

New Hope Lutheran Church

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December 12, 2021

The 3rd Sunday of Advent

Coming Events

Dec 14

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

Dec 15

10 – 1 Kahvi Time **Regent St.**

2:00 Mission Circle **Finlandia – Impola Room**

Dec 16

7:00 Caroling **Zoom**

Dec 17

6:00 Most Beautiful Christmas Carols **Voima Hall**

Dec 19

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

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

Dec 24

4:00 Candle Light Worship † **Regent St.**

9:00 Candle Light Worship † **Regent St.**

In our prayers Ruth, Esme.

Notice: As of January 1, 2022 the sermons will no longer be emailed. You can find them on our webpage nhlc.ca

Lighting of Advent Candles



We praise you, O God, for this victory wreath that marks our days of preparation for Christ's advent. As we light the candles on this wreath, strengthen our hearts as we await the Lord's coming in glory. Enlighten us with your grace, that we may serve our neighbors in need. Grant this through Christ our Lord, whose coming is certain and whose day draws near. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn –

Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn (424)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r18aTNzpm0>

Prayer of the Day

Stir up the wills of your faithful people, Lord God, and open our ears to the preaching of John that, rejoicing in your salvation, we may bring forth the fruits of repentance; 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.

Isaiah 12:2 – 6

² Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord himself, is my strength and my defense^[a]; he has become my salvation.”

³ With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

⁴ In that day you will say: “Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted.

⁵ Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world.

⁶ Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you.”

First Reading “Zephaniah 3:14 – 20”

14 Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem! **15** The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. **16** On that day they will say to Jerusalem, “Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. **17** The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.” **18** “I will remove from you all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals, which is a burden and reproach for you. **19** At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the

lame; I will gather the exiles. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they have suffered shame. **20** At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes,” says the LORD.

Second Reading “Philippians 4:4 – 7”

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! **5** Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. **6** Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. **7** And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel “Luke 3:7 – 18”

Glory to you, O Lord.

John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.” “What should we do then?” the crowd asked. John answered, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.” Even tax collectors came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?” “Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?” He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.” The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

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

Sermon

By Rev. Charles Nolting
“John’s Message”

To say that John the Baptist was one of the most important and unusual people in the Bible might be a bit of an understatement. He’s right up there with prophets who walked the city streets naked proclaiming gloom and doom long before John’s arrival. But since it had been centuries since anyone had heard or seen a prophet, it’s no wonder that people in Jesus’ day would make the long trip into the wilderness to see what this guy in camel hair apparel had to say.

As we heard today, his message wasn’t always pretty. He wasn’t one to make people feel better about themselves; in fact, he did just the opposite. In spite of that, people still came to hear his message because, even if it might be taken as offensive, it still struck a chord with people. They had been waiting for some kind of prophetic relief for centuries, and now, with the advent of John, it appeared that God was once again sending prophets, and – just perhaps – might have mercy on them in their plight.

What makes John relevant for us today is not only his message, but also the way he delivered his message. He was straightforward and forthright. He didn’t pull any punches. He told it the way he saw it, and the way he believed God saw the world. Going by our gospel today, John was very much aware of the injustices of his time. He encouraged honesty and fairness in business dealings. He spoke up for the poor and disadvantaged. He urged people to be content with their lifestyle, and get away from the whole idea of always getting more and more and more.

In a lot of ways John was encouraging people to take a good hard look at their lives and evaluate where they stood with God. And that’s a message that should still resonate with us today. So often we fail to see the blessings in life that have been laid at our doorstep, and instead complain that we don’t have enough. It’s like we are afraid that somehow we’re getting behind in life, so we had better make sure we can take as much as possible while the going is still good. It may be the reason we buy goods that add little to our lives, we purchase luxuries that do little to help others who are struggling to survive, and we too often pay more attention to our own image, wants, and reputation than we do to God. It seems like we never have enough, and always want more.

One of the reasons we may feel that way is that we fail to see our standing in the world. The World Inequality Report 2020 was recently released, a document produced by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. In that year, while 100 million people sank into extreme poverty, 2020 saw the steepest increase in billionaire’s wealth on record. The richest 10% of the earth’s population now takes 52% of the global income, and the poorest half of the world population, just 8%.

