

New Hope Lutheran Church

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May 16, 2021
7th Sunday of Easter

Coming Events

All services have been cancelled.

May 18 6:30pm Zoom Raamatupiiri

In our prayers Ruth, Fred, Esme, Martha.

Prayer of the Day

Gracious and glorious God, you have chosen us as your own, and by the powerful name of Christ you protect us from evil. By your Spirit transform us and your beloved world, that we may find our joy 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.

Opening Hymn – Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness
<https://youtu.be/3P8W6gRI68o>

Psalm 1

- 1 Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers,
- 2 but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night.
- 3 That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers.
- 4 Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.
- 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
- 6 For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

First Reading “Acts 1:15 – 17, 21 – 26”

15 In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) 16 and said, “Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. 17 He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.”

21 Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, 22 beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.” 23 So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. 24 Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen 25 to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” 26 Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

Second Reading “1 John 5:9 – 13”

9 We accept human testimony, but God’s testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. 10 Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. 11 And this is the testimony: God has

given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. 13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Gospel “John 17:6 – 19”

6 “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. 8 For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. 9 I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. 10 All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. 11 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. 12 While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. 13 “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. 14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. 9 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

Sermon

“Pandemic Grief”

In our first lesson for today we come across a rather interesting event in the life of Jesus’ disciples. They are choosing a replacement for Judas, and we might wonder why. Some scholars have suggested that they are following the custom of having the number twelve, as in the twelve tribes of Israel, or the initial twelve disciples. More recently it has been speculated that, in spite of Judas’ faults, he had been one of them from the beginning, they still grieved his loss, and they may have wanted to fill the void left behind. Added to that, this lesson takes place after Jesus’ ascension, so they were also

missing the physical presence of Jesus. In spite of the joy of the resurrection and all it meant to them, it is quite possible that the disciples still had a variety of reasons to grieve, and replacing Judas was one way of coping with that.

That can happen to us as well. We cope with grief in a number of ways, and just because something wonderful has happened to us, it doesn't mean that the repercussions of a sad event in the same time frame will be erased. It is still possible to feel the joy and sadness at the same time.

How do we deal with the loss of something significant in our lives? When it comes to grief, we may be well aware of the common stages of grief as identified by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross in 1969; denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance – which do not always happen in any particular order and are actually descriptions of a common experience for those who grieve. David Kessler, a protégé and co-author with Kubler-Ross, did further studies and adds to that list another final stage of the healing process: meaning.

According to Kessler, something that can hold us back from overcoming grief is the inability to find meaning after experiencing great loss. When we look at the events after the crucifixion, we find the disciples in the early stages of grief. They are afraid and in hiding, fearing for their very lives. But after the resurrection, that all disappears when they understand that there was such immense meaning to Jesus' death; salvation for all believers. It is easier to cope with loss when it has some meaning to us, when there appears to be a logical reason for the loss. If we lose something like a job we are going to mourn the loss, but if we end up with a better job, the loss of the first one is much easier to handle when we can see that original loss meant we moved on to something better.

Recently I've noticed several articles written regarding grief the pandemic has caused many people. During the past 15 months we have suffered numerous losses, especially in our congregation, the loss of the ability to worship and have fellowship together. We've also lost the ability to be with our extended families for holidays and special events. We've lost the experience of going out just for the sake of going out. We've lost the pleasure of enjoying a meal in a restaurant. Work has to be done differently, meaning we have lost

something there as well. The list goes on and on, depending on who you are and what your situation is.

All those losses add up, and when they become too overwhelming, we may even begin to become numb. As an example, when we heard of the first deaths or the first people on ventilators, we may have had an emotional attachment, feeling sorry for those people and their families. But as the numbers grew beyond what we can hardly comprehend – deaths in the thousands, then hundreds of thousands, now even in the millions worldwide – our brains just want to shut down. We may reason that perhaps, like the disciples after Jesus' death, the best thing would be to just go and hide somewhere.

Unfortunately, if we reach a stage of numbness, it may cause us to fail to realize how serious the situation is, and people may revert to thinking it's not serious at all. Look at the various anti-mask demonstrations, rallies, and even a rodeo in Alberta. People want the grief and loss to go away, and some will go to any length to pretend it isn't there.

So how can we avoid this? The first step is to understand what is going on within us, to express our feelings to ourselves, acknowledging our loss and grief. Another step is to limit our intake of pandemic news. Don't totally ignore it, but take breaks from the 24 hour news channel. Give yourself time to unplug. Yet another way is to find realistic ways to help the situation. Make a donation to food banks for those who are really suffering. Consider all the times you may have prevented transmitting COVID-19 by wearing a mask, distancing, and hand hygiene. How many lives and illnesses might you have saved along with your own, in the process loving others as God has loved us?

Lastly, let's begin to consider what meaning we might get out of this pandemic situation. What purpose could it possibly have served? One way to answer this might be to consider the social ills that have been exposed; such as the need for nurses and health care staff, the gaps in so many nursing homes, how poverty was exacerbated, and the importance of people in low paying jobs like grocery store employees. If we can be part of doing something to alleviate such conditions, we may actually find some meaning to the situation we have found ourselves in. Like the disciples, these aren't the answers to curing all our grief and loss at this time, but they can help us to get through.

Like the disciples, we may want to remind ourselves of the meaning of Jesus' death, willingly given out of love for us and others. And, like the disciples, we want to move forward in the aftermath showing that the meaning we have gleaned in our grief matters to the point that we act. May God bless us in our grief, comfort us in our losses, and guide us in the days to come. Amen.

Hymn – Come Now, O Prince of Peace
<https://youtu.be/PhmnNBjJvEo>

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.

Holy God, in Christ Jesus the joy of the church is made complete. Root the church in your Word and unify us as Christ's body. Send us into the world as your loving people, ready to testify to your Spirit at work. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Mighty God, the world is your handiwork, displaying your creative impulse. Seas teem with life, forests reach up to praise you, and the mystery of life lies deep in the soil. Guard and keep this world for the well-being of all your creatures. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Gracious Sovereign, those who follow your ways are like trees planted near streams of water. Establish the leaders of nations and all in authority in your grace and truth. Strengthen them, so that the people they serve will have abundant life. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Generous Savior, you befriend those who are sick, suffering, poor, lonely, outcast, and rejected. Grant healing and love to all in need. Give them tangible signs of your steadfast love. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Creator God, here in this community we share the gift of praying, learning, and supporting one another. Give us thankful hearts as we claim the gifts that are unique to us and keep us

from being envious of others with different gifts. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Saving God, your wonderful promise is the gift of eternal life in Jesus. Through the witness of those who have died in you, strengthen us now in this gift of life. We cherish the memory of your saints. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

In the hope of new life in Christ, O Lord, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy; through 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 – Son of God, Eternal Saviour

https://youtu.be/VXDjkXe_btA