

# New Hope Lutheran Church

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May 2, 2021  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

## Coming Events

**All services have been cancelled.**

May 4 6:30pm Zoom Raamatupiiri  
May 9 10:00am Bilingual Mother's Day service **Zoom**

## Mother's Day bilingual zoom service

For Mother's Day, May 9, 2021 at 10:00am, we are planning a bilingual service by **zoom only**. If you would like to take part, please send the office an email to let us know. Then on May 8, 2021 you will receive an invitation with instructions to join.

**In our prayers** Fred, Esme, Martha.

## Prayer of the Day

O God, you give us your Son as the vine apart from whom we cannot live. Nourish our life in his resurrection, that we may hear the fruit of love and know the fullness of your joy, 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 – Now the Green Blade Rises (379)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-5Bi2jM40E>

## Psalm 22:25 – 31

**25** From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows.  
**26** The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the LORD will praise him— may your hearts live forever!  
**27** All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him,  
**28** for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations.  
**29** All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him— those who cannot keep themselves alive.  
**30** Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord.  
**31** They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!

## First Reading “**Acts 8:26 – 40**”

**26** Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” **27** So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, **28** and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. **29** The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.” **30** Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. **31** “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. **32** This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading: “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. **33** In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.” **34** The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” **35** Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. **36** As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” **38** And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then

both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. **39** When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. **40** Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

## Second Reading “**1 John 4:7 – 21**”

**7** Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. **8** Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. **9** This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. **10** This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. **11** Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. **12** No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. **13** This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. **14** And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. **15** If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. **16** And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. **17** This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. **18** There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. **19** We love because he first loved us. **20** Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. **21** And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

## Gospel “**John 15:1 – 8**”

**1** “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. **2** He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. **3** You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. **4** Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. **5** “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. **6** If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and

withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. **7** If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. **8** This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

### Sermon

#### *"Loved By God"*

You are loved by God. I know that is a sentence we should all know in our hearts, but how often do we bother to remind ourselves that it is so? How often do we forget that we are loved by God, or even just doubt that we might be loved by God?

Doubt is one of the greatest hurdles we have to cross on a regular basis. According to Genesis, it began in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve came to doubt God's word, and ended up being tossed out of the garden. We see other examples of doubt in various places in the Bible. Jonah doubted he could ever convince the people of Nineveh to follow God's ways, so when directed to go there, Jonah ran the other way. His decision initially proved to be disastrous, and may well have led to a life-long distaste for seafood. In the New Testament, the apostle Thomas is the one infamous for doubting the resurrection of Jesus. Once faced with irrefutable proof though, Thomas changed his tune.

You are loved by God. How do we know beyond a doubt that it is so when doubt comes so easily to us? How do we fight doubt if we are in the midst of it and wonder if any of the stories told to us in Sunday school hold a shred of truth?

In many ways it is similar to the temptation to doubt what we hear on the news these days, when we are bombarded by conspiracy theories that feed off of our fears, and even our hopes for a return to normal. Maybe there really isn't a pandemic or its not all that bad. After all, I personally don't know any of the millions in India that I'm told are struggling with the disease and a shortage of oxygen supplies. And, if it is that bad, can a simple multiple layer of cloth over my nose and mouth, staying six feet away from others, and hand sanitizer actually beat this beast? Doubt feeds on hopes, fears, and our selfish desires.

You are loved by God. How can I be certain, in such an uncertain world where illness and death are the top news stories?

Fortunately the author of 1 John provides us with an answer. According to 1 John, we know God loves us because God chose to send his Son, his only Son, to be lowered to the position of a human, for the purpose of being put to death for our sins. In that process, Jesus also showed us the benefits of living God's kingdom way, and that death has been beaten for all believers. This was not done for God's benefit, but for our benefit, because God loves us. And it is all recorded in a resource that has been trusted not for hundreds, but for thousands of years.

You are loved by God. If what I've told you so far has cast away any doubts, you should also be aware that being loved by God, in itself compels a response.

And that response is shown to us today in our lesson from the book of Acts. Be open to God working to nudge you toward sharing with others that they are also loved by God, regardless of who they are. For those who live with the knowledge that they are loved by God, the response is to show that same love to others, and to generously share that love, just as God has been generous to us. In doing so, we become a fruitful portion of the vine that Jesus speaks of in today's gospel lesson.

You are loved by God. If you are having difficulty believing it, keep in mind that doubt may have a purpose if we are willing to fight it. In fighting away doubt with research, with trusted resources and people, we can actually gain in our faith. Struggling with doubt is indeed a battle, but a battle we will never win if we succumb to it. In that battle, make use of the vine Jesus talks about to connect with others in our congregation, with our pastors, with scriptures, with Bible study, perhaps even going back to look at Luther's small catechism.

And above all, keep reminding yourself that you are loved and cherished by God. Amen.

Hymn – Alleluia! Jesus Is Risen! (377) -  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nITcyewdmHI>

### 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.

God of all fruitfulness, you abide in your church and your church abides in you. Cleanse us by your word and give yourself to the whole church on earth so that it bears fruit and witnesses to your love. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You have created the heavens and the earth. As we wonder at the beauty of creation, may we seek vital connections among all that depends on the earth for life. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You rule the nations with justice and love. Give the leaders of the earth assurance of your abiding presence, that they lead not by fear but with love for those they are called to serve. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You have loved us so that we can love others. We pray for all in need of your love: those who are poor, lowly, outcast, weak, or fearful. Provide for the needs of all. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You gather us with all the saints by the power of your Spirit. With them, may our hearts live forever in your keeping. 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. **Amen.**

Hymn – Christ Is Alive! Let Christians Sing! -  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fD8pxDgTZZU>