

New Hope Lutheran Church

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April 11, 2021
2nd Sunday of Easter

Coming Events

All services have been cancelled.

Apr 13 1:00pm Zoom Raamatupiiri
Apr 14 6:30pm Council meeting **Zoom**

Apr 18 1:00pm Annual Meeting Zoom only

If you are a member of New Hope Lutheran Church, and want to join by zoom, **please email the office at office@nhlc.ca to let us know.**

In our prayers Fred, Esme, Martha.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, with joy we celebrate the day of our Lord's resurrection. By the grace of Christ among us, enable us to show the power of the resurrection in all that we say and do, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn – That Easter Day with Joy was Bright
<https://youtu.be/Wt5HmvHLUsY>

Psalm 133

1 How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!
2 It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe.
3 It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

First Reading “**Acts 4:32 – 35**”

32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. **33** With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all **34** that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales **35** and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Second Reading “**1 John 1:1 – 2:2**”

1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. **2** The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. **3** We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. **4** We write this to make our joy complete. **5** This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. **6** If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. **7** But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. **8** If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. **9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. **10** If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

2:1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—

Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. **2** He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Gospel “**John 20:19 – 31**”

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Sermon

By Bishop Michael Pryse

Dear friend in Christ. It's a privilege to be with you as a part of this morning's worship and to be able to give your dear pastor some much welcome relief. Our rostered ministers have been doing such a wonderful job over the course of the past year. But

its hard work and we need to do everything we can to give them our encouragement and support!

Today's Gospel lesson raises questions that cut to the very heart of what it means to experience Christ's presence; questions that cut to the very heart of what it means to say the words, "I believe."

We witness the gathering of the disciples on Easter night and we can't help but asking some very basic questions about the nature of belief. How is it that you believe -or disbelieve- for that matter? Who can you believe? How much proof do you need before you can say that you believe something? How certain does your belief have to be, before you really believe?

I need to tell you that I think poor old Thomas has received a bit of a bum rap by many Christians over time. Yes, he had doubts and questions, but we don't know that he had any more doubts than the other disciples would have had, given the same circumstances. He certainly had no more doubt than I would have had!

Remember, the others had already seen Jesus; he hadn't! All he had to go on was the strength of the disciple's witness, and obviously, it wasn't all that convincing! If Christ were indeed raised, why were they being so fearful? Thomas didn't doubt the Lord! He did, however, fail to be inspired or convinced by the witness of his colleagues who claimed that the Lord was risen but were still hiding behind closed doors.

I find it very interesting that, while the Western Christian world typically speaks of Thomas as "doubting Thomas," the orthodox church of the east calls him "believing Thomas" in reference to his exclamation "my Lord and my God" after having seen Christ and touched his wounds! Isn't that something?! They choose to honour his exclamation of faith rather than his quite understandable – and temporary – expression of doubt. Furthermore, Jesus honoured Thomas's questioning in a very special way! Think about it for a moment. He came back, just for Thomas! He'd already visited the others. He returned just for Thomas and said, "Peace be with you. Touch my hands touch my side. See and believe."

Friends, never, ever be ashamed of your doubts and questions. And let's be honest; if you don't have any doubts or questions,

you are either fooling yourself or spiritually asleep! Frederick Buechner tells us that "doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving!" Remember, there is often much more faith expressed in an honest doubt or question than in many of the pious platitudes that all too easily cross our lips. In fact, I would maintain that doubt, in many ways, is a precondition of faith!

The disciples of old could not reveal Christ while they remained safe and comfortable behind closed doors. Their witness couldn't even convince Thomas, one of their own number! And neither will the church's witness convince modern day Thomas's so long as we remain in a similar posture; hidden away, seemingly safe and secure behind closed doors.

Those who are seeking a new experience of the Christian life will not be easily drawn to churches that blithely assume the fact of their own relevance or give all too-easy answers. People seeking a deeper experience of theological inquiry will struggle to maintain connections with faith communities that are intolerant of their questioning.

