

New Hope Lutheran Church

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December 11, 2022

3rd Sunday in Advent

Coming Events

- Dec 12 6:30 Luther Bells **Regent St.**
Dec 13 7:00 Eng Bible Study **Zoom**
Dec 14 10 – 1 Kahvi Time **Regent St.**
Dec 15 6:30 Finnish Bible Study **Zoom**
Dec 17 3:00 Bilingual Christmas Carols
& rice pudding **Regent St.**
Dec 18 10:00 Finnish Worship Service **Voima**
2:00 English Worship Service **Regent St.**
Dec 23 – Jan 8 Both offices closed

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

Remembering Liisa Mansikka 98 yrs.



Merciful Lord; we pray for all who are bereaved on this day. Be with them to give them comfort, strength, and guidance. We especially pray for the family of Liisa Mansikka that your loving arms may enfold and comfort them in their faith. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

Stir up the wills of all who look to you, Lord God, and strengthen our faith in your coming, that, transformed by grace, we may walk in your way; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

First Reading “Isaiah 35:1 -10”

¹The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus ²it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. ³Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. ⁴Say to those who are of a fearful heart, “Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you.” ⁵Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; ⁶then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; ⁷the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. ⁸A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. ⁹No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. ¹⁰And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Psalm 146:5 – 10

⁵ Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God.
⁶ He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and

everything in them—he remains faithful forever.

⁷ He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free,
⁸ the Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous.
⁹ The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.
¹⁰ The Lord reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord.

Second Reading “James 5:7 – 10”

⁷ Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.
⁹ Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! ¹⁰As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

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

Gospel “Matthew 11:2 – 11”

Glorify to you, O Lord.

² When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples ³and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” ⁴Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.” ⁷As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. ⁹What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

¹⁰This is the one about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' ¹¹Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

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

Sermon

By Rev. Charles Nolting
"Our Identity"

Today we come across an interesting situation in our gospel lesson. John the Baptist, THE John the Baptist, the person who baptized Jesus and saw the dove and heard the voice from heaven, the one who foretold Jesus appearance – well he doesn't seem very sure about who Jesus is. Poor John has been put in prison, he's had time to mull things over, and now he seems to have doubts about whether he was right or wrong about Jesus identity.

And if you look at it from John's point of view, you can see where he might be coming from. The message of John the Baptist after all, was a message of preparing the way and making the road straight and getting your life in order because the Messiah was on his way and a great judgment was going to soon follow. Remember his words? *"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Repent!"* (Matt 3:10). That was John's message.

But when Jesus began his ministry after the baptism and temptation in the wilderness, it didn't look hardly anything like what John had predicted. Where's the fire and brimstone? Where's the judgment? Up to this time Jesus ministry has been low key, and full of loving actions, and a lot of talk about being blessed. You can't really blame John for starting to doubt his own message. And so, he sends some of his followers to ask Jesus whether he is the messiah or not.

Jesus gives an interesting reply: *"Go and tell John what you have heard and seen. The blind are now able to see, and the lame can walk. People with leprosy are being healed, and the deaf can hear. The dead are raised to life, and the poor are hearing the good news."* (vs 4-5) Basically Jesus is reiterating what the prophets had foretold about the messiah:

The prophet Isaiah wrote: *"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer and the tongue of the mute sing for joy."* Isaiah 35:5-6

Through these words from the book of Isaiah, (and other prophets) Jesus was verifying that yes, he is the promised one, that is his identity, and John need not fear that he had made some kind of grave mistake. John's message had been spot on, but – like many things we expect from God – the actions expected weren't going to happen immediately. Things were going to work in God's time. In the meantime, Jesus was verifying who he was, and what he really was about.

That brings us to the question of how do we determine who people are, and whether they are who they claim to be? In an internet world, it appears to be pretty easy to escape detection as to your real identity. It's actually scary to hear about predators meeting their prey online; their prey never knowing until too late, what kind of person they have become associated with. We hear about people bullying others online, and the victim isn't always sure exactly who is persecuting them. It doesn't appear to be all that difficult. Identities can be very vague and fleeting.

So, in a world with so much fakery going on, and so many false identities, how do we determine if a person is who they say they are? For the most part, these days we are told to ask for photo ID. They are supposed to tell us who a person is and what they are about. But they aren't the only way.

