

# New Hope Lutheran Church

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**October 16, 2022**

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

## Coming Events

Oct 18 7:00 Eng Bible Study **Zoom**  
Oct 19 10 – 1 Kahvi Time **Regent St.**  
2:00 Mission Circle **Impola**  
Oct 20 6:30 Finnish Bible Study **Zoom**  
Oct 23 10:00 Finnish Worship Service † **Voima Hall**  
2:00 English Worship Service † **Regent St**

**In our prayers** Eero, Ron, Ruth, Marilyn.

## Prayer of the Day

O Lord God, tireless guardian of your people, you are always ready to hear our cries. Teach us to rely day and night on your care. Inspire us to seek your enduring justice for all this suffering world, we pray through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

## Psalms 121

- <sup>1</sup> I lift up my eyes to the mountains— where does my help come from?  
<sup>2</sup> My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.  
<sup>3</sup> He will not let your foot slip— he who watches over you will not slumber;  
<sup>4</sup> indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.  
<sup>5</sup> The Lord watches over you— the Lord is your shade at your right hand;  
<sup>6</sup> the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.  
<sup>7</sup> The Lord will keep you from all harm— he will watch over your life;  
<sup>8</sup> the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

## First Reading “**Genesis 32:22 – 31**”

<sup>22</sup> That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. <sup>23</sup> After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. <sup>24</sup> So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. <sup>25</sup> When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. <sup>26</sup> Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.” But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” <sup>27</sup> The man asked him, “What is your name?” “Jacob,” he answered. <sup>28</sup> Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have

overcome.” <sup>29</sup> Jacob said, “Please tell me your name.” But he replied, “Why do you ask my name?” Then he blessed him there. <sup>30</sup> So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.” <sup>31</sup> The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.

## Second Reading “**2 Timothy 3:14 – 4:5**”

<sup>14</sup> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, <sup>15</sup> and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

<sup>4:1</sup> In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge:

<sup>2</sup> Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. <sup>3</sup> For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. <sup>4</sup> They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. <sup>5</sup> But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

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

## Gospel “**Luke 18:1 – 8**”

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

*Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there*

*was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!' "* And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"  
*The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.***

### **Sermon**

*By Rev. Doug Reble  
"Do We Still Need God?"*

In the name of the God who loves us all, grace to you and peace.

First of all let me say what a privilege it is to be with you, the members and friends of New Hope, Sudbury on this Lord's day. This is the day that the Lord has made.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Yes, even with all the challenges of life right now in church and society and the world, let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Before I turn to my sermon, this is a good time for me to thank you for your continued partnership in ministry with the Eastern Synod. To thank you for your support of the synod and wider church through your prayers and generous benevolence offerings over the years.

Support which continued even when you were dealing with Covid. It has been said that no one is anyone without everyone. I like that. It tells me we need each other now more than ever. We are in ministry together. No one is anyone without everyone. Of course that

thank you extends to your pastors. Thank you Pastors Johanna and Charles.

And now to my sermon. I don't know what your pastor's habit is when it comes to preaching but I am what would be called a lectionary preacher meaning, normally, nine times out of ten, I would preach from one of the four readings assigned for this day in the church year, Old Testament, Psalm, Epistle, or Gospel, what is called the lectionary. Not today. God's Spirit took my sermon writing in a different direction. I would simply invite you to take your bulletin home and read from your own Bibles, prayerfully reflecting on the words.

If I were to preach from one of today's readings, I think I would focus on the gospel story of the persistent widow who keeps asking the judge for justice reminding me that we too are called to be persistent in pursuing justice especially for those who are most vulnerable in our world.

But as said my sermon takes a different direction and so I have a question for you, maybe two. Does the world still need God? Do you need God? Do I need God? Does the world still need Jesus? Do you and I need Jesus? I am not trying to be funny here of flippant. Please hear me out.

Most of my 29 years of parish ministry were spent at Zion Lutheran Church in Stratford where I was pastor for 18 years and where I still live. Our home is about a 30 minute walk from the church, so most mornings, I walked to church and to pass the time I wrote sermons in my head - most of which were pretty bad. Now when I drive the 45 minutes to the synod office in Kitchener or now that parish visits have returned, post-Covid, and I am driving all over the synod from Windsor to Sudbury to Ottawa or places in between, I spend the time reflecting on the questions I just asked you. Do we still need God? Do we still need Jesus?

Now why would I do that? Because I live and work in a world, the world of the church, and I see a world that is changing right before my eyes. Before your eyes. Literally. Rapidly. It doesn't look like people need God, let's be frank. Now I'm not trying to say that the church is dying, I don't believe it ever will, but it is changing with declining human and financial resources and all of us know that. Our sons and daughters and grandchildren, where are they? We used to share the pew with them. Not so much anymore.

I see the day to day reality of this in my work as Assistant to the Bishop. I work regularly with congregations that can't afford pastors, at least full-time, congregations that look to team up with other congregations so that they can share a pastor, churches merging or amalgamating with other churches, churches closing. To use the analogy of a boat, which is an ancient symbol of the church, the church is like a boat on the high seas, it's in the middle of a voyage, and you can't see either shore. That can be scary for some of us. Exciting for others. Where is God in all this? Where is Jesus? Are God and Jesus still relevant? Do we need God? Do we need Jesus? That's what I think about.

