

New Hope Lutheran Church

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August 22, 2021

13th Sunday after Pentecost

Coming Events

Aug 16 – 27 Both offices closed.

Email and telephone messages will be checked periodically.

Aug 25

10 – 1 Wed Café **Regent St. (outside only)**

Aug 29

10:00 Finn. Worship Service † **Voima Hall**

2:00 Eng. Worship Service † **Regent St.**

In our prayers Ruth, Fred, Esme.

We are tentatively planning a Bilingual Rally Sunday service for Sunday September 12, 10:00 a.m. at Voima Hall so please mark your calendars for this special service.

As we prepare to come together once again, we are reminded that our worship services require worship assistants, beginning in August, and a growing need as restrictions increase. Please consider being a part of this important ministry and let Hilka know of your interest by calling the office at 705-673-2933 or email office@nhlc.ca

Opening Hymn – Awake, My Soul, and with the Sun (557)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ly-1Cva6kxY>

Prayer of the Day

Holy God, your word feeds your people with life that is eternal. Direct our choices and preserve us in your truth, that, renouncing what is false and evil, we may live in you through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Psalms 34:15 – 22

- 15** The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry;
16 but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to blot out their name from the earth.
17 The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.
18 The LORD is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.
19 The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all;
20 he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.
21 Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned.
22 The LORD will rescue his servants; no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.

First Reading “**Joshua 24:1 – 2a, 14 – 18**”

1 Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God. **2** Joshua said to all the people, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods.

14 “Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. **15** But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.” **16** Then the people answered, “Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods! **17** It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our parents up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us

on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. **18** And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God.”

Second Reading “**Ephesians 6:10 – 20**”

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. **11** Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. **12** For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. **13** Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. **14** Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, **15** and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. **16** In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. **17** Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. **18** And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people. **19** Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, **20** for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Gospel “**John 6:56 – 69**”

Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever.’ He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, ‘This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?’ But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, ‘Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him.

And he said, 'For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.'

Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, 'Do you also wish to go away?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.'

Sermon

*By Bishop Michael J. Pryse
Eastern Synod*

Dear friends 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 and a half. But it's hard work and we need to do everything we can to give them our encouragement and support and I'm glad to be able to help in this small way.

In today's epistle and Gospel lessons we are provided with some incredibly rich and evocative images of what it means to live a Christian life. They are also challenging images that have been understood in different ways through the church's history.

Today's epistle from Paul's letter to the Ephesians reads as follows. "Therefore, take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace.

With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

I must confess that I find the martial, militarized language of this text difficult. It may be that I have been overly sensitized by my summer's reading of the full five volume — 5000 plus pages — Game of Thrones series. As fun as it's been, I've pretty much had my fill of breastplates, helms, swords and shields! But I am also quite aware of the destructive ways in which Christian people have seen the life of discipleship through militaristic

lenses. The images of battle and conquest have been used by Christians to engage in evil acts that are completely at odds with the Gospel of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. As such, we need to be extremely careful in how we read and express such imagery.

I am heartened, however, that the passage is framed with the counsel that we arm ourselves with whatever is necessary to proclaim "the Gospel of Peace." That is the real point here! And although the imagery used is all about arming for violent battle, the real strength that is advocated is not the might of armies, but rather the world-reconciling power of the Prince of Peace who himself was the victim of a violent and oppressive regime. Yes, evil exists. And yes, we do need to combat evil. But we do so by arming ourselves, not with weapons, but with the virtues of righteousness, peace, faith and the Word of God.

Hence, I find it helpful to read this Ephesians passage alongside other discipleship descriptions employed by Paul, such as this passage from his letter to the Colossians where he writes, "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

Today's Gospel, likewise, holds a few theological pitfalls of which we need to be careful. This is now our fifth and final Sunday dwelling within John, chapter six. For four of those we have been moving our way through Jesus' "bread of life discourse" at the synagogue in Capernaum.

For most of us, the phrase "bread of life" is well known and often used in our churchly discourse; almost casually! But that was not the case for Jesus' listeners in this passage. For many it was deeply offensive! We read that the people complained and grumbled. "This is difficult! Who can accept it?" Many simply turned and walked away.

