

New Hope Lutheran Church

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March 21, 2021 The Fifth Sunday of Lent

Coming Events

All services have been cancelled until April 18, 2021 due to COVID-19.

Mar 23 1:00pm Zoom Raamatupiiri
Mar 24 7:00pm Zoom Lenten service & coffee
Mar 26 7:00pm Zoom Confirmation

Apr 18 10:00am Messu † **Voima Hall**
1:00pm Annual Meeting
Regent St, Voima Hall & Zoom
2:00pm Worship Service **Regent St**

In our prayers Fred, Esme, Martha.

Remembering Lillian Wahamaa 94 yrs.

Almighty God; we ask you would look over the family and friends of Lillian Wahamaa, that they may be aware of your presence in their time of grief. In their sorrow, bless them with words of comfort, with people who sit with them, and with the silence they may require in their lives. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.



Opening Hymn – Now the Green Blade Rises (#379)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-5Bi2jM40E>

Prayer of the Day

O God, with steadfast love you draw us to yourself, and in mercy you receive our prayers. Strengthen us to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, that through life and death we may live in your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.

Psalm 51:1 – 12

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.

² Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.

⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

⁶ Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

First Reading “**Jeremiah 31:31 – 34**”

31 “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. **32** It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. **33** “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. **34** No

longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

Second Reading “**Hebrews 5:5 – 10**”

5 In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.” **6** And he says in another place, “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.” **7** During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. **8** Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered **9** and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him **10** and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Gospel “**John 12:20 – 33**”

20 Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. **21** They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” **22** Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. **23** Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. **24** Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. **25** Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **26** Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. **27** “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. **28** Father, glorify your name!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” **29** The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. **30** Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. **31** Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. **32** And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” **33** He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

Sermon

A New Covenant

In our Old Testament Lesson we are introduced to a problem. The Lord, in talking with Jeremiah, tells him that something needed to be done about the old covenant. God had kept his end of the covenant, but the people had strayed away from it. So God, in his wisdom and love for human kind, came up with a new plan. There will be a new covenant constructed to accommodate the shortcomings of the people.

Now, for most of us, we may wonder just what the old covenant was, and why it was so inadequate. Essentially God had said; *"I will be your God, and you will be my people."* (Lev. 26:12) While it may not seem to have been much of a contract, there is a lot contained in it. What this meant was that God was to be acknowledged as God by the people, and in return, God would care for and about those people. In order to help the people acknowledge God as God, they were given the gift of the 10 commandments, along with other helpful tips on how to make life a worthwhile endeavor. By following all this, not only would they be acknowledging God, but they would find God's favor as a people as well. Their lives would be blessed and filled with purpose.

But the people found it difficult to follow God's ways. Part of the problem is the same as we ourselves face today – it's just easier to give in to temptation and not follow God's ways. It's easier to think about yourself first, rather than think about your neighbor at all. It's easier to credit yourself for achievements, rather than to acknowledge that God had a hand in making things happen for your benefit. It's easier to spend a life taking, rather than spend a life giving. The written rules were just too easy to break. And with the rules continually being broken, the covenant with God is also broken.

It didn't help that the people often wanted the best parts of the covenant for themselves without taking on any responsibility. They liked the blessings, but didn't seem to be fully aware of what it cost when the covenant was broken. The people were either uninformed, or downplayed their responsibilities to that covenant.

In spite of this, we should take note here that God never gave up. God couldn't turn his back totally against the descendants of the one with whom he first made that covenant – Abraham. In God's original plan, Abraham's offspring were supposed to be a light shining to the world, so that the rest of the world could

see the benefits of being God's people, and they too would become God's people. Ideally, that was the whole idea of the covenant but, in a nutshell, they weren't much of a light. The covenant wasn't working.

So God – rather than just trash the whole idea – decided that something had to change, and since God could see it was difficult for the people as a whole to change, God decided to do some work on the covenant. The old written covenant had to be reworked into a new covenant. But how?