Let's say a nice car drives up to your residence and a few people dressed very smartly come to your front door holding pamphlets. Who could it possibly be? We know, don't we? And yet, they don't show ID badges, they hardly introduce themselves, they don't say much about where they are from or what their intent is. Instead they ask you questions about your faith, and want to discuss their pamphlet with you. So even without all the identification we feel is required today, we are still easily able to identify them by what they do and what they say, as well as how they behave.

Now even though I don't care for such people coming around, there might be something we can take from them – and that is to find our own way of identifying ourselves to the rest of the world.

You see, one of the problems that we have as the Christian church today is that most people have little or no idea of who we are or what we actually stand for. The identity most people associate with the Christian church usually has something to do with sins of the past committed by some church bodies we may never have been associated with; and because that is on people's minds, they have little interest in finding our true identity. They aren't overly familiar with our teachings except perhaps in a very vague way. And because of that, we have faded into the background of society. Not a lot of people are aware of what we do for the good of society. Most think that Christian churches exist only for their own benefit.

How will others know what we mean then, when we say we are Christians? How do we prove our identity? We aren't about to hand out photo ID's saying you belong to New Hope Lutheran church, mainly because we shouldn't have to. Just as we can identify those well-dressed persons at our door, people should be able to pick us out as Christians on the street, at least by our words and actions.

I had an interesting experience just a couple of weeks ago. A delivery truck had backed into our driveway to make a delivery, and the driver was very apologetic that he had bent over a driveway marker by the ditch. It didn't really bother me because earlier this year a large septic truck had totally run the thing over. I had just bent it back into some semblance of its former image and propped it up there. But this driver was insistent that he would bend it back straight, which he did.

The shocker to this tale comes a couple of days later when the delivery driver is at my door again, and handed me a brand-new driveway marker. I tried to explain that there was no need, but he just waved me off and left. The thought that ran through my head was: I wouldn't be surprised to find out that person is a Christian, because that's how Christians are supposed to be. That person left a mark on me. That's the brand identity for Christians.

So how do we strengthen that brand identity? You may recall a song with the refrain of: "*and they'll know we are Christians by our love.*" What Jesus' example on earth shows us is that our identity as Christians is built up and gains respect when we show love to others in ways that are visible and sincere. When we show this love for others beyond the walls of our own building, that's when we build our identity. When we refuse to take part in actions that hurt others, we build our identity. When we stand up for the bullied and oppressed, we build our identity.

This identity of love is what we want to show the world, so they too can come to know God. We show it by making the world a better and more meaningful place for others. We show our Christian identity by improving the ways humans treat each other. In a world where people are becoming more and more abusive to each other in so many different ways, we are to be the rebels. We are to stand out rather than just blend in.

While John the Baptist may not have been sure of Jesus identity, we can be. And we too can identify with Christ, by acting and speaking as he did; with words of love and comfort, in a world that is harsh and brutal. May our Christian identity blossom and flourish. Amen.

Prayers

As we prepare for the fullness of Christ's presence, let us pray for a world that yearns for new hope.

Gracious God, we rejoice in the gifts of your Spirit. Equip the global church to magnify your love and peace in every land. We pray for the work of the Lutheran World Federation and Lutheran World Relief. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Abundant God, we rejoice in your creation. Revive lands we have squandered and depleted. Make gardens flourish in cities and neighborhoods. Cleanse polluted air and water so living things may breathe, drink, and praise you. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Righteous God, we rejoice in your justice. End racism and oppression. Deliver all who are unjustly imprisoned or persecuted. Reconcile nations and peoples in conflict around the world. Help us pray for our enemies. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Healing God, we rejoice in your compassion. Comfort any in distress because of worry, illness, or loss (*especially*). Strengthen and protect health care workers, rescue teams, crisis counselors, first responders, and all who risk themselves to keep others safe. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Abiding God, we rejoice in your company. Give us calm and patient hearts as we gather with family and friends. Keep us mindful of those for whom this season is not happy. Console the grieving and surround them with loving support. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Faithful God, we rejoice with Mary, Mother of our Lord, and with all the saints, that your mercy endures for all generations. Look with favor on those who have died and lead us to joyfully sing of your everlasting promises. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Draw near to us, O God, and receive our prayers for the sake of your Son, 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.**