

New Hope Lutheran Church

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June 13, 2021

3rd Sunday after Pentecost

Coming Events

All services have been cancelled.

June 15 6:30pm Zoom Raamatupiiri
June 20 10:00am Zoom Father's Day bilingual service

In our prayers Ruth, Fred, Esme, Martha.

Father's Day bilingual zoom service

For Father's Day, June 20, 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 June 19, 2021 you will receive an invitation with instructions to join.

Opening Hymn – Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FU1u6Lmz27A>

Prayer of the Day

O God, you are the tree of life, offering shelter to all the world. Graft us into yourself and nurture our growth, that we may bear your truth and love to those in need, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Psalm 92:1 – 4, 12 – 15

- 1** It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High,
- 2** proclaiming your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night,
- 3** to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp.
- 4** For you make me glad by your deeds, LORD; I sing for joy at what your hands have done.
- 12** The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;
- 13** planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God.
- 14** They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green,
- 15** proclaiming, "The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him."

First Reading "Ezekiel 17:22 – 24"

22 "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. **23** On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches. **24** All the trees of the forest will know that I the LORD bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. "I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it."

Second Reading "2 Corinthians 5:6 – 17"

6 Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. **7** For we live by faith, not by sight. **8** We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. **9** So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. **10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body,

whether good or bad. **11** Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. **12** We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. **13** If we are "out of our mind," as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. **14** For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. **15** And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. **16** So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. **17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

Gospel "Mark 4:26 – 34"

26 He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. **27** Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. **28** All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. **29** As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come." **30** Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? **31** It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. **32** Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade." **33** With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. **34** He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

Sermon

"The Kingdom of God"

In our gospel for today, a term is used that we often hear from Jesus, but we may not have a very clear understanding of it. So today I want to look at what is meant by the term "the kingdom of God". Over and over again, Jesus attempts to interpret for us what the kingdom of God is all about using parables and examples from nature. Clearly he is trying to impart something to us.

The term must be important because Jesus is continuously inviting people into this kingdom, even though he never gives anyone the exact address. It always seems to be rather vague, kind of like inviting someone to attend a dinner party “*in the green house on the east side of town.*” Do they mean it’s a house that is the colour green, or is it a greenhouse where vegetables are grown, and we are to make our own salad from raw materials? Such vague descriptions give us the impression that we have to figure it out on our own, whether invited to a banquet on the east side of town, or the big one in heaven.

The kingdom of God must be incredibly important though as Jesus not only speaks about it incessantly, but also urges us to pray for it to come in the Lord’s Prayer; the one prayer his disciples nagged him to teach them, and in constant use still to this day. So how much do we know about this kingdom of God?

In Jesus’ day it was thought that one of the marks of the messiah would be that the messiah would usher in a new era of unending goodness here on earth. For many in Jesus’ day this meant a time when Israel would be independent, prospering, and a great nation envied by all the rest of the world. From that definition you can see why some of Jesus’ closest disciples would be looking to have a place at his right and left hand. They were hoping to ride along on his coat tails, having a juicy position as a reward for their loyalty to him.

They got it so wrong. Jesus actually meant that all believers would be workers in this kingdom planting the seeds of hope, love, justice, and equality. According to some of Jesus’ remarks, the highest title or position in this kingdom is that of a servant. So the aim is not to seek power or prestige, but to be the servant-iest possible servant one could imagine.

Something else the disciples got wrong is where this kingdom is located, and a simple answer to that question can be rather messy. As I mentioned earlier, the disciples felt that this kingdom is one that is contained to earth. This can be backed up by some of Jesus statements that the kingdom of God is right here and right now. But Jesus made other statements that pointed to the kingdom of God being in the future, and in heaven. We might wonder which one of those it is.

Because there is a certain vagueness regarding the kingdom of God, the best answer we can have at this time is to say that the kingdom of God is both here and now, and in the future in heaven. As in our gospel lesson for today, Jesus often compared it to something that is but a seed, and has yet to grow to tremendous proportions. Jesus also talked about a “foretaste of the feast to come”. From these and other remarks, the best answer we can come up with is that the kingdom of God began to be revealed to humans with Jesus and has continued to grow, although rather slowly up to this point in time.

To put it into “Toolbox” terms, it’s kind of like pulling out the end of a tape measure. Just from what we see, we know that the tape measure exists before us, but also know that there is more inside the casing; a lot more. So it exists in the here and now, but also goes even further in the future when more is pulled out of the casing. Did I mention that explaining this could be a bit messy?

The simplest way to understand the kingdom of God is it being the realm where Jesus reigns as king, and God’s authority is supreme. The kingdom exists partially here and now in the lives and hearts of the redeemed, as well as in perfection and fullness in the future. It’s like a restoration project that has begun, and we are invited to participate during the early stages.

Not that we are able to bring about this kingdom on our own, which is why we pray for help in the Lord’s Prayer. Nor can we do it all and finish the job. The job will be accomplished in its fullness when Jesus returns. We are expected though, to participate, to be actively making use of God’s love, forgiveness, and mercy. In Romans 14:17 Paul says it is part of our present spiritual life, meaning that we work towards showing others this kingdom, making use of the gifts bestowed on us.

In the meantime though, we work to plant the seeds of this kingdom. We do this by treating others as God wants us to treat them, by living a godly life, by supporting our congregation’s mission with our time and talents and treasure – because there are some things we can accomplish better as a godly community than we can as individuals. Not that our individual efforts don’t count and we depend only on our congregation. The kingdom of God is a partnership: we partner

with God in our relationship to God, and we partner with others in our congregational community. Our activity becomes constructive only when we allow God to take full charge.

May you see the kingdom of God in your lives, and may you gladly participate in this amazing project we have all been invited into. Amen.

Hymn – We Are Baptized in Christ Jesus
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7W6BvttXGgQ>

Prayers

Let us come before the triune God in prayer.

Holy God, you plant the seeds of faith in every nation. Enliven your church, so that the good news of your grace may root and grow throughout the world. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Creator, even the trees, shrubs, and flowers delight in your goodness. From the depths of the soil to the highest mountain, bring forth new plants. Restore growth to places suffering drought. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Judge of nations, we pray for our leaders and those in power. Grant them the ability to regard those under their charge with humility, dedicating their lives in service to others. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Divine comforter, you show compassion to those in need and provide relief to those who call on you. Bless all who suffer, especially people trapped in cycles of poverty and homelessness. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Sovereign God, this house of worship belongs to you. We give thanks and pray for our church musician(s). We dedicate to you the joyful noise that comes from this place; the cries of children, the melody of voice and instruments, and the songs from our hearts. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You offer to us your kingdom Lord, a kingdom of peace and justice. Help us to also bring peace and justice into your kingdom on earth, especially in these times when the hatred of others is so predominant. Today we especially remember and pray for the Muslim community in London Ontario who are

suffering the effects of such hatred. May they know your comfort as they mourn the senseless loss of four of their members, and feel the warmth of your arms around them. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Eternal God, we give thanks for our ancestors in the faith who are now at home with you. We look forward to that day when we are reunited in your new creation. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We lift our prayers to you, O God, trusting in your abiding grace.

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 – Build Us Up, Lord

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z0Zz4X7ep3Q>