

# New Hope Lutheran Church

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## Pastors:

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**October 3, 2021**

*19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost*

## Coming Events

Oct 5

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

Oct 6

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

Oct 7

6 :30 Finnish Bible Study **Zoom**

Oct 10

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

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

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

**BAPTIZED** *Sebastian William Flintoff*  
*(Miia & Spenser Flintoff)*

Opening Hymn – How Firm A Foundation (796)  
<https://youtu.be/rwGW8qRqz4I>

## Prayer of the Day

Sovereign God, you have created us to live in loving community with one another. Form us for life that is faithful and steadfast, and teach us to trust like little children, that we may reflect the image of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

## Psalms 146

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, my soul.

<sup>2</sup> I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.

<sup>3</sup> Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save.

<sup>4</sup> When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing.

<sup>5</sup> Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God.

<sup>6</sup> He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them— he remains faithful forever.

<sup>7</sup> He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free,

<sup>8</sup> the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous.

<sup>9</sup> The LORD watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

<sup>10</sup> The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD.

## Reading “**Hebrews 9:11 – 14**”

**11** But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. **12** He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. **13** The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. **14** How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## Gospel “**Mark 12:28 – 34**”

*One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.*

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

## Sermon

*By Rev. Kathleen Walker, Episcopalian*

*“Love Is Not Easy, but It Is Necessary”*

There are times in life when directions are given that seem very simple. For instance, if you are driving a car, in almost every state in the union, you are required to put on your directional signal to indicate that you are turning a corner. If you want to interrupt a conversation, you should say, “Excuse me.” You tell your kids to put away their toys when they are finished playing. That way they will know where they are the next time they want them. These instructions seem very easy to follow and yet they are constantly violated.

The commandments by which early members of the Jewish community lived were directions from God handed down to Moses about how to live in the world and in community. Jewish leaders added hundreds of more rules that stated the beliefs of the followers of God.

When Jesus was asked by members of his contemporary community, “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus redirects part of his answer to the words contained in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. He says, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” And then Jesus adds the second

instruction: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” That was a very straightforward and familiar statement.

Presumably, this was a part of the daily practice of those who were listening to Jesus. Many members of the Jewish community prayed a daily prayer called the Shema, which incorporates the first statement that Jesus quoted to them. That tradition continues to this day.

Like the first illustrative directions offered at the beginning of this text, the commandment that Jesus gives to the scribe seems pretty simple. He tells him that the most important rule is that they must love God above all things and with every fiber of their beings. While the scribes and the Sadducees may have been somewhat skeptical about the true identity of Jesus, they had been formed by God’s teachings and requirements for a holy life. Still, they were still struggling with these ideals.

As contemporary faith followers, the struggle to live fully into these commandments is apparent throughout our society. If loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind were easy, there would be no room for doubt when difficulties would arise. Yet, there are times for many when doubts arise – especially when prayers are not answered as quickly as one would want or in the way one would hope. When loved ones die unexpectedly, many will express a crisis of faith. “If there is a God,” people will say, “why did God allow this to happen to me?” Why did God allow me to lose my job? Why did God allow my marriage to fall apart? Why is my best friend addicted to drugs? It is not uncommon for regular churchgoers to question the existence of God at very challenging points in life. There have been many books written about this subject. Some of you may have read *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* by Harrold S. Kushner.

Trust is a main source of love. Jesus reminds us that when God is fully trusted, there cannot be any room for second-guessing. When there seems to be no explanation for occurrences in life, those are the moments to let your faith sustain you and lean on God for support and strength, instead of turning away from God.

There is more to this assignment than loving God with all your being. Jesus takes it a step further and says, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” In the Gospel of Mark, the scribe agrees with Jesus and understands the requirements. But take a look at the discussion Jesus had with the Pharisees in the account from Luke about the greatest commandment. When Jesus

says to them, “Love your neighbor,” they immediately push back by asking, “Who is my neighbor?” This is where things seem to get a little tricky. Jesus demonstrates the answer with the parable of the Good Samaritan. He tells the story of the man who was robbed, injured, and left in the road for dead. A priest saw the incapacitated man and walked right past him. A Levite encountered him and actually crossed the street away from him. It was the Samaritan, the unlikeliest person of all, who stopped, offered aid, and even got him to a place where someone could care for him. Jesus’ admonition to the Pharisees was that love for your neighbor is wrapped tightly in care, compassion, and mercy.

The Covid pandemic has created great tension in the United States. It has literally pitted geographical neighbor against neighbor and relatives against each other. There are thousands of news accounts of people fighting in restaurants and in other public spaces and even on airplanes over mask-wearing and vaccinations. What does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself? What would Jesus say at this moment? Perhaps being less judgmental about us versus them is a place to begin. Instead of physical altercations, what would it look like to embrace your neighbor so that a dialogue could commence instead of accusation? If we follow the lesson of the Good Samaritan, how are we caring for our ill neighbors and where are we being led to help one another? Christians are called to do all that we can to love everyone, not just those who agree with us. Love means striving for unity and moving towards becoming Beloved Community.

The same holds true for many of the controversies of the world today. Think of the great conversational shift that could occur if love took the lead. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry has written a wonderful book called *Love Is the Way*. Bishop Curry has said consistently, “If it’s not about love, then it’s not about God.” There is no compromise on this commandment. You cannot love God and hate your neighbor.

When we love God completely, we are bound to find ways to answer the call to love our neighbors also. We will be accepting of people who look different from us and those whose lifestyles are not the same. Resistance to courageous conversations that could lead to greater understanding of differing opinions prevents us from loving each other in the ways God describes.

More importantly, there is liberation in a willingness to trust God enough to believe that neighbors are the same as we are. They

have the same dreams and desires to love the Lord and to follow God as faithful disciples. They, too, have picked up their crosses and have made the commitment to follow Jesus. What greater love is there? The Good News from Jesus is that this kind of love is achievable. It is possible to love others so much that polarization ends, and healing begins.

Undoubtedly, the directions given by Jesus are not so easy after all. Loving God and each other is worth it, people of God. The next time you are asked, “Who is my neighbor?” feel free to use a quote that has been turned into an Episcopal meme:

*Love Thy Neighbor*  
Thy homeless neighbor  
Thy Muslim neighbor  
Thy Black neighbor  
Thy gay neighbor  
Thy immigrant neighbor  
Thy Jewish neighbor  
Thy Christian neighbor  
Thy atheist neighbor  
Thy disabled neighbor  
Thy addicted neighbor  
Amen.

Hymn – Blest Be the Tie That Binds (656)  
<https://youtu.be/3oiNQidLwoA>

### Prayers

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

Holy One, you have raised up faithful leaders throughout history. Empower those discerning a call to ministry and all seminarians, that they continue to be formed for the sake of the gospel. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You have established a diverse and beautiful creation. Revive declining species and preserve endangered lands. Cultivate in us a sense of wonder for the world you created. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You desire for us not to be alone and to live in community with one another. Strengthen relationships between nations and peoples, that we celebrate and support one human family. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You share in our experiences and struggles. Bless all who live with any mental or physical disability. Inspire creative communities, spaces, and environments that are accessible and hospitable. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You have established and nurtured relationships that extend beyond those gathered here today. Bless members who are unable to worship with us and remind us of their continued role in this community of faith. Help us to seek out new and vibrant ways to minister to them. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You promise eternal life to all your children. Thank you for the people of faith who have gone before us. Strengthen our trust we have in you. 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 – Go, My Children, With My Blessing (543)  
<https://youtu.be/vNyofVz24vo>