It could be that God saw that a covenant written on paper (or stone) was only good to a certain extent. It appeared that while the people were aware the written covenant existed, they didn't act as if they were fully aware of what it contained. The problem was that it was external from the people.

So it seems that God figured out that rather than have rules external to us, we should have rules that are internal, built right in, so that we not only know them, but also instinctively follow them. While it helps to become familiar with what is expected, it is better if we have our own personal experience to back it up. Such experience is the best teacher.

Take winter for example. Winter is a dangerous time of year for Canadians. Ice and snow can make life hazardous. Because of this, some might think we should have rules that apply to winter so that our own safety is ensured. It's amazing that more people aren't hurt.

But the reason more people aren't hurt is because we all know about winter, and we are well aware of the dangers involved. If you have lived here any amount of time, you know what is to be expected and what is to be done when winter hits. If it snows, you remove it from the driveway and sidewalks. If ice forms, you put the sand and salt on it. If it's cold you bundle up and turn up the heat.

And we do such things to the extent that we feel they are necessary. We may not bother to shovel every single time it snows, especially if it's only a centimeter. We use our own judgment. We don't need a law written up to tell us that winter can be dangerous and inform us of exactly what we need to do to minimize the danger. Any rules about handling winter are internal. We don't need external rules.

And this is what God means when telling Jeremiah that the new covenant will be written on people's hearts. Just as we learn the rules of winter by living through many, over and over, that's

also how we internalize God's rules for us and find the covenant written in our hearts. We increase our faith by practicing our faith, by telling the good news of the gospel to others, by putting others ahead of ourselves. The more we do this, the more internalized the new covenant becomes in our hearts. And in that process we become better and better at it.

For us then, the external thing that internalizes our understanding of God's covenant, and the way we behave, begins with realizing God's love for us, and the ultimate sacrifice God made for us – Jesus death on the cross. When we become aware that this "seed" had to die in order that we new seeds could have life, that's when we begin to live in that new life. This was how God proved to us, beyond a shadow of doubt, that God's laws are in our own interest. Jesus died on the cross to prove God's love for us. That act of love is what prompts us to love others, and in return prompting them to love yet more people. It is a planting of seeds; a spreading of the light of God, the way God meant it to be in the first place.

Seeds planted on the ground give the promise of a harvest to come; but for that to happen, some seeds have to die. The whole worldly idea of *"I can do whatever I want"*, must die to be replaced with an attitude of *"I must do what is best for my fellow humans."* In doing that we find that we too become blessed.

So may your lives be first and foremost a blessing to other people, so that you too can find the blessing of living with God's covenant written in your hearts. Amen.

Prayers

Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all who are in need:

You wash us through and through and remember our sin no more. Make your church a community of forgiveness throughout the world. Give your people courage to forgive; through them show the world new possibilities. Bless ministries of repentance and reconciliation. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You fill the earth – from tiny grains of wheat to the mighty thunder – with your presence, and you call us to attend to your will for all creation. Grant weather that prepares the soil for seeds; protect all from violent storms, flooding, and wildfires. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You promise to write your law on our hearts. Guide citizens throughout the world to shape communities that reflect your mercy, justice, and peace, and give them creativity to work for the welfare of all. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You sustain us with your bountiful Spirit. Restore the joy of all who need to know your presence: those who are lonely or feel unforgivable, those who need healing of mind or body, those who are dying, and all who grieve. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Jesus calls us to follow him in life and death. Empower this congregation in discipleship. Equip children and teachers in Sunday school, confirmation, and learning ministries. Give us your truth and wisdom and teach us to follow Jesus. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

In the cross of Christ, your name is glorified. We praise you for those who have given us words to worship you. With all those who have died in Christ, bring us into life everlasting. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We entrust ourselves and all our prayers to you, O faithful God, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, who taught us to pray...

Lord's Prayer

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.

Hymn – The Lord Now Sends Us Forth (#538)

[The Lord Now Sends Us Forth- Michael Burkhardt - YouTube](#)