I realize that we may not think of ourselves as billionaires, probably because we aren’t. But it is enlightening to see where we might fit in the global ranks. The population of the earth is about 7.9 billion. That would mean that the top 10% include roughly 790 million people on earth who make just over half the earth’s income. On average, a person in the top 10% of global income earns about \$125,000 per year. So it’s quite possible that while you aren’t in that group, you actually know someone who is in the top 10 percent of the global economy.

In that global economy, an average adult individual earned just over \$24,000 CDN. Perhaps you fit into that group, or are doing even better than the average global citizen. In that case, you might want to have pity on the poorest half of global income earners who survive on just a bit over \$4000 per year.

What I’m getting at here is not to expose guilt in the manner of John the Baptist, but rather to have us consider how often we think of ourselves as poor, struggling, and just trying to get by. But are we really? In a country like ours there is a fraction who live without anything. There is a slightly larger percentage of the population who are living only day by day struggling to keep themselves fed and housed. Roughly 5 million people are considered to live in poverty in this country alone, which translates to about 14% of the population.

I present to you these figures in order that you might reflect on where you fit in the global scale of wealth. Quite often we tend to point fingers at the 8 million richest people in the world, the 1%, and want them to solve wealth inequality. In doing so, we are actually saying: “*don’t look at me to solve wealth inequality, look at those people because they have an immense amount more than I do!*” That is so true! However, they don’t appear ready or willing to do much about it, which may put them in the category of chaff according to John the Baptist.

Most of the time we don’t like to talk about global inequalities, perhaps because we don’t see how it may impact us. But let’s talk about vaccine inequality around the globe. Rich countries

have gobbled up huge amounts of vaccine, some of it in storage and expired while poor countries don’t have enough. And now we face COVID variants coming from poor countries. If vaccines were more equally distributed around the globe, isn’t it possible that these variants wouldn’t have such a great chance of spreading? Inequalities affect each of us whether we are rich or poor.

This is why God points to us. While billionaires may not want to do much, at least we may have the willingness and courage to take steps to follow the message of John the Baptist. We can do that through access to a very good global aid organization in Canadian Lutheran World Relief. We have the power as citizens to pressure those in power to assist the poor here and around the globe. We have the opportunity even locally to assist the organizations who attempt to feed and house those who struggle just to survive.

So much of John’s message had to do with repairing the washouts of inequality and filling the potholes of injustice. It was part of making the road straight for the one to come, and preparing the way. While some of his language may have been a bit coarse, John’s message was an invitation to be a part of the kingdom to come, and to do that by bringing glimpses of that kingdom to those on earth here and now.

We are called to let go of our fears and worries that we do not have enough, to see the riches and blessings we have been given, and to share with those who are so much in need. In that process we attest to God’s love for all people, and spread the good news of the gospel message. May God grant us the courage, strength, and foresight to carry out our callings. Amen.

Hymn – People, Look East (248)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SPLN1g_ZFY

Prayers

In this season of watching and waiting, let us pray for all people and places that yearn for God’s presence.

Holy God, renew your church and raise up leaders who announce your good news. Grant peace to congregations and seminarians in the midst of transition. Guide the work of candidacy and call committees. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Creating God, your Spirit brought forth the earth and all that is in it. Breathe life into us, that we are inspired to live in harmony with one another and the planet. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Shepherding God, you lead your people in paths of righteousness. Raise up prophets in our own day who warn against captivity to greed and point us to the freedom found in generosity. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Nurturing God, you come near in times of worry and need. Cradle us in your arms, that we trust you and are not afraid. Attend to any who are hungry, imprisoned, or ill this day. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Wandering God, we pray for those who are refugees and displaced in this world. Be with those who have lost their homes and wander. May they find safe places of refuge, and may we be willing to assist them. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We give you thanks for your servants who showed us your goodness and grace. By the power of your Spirit, keep us steadfast in faith until we make our home with you. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of new life, you come among us in the places we least expect. Receive these prayers and those of our hearts, in the name of Jesus, 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 – He Came Down / We are Marching (253)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SpjCB5V6Juk>