

**Grace Lutheran Church Worship Service  
March 22, 2020**

**THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM**

In the name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning your Spirit moved over the waters and by your Word you created the world, calling forth life in which you took delight.

Through the waters of the flood you delivered Noah and his family.

Through the sea you led your people Israel from slavery into freedom.

At the river your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Holy Spirit.

By water and your Word you claim us as daughters and sons, making us heirs of your promise and servants of all.

We praise you for the gift of water that sustains life, and above all we praise you for the gift of new life in Jesus Christ.

Shower us with your Spirit, and renew our lives with your forgiveness, grace, and love.

To you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

**Amen.**

**KYRIE**

*Lord, have mercy:* **Lord, have mercy.**

*Christ, have mercy:* **Christ, have mercy.**

*Lord, have mercy:* **Lord, have mercy.**

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

**Bend your ear to our prayers, Lord Christ, and come among us. By your gracious life and death for us, bring light into the darkness of our hearts, and anoint us with your Spirit, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

**FIRST READING: 1 Samuel 16:1-13**

**<sup>1</sup>The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." <sup>2</sup>Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.'**

<sup>3</sup>Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." <sup>4</sup>Samuel did what the LORD commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" <sup>5</sup>He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

<sup>6</sup>When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed is now before the LORD." <sup>7</sup>But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." <sup>8</sup>Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." <sup>9</sup>Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." <sup>10</sup>Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these." <sup>11</sup>Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." <sup>12</sup>He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." <sup>13</sup>Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

### **PSALM: 23**

<sup>1</sup>The LORD | is my shepherd;  
I shall not | be in want.

<sup>2</sup>**The LORD makes me lie down | in green pastures  
and leads me beside still waters.**

<sup>3</sup>You restore my | soul, O LORD,  
and guide me along right pathways | for your name's sake.

<sup>4</sup>**Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall |  
fear no evil;**

**for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they | comfort me.**

<sup>5</sup>You prepare a table before me in the presence | of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is | running over.

<sup>6</sup>**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days | of my  
life,**

**and I will dwell in the house of the | LORD forever.**

## **SECOND READING: Ephesians 5:8-14**

<sup>8</sup>Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—<sup>9</sup>for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. <sup>10</sup>Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. <sup>11</sup>Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. <sup>12</sup>For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; <sup>13</sup>but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, <sup>14</sup>for everything that becomes visible is light.

Therefore it says,

“Sleeper, awake!

Rise from the dead,

and Christ will shine on you.”

## **GOSPEL: John 9:1-41**

<sup>1</sup>As [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup>His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” <sup>3</sup>Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. <sup>4</sup>We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup>As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” <sup>6</sup>When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, <sup>7</sup>saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. <sup>8</sup>The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” <sup>9</sup>Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” <sup>10</sup>But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” <sup>11</sup>He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” <sup>12</sup>They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

<sup>13</sup>They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. <sup>14</sup>Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.

<sup>15</sup>Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.”

<sup>16</sup>Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. <sup>17</sup>So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”

<sup>18</sup>The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight <sup>19</sup>and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” <sup>20</sup>His parents answered, “We know that this is our son,

and that he was born blind; <sup>21</sup>but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." <sup>22</sup>His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. <sup>23</sup>Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

<sup>24</sup>So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." <sup>25</sup>He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." <sup>26</sup>They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" <sup>27</sup>He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" <sup>28</sup>Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. <sup>29</sup>We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." <sup>30</sup>The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. <sup>31</sup>We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. <sup>32</sup>Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. <sup>33</sup>If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." <sup>34</sup>They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

<sup>35</sup>Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" <sup>36</sup>He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." <sup>37</sup>Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." <sup>38</sup>He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. <sup>39</sup>Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." <sup>40</sup>Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" <sup>41</sup>Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

## **SERMON**

"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."

Imagine an overloaded dinner table positioned directly in front of one's worst enemies. We primarily think of our enemies as other people.

I remember getting a call from my cousin telling me that his father, my uncle, died on July 4. This news took me back about 50 years when that same uncle betrayed his brother, my father. At that time my father was executor of my grandparents' modest estate. Nevertheless, my uncle spread lies to their other three brothers that my father was cheating them out of their inheritance. As a 20-something, I never dreamed that family members could betray each other in such an evil way. But looking back on it, I realize

that it was simply one more complication of life that I and my immediate family had to get through. The passing of time almost guaranteed it.

Yes, enough time has passed for the betrayal to give way to something else. It is the banquet table. I could not have provided that banquet table. Only God could have done it.

Back when my father was betrayed by his own brother, I thought at times that the end of the world had come for me. The betrayal brought many feelings to the surface. I was angry, pained. I wanted to crawl into some warm womb once more for protection from the outside world. I avoided other people for a while, suspicious of friendships.

One of my primary emotions was revenge. I wanted to get even, see justice done. So I was not all that patient with God's timing. Indeed I thought God was being entirely too slow. Where in fact was God? Why didn't God hurry up and get things back in order? So in my own way I tried to get even by writing an angry letter to my uncle, trying to set some sort of banquet table for me and my Dad. I would see to it myself. God didn't seem to be that efficient about the catering.

