

New Hope Lutheran Church

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October 23, 2022

20th Sunday after Pentecost

Coming Events

- Oct 25 2:00 Kamhari **Impola**
7:00 Eng Bible Study **Zoom**
- Oct 26 10 – 1 Kahvi Time **Regent St.**
- Oct 27 6:30 Finnish Bible Study **Zoom**
- Oct 30 10:00 Finnish Worship Service †
Pyhäinpäivä **Voima Hall**
2:00 English Worship Service †
All Saints Day **Regent St**

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

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, 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. ^[a]

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 ^[a] 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
“Skewed Thinking”*

Today we celebrate the beginning of an event that happened 505 years ago, the Reformation. It is said that on the day of All Hallows Eve, October 31, 1517, Martin Luther posted the 95 issues he had with the church on the doors of the Wittenberg castle church. He knew that the next day – All Saints Day – a number of educated people with the ability to read would be coming for worship and take note of his handiwork – which was the point of posting them.

Now, while I know that there are people who have issues with the church, I’m not sure that many of them can come up with 95. If you have ever taken a look at Luther’s document though, (of which there are English translations), what one finds is that Luther actually had fewer than 95 issues with the church, but they each had a lot of sub-points.

First and foremost, Martin Luther was concerned about how one achieved eternal salvation. At some point in time, the Roman church had skewed away from the idea that salvation is achieved quite simply by believing - believing that Jesus Christ came to rid us of our sin. It couldn’t be simpler than that.

Of course, when one leaves such things in human hands, everything has to get complicated. Somewhere in the human psyche there is an idea that there isn’t enough of anything to go around. Personally, I think that satan planted it there because it has been the cause of an immense amount of human suffering throughout the ages. This idea that we are constantly lacking leads us to believe that we always need more, that we don’t have enough, and the greedy trait of hoarding for ourselves while others have to do without and live in misery.

Unfortunately, in Luther’s day and for years before that, the church had also taken up with such thinking. The pope wanted a grand basilica, St. Peter’s cathedral, but such a project cost a lot of money. So, one way the church of Luther’s day raised money (out of many other wild ideas) was by selling offices, such as the office of Bishop and other church hierarchy. Such a plan seems innocent enough, doesn’t it? It doesn’t seem like it’s going to hurt anyone, does it? Everyone will be a winner. So we are told.

It is however, at this point where things go terribly wrong. A person who’s into buying power isn’t going to be happy with one post, as their inclinations are to purchase more. In order to pay for a variety of church offices then, one gentleman had borrowed heavily and needed to pay his debts in a hurry. He hired a priest by the name of Johann Tetzel to collect on his behalf because Tetzel had a great plan: to go around the German countryside and sell off what he called “indulgences”.

The idea was simple. People knew they were sinners; the church told them that all the time, so why not get them to pay something in exchange for a reduced sentence in purgatory? The plan was wildly successful – from the hierarchy’s point of view, but not so much for the peasants it took advantage of.

This scheme bothered Luther to no end, partly because it was hurting peasants, and partly because his study of scripture told him differently. One example is our lesson today from Romans which is summed up in verse 22: “*This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.*” There is no mention of any worldly type of payment except for the payment Christ made on the cross. All that is required is faith.

The one problem with that outlook is that human thinking often skews what that really means. The most common perception is that since salvation is free, all you need is faith, and that’s the end of it.

What is more often forgotten (or ignored) is that: when someone pays off a debt on your behalf, shouldn’t there be a sense of gratitude? The reason that the church in its current form hasn’t totally dropped the idea of sin from breaking the commandments, is that we need to be reminded that sin is a constant part of our lives whether it comes from thoughts, words, or deeds. Yes, some people do better at resisting it than others, but no one is ever totally rid of it. Because of that we need to constantly be turning to God in thankfulness that God is so loving and willing to let it go whenever we request forgiveness.

If gratitude is present, we then go on to do things that show it. We support our church body, we come to worship God with prayer, praise and sacrament, and we attempt to love others as much as ourselves. And yet, today we often find that many are willing to take the cancelled debt, and leave it at that. It’s kind of like paying off a loan, but not the interest for a loan. We

may think we have done our part, but the powers that be may not see it that way.

This too was a big part of Luther's message. It hasn't only been in our time that people – upon discovering the freedom given through forgiveness – just let things go at that and did nothing about it. And this is one reason we need to remember and celebrate Martin Luther and the Reformation. Luther still reminds us that while it's impossible to buy our way to salvation since Christ suffered freely, we still are to realize the immense size of that debt, and respond to it accordingly. In many ways we are reminded that because God loves us, our faithful response is to love God as well, showing that love with words and actions toward God and others. Amen.

Prayers

In gratitude and humility, let us join together in prayer

God our fortress, we pray for the church. Write your law of love on the hearts of your people, that we remain steadfast in our witness to your grace. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God our liberator, we pray for your earth. Bring new life to overused land and contaminated rivers. Bring rain to places of drought and dryness to flooded areas. Reform and reorient our relationship with the environment, that we faithfully care for all of your creation. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God, our refuge and strength, we pray for the nations. Where they are in an uproar, bring wise leadership and comfort for those in distress. Make wars to cease and peace to enter every land. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God, our very present help in trouble, we pray for those in need. Show mercy to refugees and all fleeing from danger. Shelter any without homes. Calm all who are

facing illness, surgery, or a new diagnosis. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God our redeemer, we pray for our congregation. Bless us as we attempt to discern our way forward. Open our hearts to your Holy Spirit, remind us of your word, and give us courage as we plan ahead. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God our stronghold, we give thanks for those who have gone before us in faith, especially Martin Luther and all reformers. Renew and reform us as we strive to continue in your word. 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.

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.**