Well, yes, of course we do, I wouldn't be standing in this pulpit or any pulpit if I believed otherwise. In these crazy times in which we live, as I reflect on the world around me, which includes the church, I experience a world where people, sometimes me included, are dazed by the maze of complexity, the ambiguity, and sometimes madness of this world. I meet many people desperate for a sense of direction in a world coming apart. We do live in an age of changing personal relationships and confusing international relationships. In times of confusion such as these, people need God, need Jesus, now more than ever. I am convinced of this.

But maybe one of the reasons, one of the many reasons, why church membership has been declining across all of the Northern Hemisphere, North America, and Europe, and across many denominations, not just Lutherans, is because the church has not always been clear in our preaching, teaching, and actions about the God we know most perfectly in Jesus Christ. We need God! We need Jesus! But what kind of Jesus does the world need? We need to be clear about what we need and I would add we need to be clear about what we don't need.

Certainly we don't need a God who loves some and not others. We don't need a God who creates distinctions between people. Our world-we-doesn't need a God who separates capitalists from communists, conservatives from liberals, Republicans from Democrats, anti-vaxxers from vaxxers. We don't need a God who pulls strings and manipulates people with coercive force. Our world, we, do not need a God who says men are better than women or women better than men, or straight better than gay or white better than non-white or non-indigenous better than indigenous or Christians better than Muslims or Jews.

But we do need a God who is partial to all human beings, as it says in the Book of Acts. We need a God in whose presence all distinctions of class, clan, nationality, ethnic background gender and sexual orientation are erased. We need a God who changes people by the persuasive power of love and not by the coercive power of guilt and fear and violence. A God who suffers with the suffering, mourns with the grieving. Our world needs a God who speaks with many voices not always just a Christian voice but through other religions as well. Yes, our world needs to hear that everyone belongs to God.

What of Jesus? It is because of Jesus that we call ourselves Christian. But do we really need Jesus? Do you need Jesus? Why did you come to church today?

To spend some time with Jesus. But we don't need a Jesus who merely looked like a human being and we certainly don't need a Jesus who is viewed through the lens of a legitimation of power and privilege, a Jesus who merely reinforces the status quo. Our world does not need a tv evangelist portrayed mill toast Jesus, a Jesus who only cares about personal piety. We don't need a Jesus who really didn't suffer and die as we must suffer and die.

But we do need a Jesus who was a human being through whom God participated in human life. Our world needs a Jesus who often found himself in trouble because he took his place beside the poor, the outcasts, and the dispossessed. Our world needs a Jesus who asked the right questions and lived the right answers. We need a Jesus who suffered as may suffer, died as we must die, and was raised to life as we shall all be raised. Our world desperately needs a Jesus whose humanity means ultimate hope for all of humanity.

My sisters and brothers in Christ. What am I trying to say this morning? Trust me, there are more than a few times over 38 years of preaching that I have asked myself that. Perhaps it is simply this and this goes back to the two questions I asked. Do we need God? Do we need Jesus? Most assuredly, most unequivocally, most definitively- Yes! But that "we" extends beyond us, beyond you and me. It includes this congregation, this community, this province, this country, this world. This changing, sometimes confusing world in which we live needs God and the God we know most perfectly in Jesus Christ, now more than ever.

That is why I believe the church, despite all its challenges in this 21st century has never been more relevant. Maybe that is what I am trying to say. We need God. We need Jesus. We need you. We need New Hope. Don't give up!

Christ's message of peace, sacrificial servanthood, neighbourly love, and unconditional justice is exactly what our ailing world needs. Our responsibility as Christians, as followers of Jesus, is to name that, claim that and offer that message right where we are, in our homes, our places of work, our places of play, our places of learning and our places of worship and to do it in word and actions, in the most clear, caring, loving, and just ways we can. May it be so.

In the name of the God who loves us all. Amen.

### Prayers

In gratitude and humility, let us join together in prayer on behalf of all of God's creation.

For all the baptized, that they become skilled in compassion and grace and equipped to share the good news with all. Grant your followers persistence in proclamation and prayer. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

For air and sky, clouds and sun, that they provide rain to parched land and relief to flooded ground. Renew and restore our polluted atmosphere and empower us to be worthy stewards of creation. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

For judges, juries, and all who work in the judicial system, that they desire wisdom, seek truth, rule with fairness, and have the courage to do what is right. Eliminate oppression and injustice in our criminal justice system. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

For all who are lonely, especially those who have newly arrived in an unfamiliar city or country, political prisoners without recourse to justice, hospital patients without visitors, and any who are ill or grief-stricken. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

For those in our congregation and community engaged in advocacy work, that with the persistence of the

widow, they lift their voices in seeking justice on behalf of others. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

For those who have taught us faith and now rest in your heavenly peace, that we remember and give thanks for these saints who shared the gospel through word and deed. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

With grateful hearts we commend our spoken and silent prayers to you, O God; 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.**