Perhaps you too, have dusted your heels through such sands. And as the current pandemic reveals, our enemies aren't just people. If you have thought God left you, not trusting God all that much, then welcome. If you have dealt with blisters of the heart, believing some of them have even been inflicted by God, then welcome. If you have faced that awful loneliness of soul that comes when you reach out to touch the mystery of God, only to feel that God has gone on vacation, then welcome.

But in all that, interestingly enough, God was present. At first, God was disguised, which is God's privilege since God is the author of complex appearances. At first, God spoke in silence, which is also God's right, since God brings into being not only the clatter, but also the quiet of the universe. At first, God stayed aloof, which again is God's prerogative, because God is everywhere, which allows for God seeming to be nowhere.

Then you had your comforters. For even if you dared not speak, trying to hide your hurt and fears, and desire for revenge, some who were close to you detected it. And you had to deal with them as they dealt with you. "Why don't you pray more?" they would ask. "Where is your faith?" "This too shall pass." "You (or your Dad) must have done SOMETHING wrong."

The helpers were no help. And when you looked up for comfort, God did not seem to be any help either. Where was the real help that your soul desperately cried out for?

Yet, as if on cat's paws, God was setting up a table. The cloth. The candles. The plates and cups, saucers and silverware. The napkins. But most of all, the food.

Of course, you did not see it. Nor did you hear God coming. Neither did Bethlehem when God was born as a human being. Neither did Jerusalem when Christ rose from the dead that first Easter morning.

But our hearing or seeing are not finally what count. What counts is that God is still at work, preparing a table before our enemies, whether that enemy is a person, or a virus, or even our own selves. And more times than not, not even our faith makes much difference. If it did, we would many times not ever get to a banquet.

What then, finally brings the banquet? If it is not our ingenuity, our plotting, our stubbornness to have it our own way in a hurry, our faith (or lack of it)? What brings about the banquet in bad company?

It is the loving mercy of God – the God who came to us in the human flesh of Jesus of Nazareth, who said, “I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly.”

Unbelievable! I myself wouldn't have believed it when I was 20-something and suffering with my father's pain of betrayal. It was not within my faith to get hold of even a smidgen of it.

Yet it is true. Through time, without my faith being all that strong, God set up the banquet table. On it were blessings, more than I ever dreamed could come my way: marriage to Paul, my partner, my best friend and companion for 30 years. Our beautiful child Wyatt. Friendships with new people. The more names my mind ticked off, the more I saw what a feast the Lord was laying before me.

On the table was also the blessing of the simplicity of everyday things: flannel sheets on a cold winter's night, a piece of warm home-made bread fresh out of the oven, dripping with butter. My now adult child's marriage to a man who has become the son we never had.

But more. The table was full. One of the most precious foods proved to be a deeper trust in God, knowing that God was present even when God seemed absent. There also came to the forefront the conclusion that no matter what happened from now on, I knew God was at work, for my good and for God's glory.

So when I got a letter from a seminary classmate that said, “I have decided that regardless of circumstances, I will not allow any of life's experiences to silence the song of praise and thanksgiving in my heart,” I could, and still can, identify with his words. Those words are true even in the face of the tragedies of life, yes, even in the face of a pandemic.

My uncle has now joined my father in death. I no longer want revenge. I see him on the other side of the banquet table, and I look forward to the day when I join him and my Dad at the banquet feast that has no end. I could not have done this 45 years ago. Yet, without my being aware, God was putting it in me as God prepared the table.

Where is God when you feel betrayed, surrounded by enemies? God is there. God is setting the table. Can you believe it? If not, don't worry. What matters most is that you are God's child. Christ, the Good Shepherd is calling you by name. Can you hear Christ's voice? God's loving mercy will see you through because Christ the Shepherd is holding you and walking

with you through this time. Whether you can make out the form of it all is not important. What makes the difference is our Shepherd, who goes ahead and prepares the banquet table. In time you will see. In time you will sit yourself down at the banquet table and feed on its truth. AMEN.

### **APOSTLES' 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**

*Prayers reflect the wideness of God's mercy for the whole world—  
for the church universal, its ministry, and the mission of the gospel;  
for the well-being of creation;  
for peace and justice in the world, the nations and those in authority,  
the community;  
for the poor, oppressed, sick, bereaved, lonely;  
for all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit;  
for the congregation, and for special concerns.*

*Additional prayers may be added.*

*Prayers of thanksgiving for the faithful departed may include those who recently have died.*

*End the prayers with these or similar words:*

Into your hands, gracious God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

**Amen.**

### **OFFERING:**

*Please remember to mail in your offerings so that Grace can continue to serve you.*

### **THANKSGIVING FOR THE WORD**

O God of justice and love, we give thanks to you that you illumine our way through life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, awaken us to the needs of others, and at the end bring all the world to your feast;

through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever.

**Amen.**

### **LORD'S PRAYER**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

### **BLESSING**

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**