

New Hope Lutheran Church

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September 5, 2021

15th Sunday after Pentecost

Coming Events

Sept 8

10 – 1 Wed Café **Regent St. (outside only)**
6:30 Council mtg **Regent St.**

Sept 12

10:00 Finn. Worship Service † **Voima Hall**
2:00 Eng. Worship Service † **Regent St.**

Funeral

 Jaakko Törmälä 86 yrs

Heavenly Lord, you are our comfort and strength in times of trouble and grief. We pray for your divine presence with the family and friends of Jaakko Törmälä, that you would bless them with comfort, with fond memories, and with your light in their lives. This we ask in the name of Jesus, our savior and Lord. Amen.

In our prayers Ruth, Fred, Esme.

Rally Sunday CANCELLED

If this was a normal year we would be getting together for a bilingual service and a meal on Rally Sunday (September 12). Unfortunately, with the restrictions imposed by the Covid pandemic, we do not have a space large enough for us to join together this year.

Opening Hymn – Praise to the Lord, the Almighty (858)
<https://youtu.be/hFV7y3jH8dY>

Prayer of the Day

Gracious God, throughout the ages you transform sickness into health and death into life. Open us to the power of your presence, and make us a people ready to proclaim your promises to the whole world, through Jesus Christ, our healer and Lord. Amen.

Psalms 146

- 1 Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, my soul.
- 2 I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.
- 3 Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save.
- 4 When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing.
- 5 Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God.
- 6 He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them— he remains faithful forever.
- 7 He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free,
- 8 the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous.
- 9 The LORD watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.
- 10 The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD.

First Reading “**Isaiah 35:4 – 7a**”

4 say to those with fearful hearts, “Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.” 5 Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. 6 Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. 7 The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs.

Second Reading “**James 2:1 – 17**”

1 My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a

good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong? 8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 11 For he who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. 12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, 13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment. 14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? 15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Gospel “**Mark 7:24 – 37**”

Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. “First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” “Lord,” she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.” She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone. Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him. After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put

his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!"). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Sermon

By Rev. Kathy Martin

Assistant to the Bishop, BC Synod

My name is Kathy Martin and I serve as the assistant to the bishop in the BC Synod with particular focus in the area of mission renewal and congregational support. I live, work, and worship on the unceded ancestral land of the Semiahmoo and Coast Salish peoples.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from the One who is, who was and who is to come. Amen.

This summer the effects of climate change have been ever so visible across our country... droughts, floods and fires just to name a few. I live in the Greater Vancouver area, the Lower Mainland of BC, and we have had high temperatures, a devastating heat dome and heat waves several times over this summer. Sadly, as communities we've discovered how ill-prepared we are for these extreme weather events. Even as I write there are scores wildfires running up and down the mountains of BC's interior regions forcing the closure of several major highways, displacing people and creatures great and small; devastating natural areas as well as those formed and shaped and built by our hands.

Fires are inevitable, of course, and necessary. In time, they make way for new growth: they redistribute nutrients moldering on the forest floor, change the profile of the tree canopy so the sunlight can make its way through. The sharp heat cracks open the cones, freeing the seeds and making way for a new generation of trees. But first, when these fires appear, random, wild and out of control, all we see is the devastation and the aftermath of this beloved landscape that is now changed forever.

After some time (and often much sooner than we expect) tiny shoots of new life emerge, here and there, little clumps of

green. From a distance the charred trees remain the most visible feature of the landscape. We have to get closer, look more carefully, if we want to see what is emerging out of the ashes.

In our gospel reading, an exchange between Jesus and the mother of a young child, is like a wild fire. In just a few moments it changes the landscape of Jesus' ministry. The sharpness of the woman's response cracks open assumptions of the past, releasing seeds that will begin to flourish and make way for a new generation of ministry.

Jesus is in the region of Tyre, on the Syrophenician coast just a little beyond the borders of Israel. His schedule has been hectic with very little Sabbath time to catch up with himself, to recharge, reflect and pray. He has been trying to slip away for a bit of rest but everywhere he goes the crowds follow or figure out where he is going and then even arrive there ahead of him. Perhaps that is why he goes into the territory of the Gentiles, to get a little respite from it all, some distance from the people of Israel.

A multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-faith port city like Tyre was just the kind of place his people would avoid like a plague. It felt like there was something on every corner that would make them unclean; the wrong kind of people, the wrong kind of cloth or animals, the wrong kind of practices.

Jesus may have come to this region hoping for a little anonymity but his reputation has gone ahead of him even here. He tucks himself up in a house, makes it clear he doesn't want anyone to know he is there, but he still can't escape notice. Word of his presence spreads like wildfire and a mother arrives, prostrates herself at his feet and begs him to cast the demon out of her little daughter. There is no way to know what this really means. In Jesus' time all kinds of illnesses were assumed to be caused by evil spirits.

We are told the woman is of Syrophenician heritage. This means she is Gentile, not Jewish like Jesus and his followers. Her background, her culture, her religion are different than his. To us, all these generations later, we think this is something that wouldn't have mattered to Jesus, wouldn't have been something that deterred him from helping someone so desperate for his aid. Her origins or faith background just shouldn't be the deciding factor...but in that moment for Jesus it was. In Tyre, surrounded by people he'd been taught to avoid, dismiss, and see as unclean...in his weariness, in his yearning

for just a few hours of anonymity he utters these horrible words to an anguished mother begging for help for her little girl. "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." What? What did he say?

His response is outrageous...at least to us. Yet to the people of his day, to the Gentiles hearing this story, Jesus' comment wouldn't even have raised an eyebrow. To them it was a completely appropriate and reasonable response...no matter how we might struggle with it now.

I read somewhere that the most dangerous prejudices are the ones that are unacknowledged, the ones we do not realize we have. If we can't see them, we can't change them. We are all shaped by the mindset of the world we grow up in whether we are aware of it or not, whether we like it or not. This is true even for Jesus.

Yet this woman, this mother, doesn't back down. In her desperation she sees and challenges his cultural and religious bias. "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." She contends that there is a deeper truth about God that his past is obscuring and she challenges his refusal to help.

Her words burn and in the sharpness of her response Jesus realizes that his call goes far beyond the people he calls his own. In that moment a new generation of ministry begins to take root, one that will flourish over the centuries and extend to the ends of the earth. A ministry that will welcome all people, include all people, and open the door to all people to enter into the love and grace of God.

I wonder who you might encounter if you risked venturing into places in your neighbourhood or community that you normally would avoid? I wonder if you might find someone who would interrupt your way thinking like the woman did when she encountered Jesus? I wonder who might cause us as a church to re-evaluate our living, our prejudices, our assumptions about the way the world works or ought to. Maybe we would discover that there are things that need to change, in our life together as ELCIC, as Synods, as this Lutheran expression of the church in Canada, the way they did for Jesus when he started really listening to this Syrophenician woman.

Over and over, God's call to us includes learning, having our assumptions challenged and our ears opened to God's grace. It means letting go of cultural prejudices, embracing insiders and outsiders, and giving up the idea that there is not enough grace to go around. For these tiny morsels, the smallest crumbs, from

the table are precious gifts and a feast beyond our wildest imagining. Amen.

Hymn – Light Dawns on a Weary World (726)
<https://youtu.be/ZPsSm2sto8A>

Prayers

Made children and heirs of God's promise, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

Holy One, you bring your people together in worship. Enliven your church. Guide all evangelists, preachers, prophets, and missionaries who seek to share your love through word and deed. Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

You provide water for thirsty ground and sunshine to feed hungry plants. Bless all who advocate for healthy forests, unpolluted air, and clean waterways. Inspire all people to show care for the world you have made. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You show no partiality. Increase justice in all nations. Encourage leaders and governments to work with one another for the good of our common world. Unite us in seeking the health, safety, and dignity of all. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You accompany those who are most in need. Shelter all fleeing violence or persecution, protect any who are in danger, and sustain them through uncertain and unstable times. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You support the work of your disciples. Continue to nurture the leadership and ministries of this congregation. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You embrace all who have died in the faith and brought them into your glorious presence. We thank you for their example and rejoice in their lives. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Receive these prayers, O God, and those in our hearts known only to you; 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 – Oh Christ, Your Heart, Compassionate (722)
<https://youtu.be/ibZaY0547sg>