We need to follow Jesus' example and open ourselves to the honest questioning – to the touch - of those who come seeking a new truth. We need to equip ourselves with the tools needed to engage in mature but robust theological reflection, confident in the knowledge that our faith tradition is robust and strong enough to bear the weight of our critical self-reflection. Indeed, if that faith tradition is to carry any real authority, beyond that of mere lip-service, such reflection is of absolute necessity.

The story is told of a student who asked his teacher about the nature of faith. The teacher told her about a dog who scared up a rabbit and began to chase it. Soon other dogs heard the barking and joined in the chase but slowly they began to drop out, one by one until only the first dog was left. "What does this tell me about true faith," the student asked? The teacher explained that, "The first dog stayed in the chase because it had seen the rabbit. And for us to maintain a deep and abiding faith, it is necessary for us to have seen and experienced the risen Lord.

Most churches today claim to be very concerned, and rightly so, about questions of evangelism and outreach. And my guess is that the church can do all sorts of things to try and bring people

into our buildings. It can put on a kinder, friendlier face; it can use gimmicks, frills and tricks. (Most of us have learned that threats no longer work, if they ever did!) But unless the church provides people with a living experience of the Risen Christ all of its efforts will be for naught. The hounds might follow for a while to see what all the barking's about, but they won't stay in the chase because they will not have seen the rabbit. And why should they?

An old saying tells us that ships that remain in the harbour are safe ships. But we need to remember, that isn't what ships are made for. The same is true for the ship that is the church. It can remain safe and comfortable in the harbour; its disciples can remain safe, locked away behind closed doors. But that's not what this ship has been made for and that is not what disciples are made for.

A spiritually hungry world is pleading "Show us your wounds." They are looking to see where God is to be found today. Those who are searching are looking for a body of believers that resembles Christ's Body, a church that is visibly following Him in the way of the cross. And unless we are serious about providing that kind of a witness, then all our busy chit-chat about evangelism and outreach is really just a lot of empty talk.

We are currently celebrating the season Easter; the holy season of resurrection and new life. It's an opportune time for us to take a good hard look at the witness we are providing; for us reclaim our place in the pack and dedicate ourselves anew to running the chase of our lives; following Jesus the Christ, our resurrected Lord.

It's an opportune time for us to join with Thomas in His great confession "My Lord and my God;" an opportune time for us to invite others to join us in that confession by revealing the crucified and risen Christ to them, in our words, but especially in our actions and our choices.

May God help us to be faithful in that task. May God bless the work that you do – as a people of God called to witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in your home communities – and may God bless the work that we do together as a wider church community called to show, in thought word and deed, that the Lord is risen! That he is risen indeed, Alleluia!
AMEN

Hymn – We Walk by Faith - Marty Haugen
https://youtu.be/B6n_SwJj4Vw

Hymn – Thine is the Glory -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GK0I9vj2QII>

Prayers

Alive in the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we bring our prayers before God who promises to hear us and answer in steadfast love.

You shower your church with grace, O God. Unite the whole church on earth, so that with one heart it testifies to the resurrection of Jesus Christ with power and love. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You proclaim the blessing of life forevermore. Like dew upon the mountains, refresh your creation. Restore waters, cleanse the air, and provide revitalizing moisture to parched land. Give your whole creation the promise of new life. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You direct the nations, O God. Guide all in authority, that they shepherd their peoples in the ways of your love. Defeat in us our impulse to war. Bestow the peace of Christ upon those in authority and breathe upon them the Holy Spirit. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You place within the heart of the church a spirit of sharing. Give us the power of your generous Spirit, that we provide for the needs of others. Announce your peace to those who are lonely, hurting, suffering, or afraid. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You give us fellowship with one another in this faith community. Shine the light of the risen Christ in our life together, so that we live in love for one another and our joy may be complete. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You share the gift of eternal life. In thanksgiving and remembrance, we recall the lives and gifts of those who now live in endless joy. Unite us with them in resurrection hope. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

In the hope of new life in Christ, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**