, my ranking, and my stats that the app keeps a very close eye on. And so I'm not exactly motivated to do well in the app per se, but I'm more motivated to just not do bad.

And that tracks with life in general, doesn't it? I mean, we admittedly live in a very competitive world and our motivations at times can stray from "do good because it's good" to "don't do bad so you don't get bad." Because in the natural order, that's just how things work, right? Good begets good and bad begets bad. Do good and good will happen to you, do bad and you better watch your back. Be good to others and they better be good in return because otherwise then you can be as bad as you want toward those ungrateful little saps. We're told that's what they deserve. It's the right that we've earned. It's how the world works.

And that's not just how it is now, is it? But since the beginning of time, the world has worked this way. Adam and Eve disobeyed God so they were thrown out of the Garden of Eden. The world was full of sin except for Noah so everything was drowned but him and his family. All of Israel kept getting it wrong so they were exiled and conquered and discredited as a nation that just didn't amount to anything.

So then if doing bad gets bad, it makes sense that when bad happens to you, you must have been bad, right? It must mean that we are being punished, that we brought it upon ourselves, that we somehow, some way, deserve it. It must mean that we've earned this bad by being bad.

That's why the disciples asked what the blind man or the blind man's parents did to cause the blindness. Why Pilate later asks what Jesus has done to get himself arrested. Why in today's texts the people wonder about the sin levels of those who were killed and had their blood mixed with their religious sacrifices as well as those crushed by the tower of Siloam.

I mean, they must have been bad for that to happen to them, right? They must have done something to deserve it. They must have just not been good enough.

But that's not what Jesus says about it. In fact, he says something that no one actually expects, perhaps not even us. He says that it's not that those people who faced those tragedies weren't good enough, it's that we *all aren't good enough*.

Seriously, all of us. All of us can't do the bare minimum to keep the bad away. All of us keep doing bad, being bad, and causing bad. All of us are like this figless fig tree who is about to be chopped down for not producing any figs in this parable that Jesus gives us.

This parable that we're probably familiar with. This parable that illustrates for us the nature of God's kingdom. This parable that makes no sense whatsoever.

I mean, almost every aspect of this parable is absolutely nonsensical. From how the fig tree doesn't produce figs, to how the owner doesn't understand the timing of the fig harvest, to the worker tending to the fig tree not even knowing how to properly tend to it. Nothing makes sense.

Until.

We see that the parable isn't about making sense. It isn't about giving us gardening tips. It's not even about scaring us into producing fruit. But it is about us being regarded as worthy of saving even when we don't deserve it. It's about us being seen as valuable even though we haven't done anything to earn it. It's about us getting good not because we're already good, but because God is.

See in this season of Lent, as we examine and reflect on ourselves, our shortcomings, and our sinfulness, we might be a little disappointed in ourselves when we realise just how much we fall short. But also in this season of Lent, we are reminded that God doesn't punish us for our sins, rather God forgives us of them. God doesn't shun us because we're bad, but God seeks us out and welcomes us into God's community and family. God doesn't condemn us, but instead we are saved by grace.

You see, the world tells us what we deserve but God shows us what we are given. The world tells us what we need to do to earn good, but God reveals to us the good that we get. The world tells us that we need to do, to be, and to produce in order to be loved, but God tells us that no matter what we do, no matter who we are, or no matter where we're from, God will welcome us, hold us, and love us with the power that created the universe.

This doesn't mean that we can be as bad as we want because we'll get good anyway. It doesn't mean that we're impervious to bad situations and feelings. It doesn't mean that there aren't real world consequences of the bad we do. But it does mean that through it all, God wants to

give us good. Whatever the future might bring or however the past might haunt us with, God will forgive and has always forgiven you. However and wherever we might fail, falter, or fall short, God will always be with us to pick us up, brush us off, and save us with an unending love.

As we continue in this season of Lent, as we see and recognise our sin and shortcomings, may we also see how God's grace, forgiveness, and love are, always have been, and always will be enough to welcome all people into God's community of figless fig trees saved by the compassion of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Thanks be to God. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY: Abide with Me (#629)

CREED

Together with all of God's people, 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 by the Spirit, let us turn to God in prayer for the church, the world, and all those in need. With each petition ending with "God, in your loving mercy," the congregation is invited to respond with **hear our prayer**. God, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, you are our God and eagerly we seek your face. Remind us always of your presence in our lives, that we might rely on your strength and wisdom to guide us along right paths. God, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer**.

O Lord, our souls thirst for you as you lead us out of these dry and weary lands of the hardships and difficulties of life. Strengthen our faith that we might rely on you and proclaim your goodness to all the world. We pray especially for our neighbouring faith communities; those who use this 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 Living Faith Lutheran Church in Sechelt and their interim pastor Richard Hergesheimer; and for Lord of Life Mission in Sandspit and their interim pastor

Jim Whaley. And we offer a special prayer for the discernment of our ELCIC in convention this summer as we elect a new National Bishop. God, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, by your power and glory you have created a world full of beauty at which we can gaze upon and see your face. Help us in our care for all that you have entrusted to us, that this planet can continue to be our home for the generations to come. God, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, your steadfast love is better than life itself, and with it we are content as with the richest of foods, yet our thirst for power often gets the better of us. Be with all areas of the world that are facing violence, political turmoil, or general unrest and conflict, that all citizens of this planet might work together to bring out peace. We pray especially for the continued support for those that we've sponsored to come into this country: Abraham Barhane; Solyana Amanuel; and Filimon Abraha; as well as for those who have not yet arrived: Maekele Kiflu, Selam Hailie, and their children; and Mery Gabramikael. God, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, we praise you with joyful lips as we remember and meditate on your goodness and grace and healing. Be with all among us who are sick, who mourn, or who feel lonely, and bring us all your steadfast love. We pray especially for Bryan and Chona; Ron, Tess, and Mineko; Beulah; Bev and family; John and Betty; Sukhwant; Pastor Kristen; Laura; Kandie; Thomas; Will; Chris; Larry; Walter; Piet; Hwee Yang; Ephraim; Georgina; and all those we name aloud or quietly in our hearts at this time...
God, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, you have always been our helper, and our whole being clings to you as you hold us in your arms of love, welcoming us under the shadow of your wings with all the saints. May we hold onto this promise of eternity with you, that it might strengthen us in our faith today and always. God, in your loving mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your steadfast love, shown to us by Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.
And also with you.

HYMN OF FAITH: We Walk by Faith (#635)

THANKSGIVING FOR THE WORD

Let us pray.

Praise and thanks to you, Holy God, for by your word you made all things: you spoke light into darkness, called forth beauty from chaos, and brought life into being. For your Word of life, O God, **we give you thanks and praise.**

By your Word you called your people Israel to tell of your wonderful gifts: freedom from captivity, water on the desert journey, a pathway home from exile, wisdom for life with you. For your Word of life, O God, **we give you thanks and praise.**

Through Jesus, your Word made flesh, you speak to us and call us to witness: forgiveness through the cross, life to those entombed by death, the way of your self-giving love. For your Word of life, O God, **we give you thanks and praise.**

Send your Spirit of truth, O God; rekindle your gifts within us: renew our faith, increase our hope, and deepen our love, for the sake of a world in need. Faithful to your Word, O God, draw near to all who call on you; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever.

Amen.

HYMN OF THE THANKSGIVING: The Church's One Foundation (#654)

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered into one 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.**

SENDING

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.
The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.
Amen.

SENDING SONG: Canticle of the Turning (#723)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.