

New Hope Lutheran Church

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October 31, 2021
Reformation Sunday

Coming Events

Nov 2

2:00 Finnish Bible Study **Finlandia-Impola Room**

Nov 3

10 – 1 Kahvi Time **Regent St. (inside)**

Nov 4

6:30 Finnish Bible Study **Zoom**

Nov 6

Before going to bed tonight, turn back clocks 1 hour

Nov 7

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

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

In our prayers Ruth, Esme.

Remembering Jorma Nosov 78 yrs



Lord of all; you promise to be with us in our joys and our sorrows. Today we humbly ask you be with the friends and family of Jorma Nosov, to guide them through their grief and sorrow. Bless them with your loving presence, and secure them in their faith. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Opening Hymn – The Church's One Foundation (654)
<https://youtu.be/1LZVz1guz2c>

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, gracious Lord, we thank you that your Holy Spirit renews the church in every age. Pour out your Holy Spirit on your faithful people. Keep them steadfast in your word, protect and comfort them in times of trial, defend them against all enemies of the gospel, and bestow on the church your saving peace, we pray through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Psalm 46

- ¹ God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.
- ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
- ³ though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.
- ⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.
- ⁵ God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day.
- ⁶ Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts.
- ⁷ The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.
- ⁸ Come and see what the LORD has done, the desolations he has brought on the earth.
- ⁹ He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.
- ¹⁰ He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."
- ¹¹ The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

First Reading “**Jeremiah 31:31 – 34**”

31 “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. **32** It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. **33** “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. **34** No

longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

Second Reading “**Romans 3:19 – 28**”

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. **20** Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. **21** But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. **22** This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, **23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **24** and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. **25** God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—**26** he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. **27** Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. **28** For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel “**John 8:31 – 36**”

Glory to you, O Lord.

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” They answered him, “We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?” Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

*The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.***

Sermon

By Rev. Charles Nolting
"Law & Grace"

Today we celebrate Reformation Sunday, and I have to admit, it's one of my favorite celebrations in the church year. It's not just that the Reformation is based on the underdog story of a lowly monk/priest/theological professor who fought against perceived wrongs and managed to survive, but rather all the ways that God was with Martin Luther to overcome so many obstacles. I'm pretty sure that on this date in 1517 the bookies would have given pretty long odds that Luther would even survive with his life.

Another reason I like celebrating the Reformation is because it highlights the relationship between law and grace, a favorite topic of Martin Luther's preaching. Luther's personal story is a great example to help us understand that relationship. Growing up, Luther was made very much aware of his magnitude of sins; everyone was. The practice of the church in those times was to point the finger at everyone, highlighting how much they had sinned, and how much they owed to God because of their sins.

At the time, sin was viewed as a massive debt everyone carried around and had to repay to God with good works, acts of charity, and hard cash. While such practices kept the church in good financial shape, it did little to help the average person in their relationship with God. God was viewed as an onerous taskmaster threatening to smash your kneecaps if you didn't pay up in some way.

With those kinds of attitudes kicking about, you can see why Martin Luther feared God to the point where, as a monk, he berated himself constantly for unclean thoughts and actions. Back then he was of the belief that one worked their way into heaven. That's what the church was teaching. In later years, when Luther was a professor of the Bible, the church took it a step further and taught that one could also buy their way into heaven.

As one who studied the Bible very thoroughly, as well as being involved in his community, Luther began to have doubts regarding some of the church teachings because the teachings didn't appear to match the words and actions of Christ. Something had to be untrue. Either the church was wrong, or the Bible was wrong. So Luther searched for the truth.

He found clues in places like our 2nd lesson for today from the book of Romans. You can't be declared righteous by works of the law. All have sinned and all are justified by God's grace; and this grace is received by faith. A person is justified in God's sight by faith apart from works of the law. Here and in many other places, Luther came to the conclusion that the church of his day had somehow gotten off track regarding how God treated a person's numerous sins.

The church back then saw the Law of God as a way to make people feel guilty, and then use that guilt to get them to do good things. Luther came to view the Law as more of a mirror; a tool that is used to show us that we have indeed sinned and need to make some changes. Without looking at it, we probably will go through life thinking we are perfect already. So we do need the Law to help us see where we have wronged God and humans.

Some people might see this as a reason not to follow God, and this brings me to another point Luther discovered: to even have faith, however small, is an act of God. As humans, we would never choose to follow God or pay any attention to God on our own. God plants the seed, and we respond to that. I know that many may think they are saved because they made the bold decision to follow Christ, but (as told in Hebrews 12:2), *Jesus is the founder and perfecter of our faith*. It is not a good work to make the choice to follow Christ. It is simply following the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

And when we follow that inspiration, we find God's love, a love so great that it is willing to erase the massive debt of sin we all carry around with us. So it is important to understand how far we have fallen due to sin, in order that we also understand just how forgiving God is. It may not seem too big a deal to owe someone 5 dollars, but what if you found out that with interest and late payments, you now owe 5 million dollars? This is why it is a good thing to meditate on our sin from time to time, and contemplate how we have wronged God and others.

Once we understand how deep in debt we are, the normal human response is to find some way to pay it back, so many people feel that is the reason one does good deeds, or "good works" as Luther often referred to them. Luther's realization then - that we are in so much debt that we can never pay it back on our own - is very important to understanding how God works on a totally different level than humans do. Many non-believers don't understand such a mind set and feel that the reason Christians are attempting to help others is to pay off their perceived debt.

However, as Luther noted, once we understand how vast the debt of our sin is, and also understand that it has all been wiped away due to the gift of Christ's sacrifice, we then want to do something in return. In thankfulness for such a gift we love others and do good things for others. There is no paying back because we could never do enough to pay for all our sins. Besides that, Christ made the payment for each of us. So be happy! Be joyful! Be thankful! Share that happiness, joy, and thankfulness with others.

Luther's conclusion was that while the law can seem like a real burden on our lives, it actually drives us to look for God's grace, which is waiting for us. In finding that grace we also find the joy of living lives thankful for God's gift. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Hymn – Lord Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word (517)
<https://youtu.be/S8ViZi7M5p4>

Prayers

Set free from sin and death and nourished by the word of truth, we join in prayer for all of God's creation.

We pray for all who long for a word of truth and for the radical grace that flows from the cross. Inspire congregations to freely and boldly proclaim your love for all people with persistence and hope. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for your creation, for mountains, rivers, streams, cities, homestead, and neighbourhoods. Write in our hearts a new love and care for creation. Give us the will to curb wasteful habits and to hold accountable those who neglect the vulnerable. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for all who hold public office in our land. Pour wisdom and understanding upon all who govern so that communities of justice and peace may thrive. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for all who long for healing in mind, body, or spirit. Strengthen hospitals, clinics, counseling centers, nursing homes, and recovery centers to be holy spaces of renewal that all might live the abundant life you intend. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for all who seek to grow in faith and love of you. Guide teaching and learning in confirmation, small groups, Sunday school, youth groups, schools, seminaries, and universities. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We give thanks for all the saints and reformers who have gone before us who dwell in your holy habitation. Give us courage through their example to challenge unjust systems and work toward life-giving reformation. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Confident that you hear us, O God, we boldly place our prayers into your hands, through Jesus Christ, our truth and life, 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 – The Church of Christ in Every Age (729)
<https://youtu.be/zQj6ncM3DSc>