Have you ever considered the possibility that Jesus might well have preached more people out of the kingdom than into it? For some who walked away that day, I suspect that they could not consider anything other than a quite literal interpretation of

Jesus' words, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" This is cannibalism; this is a grotesque abomination.

To which some of us might respond, but wait a minute; this is clearly a reference to the eucharist. Jesus is speaking of his presence in the Holy Communion. But if that's really the case, I don't know how Jesus could have expected his listener's to "get it." The last supper, the event which Christians subsequently viewed as the first eucharist, the first Holy Communion, hadn't yet occurred. The first record of a liturgical re-enactments of that event, in something resembling what we call Holy Communion, is found in First Corinthians which wasn't written until around 55 years after Jesus' death.

Ah, but Bishop! You and I both know that the Gospel of John was probably written between 90 and 100 years after Jesus' death. Its authors would have been a part of a eucharistic community that was conversant with using these images in this way. Maybe they were putting words in Jesus' mouth or perhaps phrasing them in such a way as to affirm their own churchly practices and theological constructs. Perhaps; and there are some scholars who would support that particular interpretation

But when I look at the John 6 discourse in the context of the whole book — the whole Gospel of John — when I look to a broad range of biblical scholars, I come to a different conclusion. I think what Jesus is really talking about here is incarnation — the Word — the logos — about God entering into the life of God's own creation and becoming flesh. I also think many of Jesus' listeners would have heard him saying as such and it was that — that earth shattering theological construct — that they found to be, at worst, offensive, and at best, impossible to believe!

I think that it was — and still is — almost unimaginable that God so loved the world — so loved God's creation — that God chooses to enter into that world — certainly in the person of Jesus of Nazareth - but also through Jesus into us — into God's beloved creation — so that we might have true and lasting life and have it abundantly.

Luther Seminary theologian Karoline Lewis describes it this way. "This is truth. Because at the end of the day, life, real life, life lived, abundant life, is hard to fathom, hard to accept, hard to imagine that it could be yours. Judas's betrayal that is referenced at the end of chapter 6, is fundamentally a rejection of relationship but it is also an unwillingness to receive life beyond measure, an inability to accept that abundant life could be true, a reluctance to envision, to dream, to picture that when God said God loves the world that it actually meant him — and means you." That's powerful!

And it is that relationship, as intimate and nourishing as eating and drinking can be – God, in Christ, entering into our lives, our existence, our being — that gives us the will and the capacity to clothe and arm ourselves in the way Paul describes to the Ephesians and the Colossians.

Our Gospel lesson today concludes with Jesus asking a question to his disciples. "Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

May Peter's response be our response. AMEN

Hymn – Blessed Assurance (638)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gGUYfcr7DNA>

Prayers

Rooted in Christ and sustained by the Spirit, we offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all of creation.

You have revealed your love for people overlooked and cast aside, sending your son to be born among the humble and poor. Send your church to proclaim good news to those who feel abandoned, despised, or rejected and make our congregations places of genuine welcome and hospitality. God, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

All creation longs for healing and restoration. Thwart the destruction of plant and animal habitats and amplify the voices of those who advocate for wise stewardship of the earth's resources. God, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

We remember your promise to our ancestors and look to you for justice. Expose pride, greed, and exploitation wherever it is found and raise up humble leaders who act on behalf of those who are poor, oppressed, or in other need. God, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Your Spirit lives in our hearts and makes us heirs of salvation. Rescue us from shame and dishonor. Lift up the lowly, fill the hungry with good things, and have mercy on those who turn to you for help. God, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

Forgiving Lord, you tell us over and over again in your word how to be your servants. Help us to achieve that goal so that we can discover the joys of serving you alone. Forgive us when we stray to the point where we serve ourselves and refuse to see the needs of your children. Guide us to always strive for a servant attitude. God, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

We give thanks for the saints who have found refuge in you, O God. As you have delivered them from all their afflictions, so save us from all our earthly troubles until that day when we sing your praise together in heaven. God, in your mercy. **Hear our prayer.**

We lift these and all our prayers to you, O God, confident in the promise of your saving love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray.

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 – How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds (620)

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