

# New Hope Lutheran Church

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**February 19, 2023**

*Transfiguration Sunday*

## Coming Events

- |        |        |   |
|--------|--------|---|
| Feb 21 | 2:00   | Kammari <b>Impola</b>                       |
|        | 7:00   | Eng Bible Study <b>Zoom</b>                 |
| Feb 22 | 10 – 1 | Kahvi Time <b>Regent St.</b>                |
|        | 12:00  | Finnish Ash Wed service <b>Regent St.</b>   |
|        | 5:30   | Souper-Time <b>Regent St.</b>               |
|        | 6:30   | English Ash Wed service <b>Regent St.</b>   |
| Feb 22 | 6:30   | Finnish Bible Study <b>Zoom</b>             |
| Feb 26 | 10:00  | Finnish Worship Service <b>Voima Hall</b>   |
|        | 11:30  | English Worship Service <b>Regent St.</b>   |
| Mar 5  | 9:00   | Bilingual Worship Service <b>Voima Hall</b> |
|        | 10:15  | Annual Meeting <b>Voima Hall</b>            |

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

**Remembering** Marjatta Salomaa 88yrs.



Heavenly Lord, you are our comfort and strength in times of trouble and grief. We pray for your divine presence with the family and friends of Marjatta Salomaa that you would bless them with comfort, with fond memories, and with your light in their lives. This we ask in the name of Jesus, our savior and Lord. Amen.

## Prayer of the Day

O God, in the transfiguration of your Son you confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the witness of Moses and Elijah, and in the voice from the bright cloud declaring Jesus your beloved Son, you foreshadowed our adoption as your children. Make us heirs with Christ of your glory, and bring us to enjoy its fullness, 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 “Exodus 24:12 – 18”

<sup>12</sup>The Lord said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.” <sup>13</sup>So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. <sup>14</sup>To the elders he had said, “Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them.” <sup>15</sup>Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. <sup>16</sup>The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. <sup>17</sup>Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. <sup>18</sup>Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

## Psalm 2

- <sup>1</sup> Why are the nations in an uproar? Why do the peoples mutter empty threats?  
<sup>2</sup> Why do the kings of the earth rise up in revolt, and the princes plot together, against the Lord and against the Lord’s anointed?  
<sup>3</sup> “Let us break their yoke,” they say; “let us cast off their bonds from us.”  
<sup>4</sup> God whose throne is in heaven is laughing; the Lord holds them in derision.  
<sup>5</sup> Then in wrath God speaks to them, and in rage fills

them with terror.

- <sup>6</sup> “As for me, I have anointed my king upon Zion, my holy mountain.”  
<sup>7</sup> Let me announce the decree of the Lord, who said to me, “You are my son; this day have I begotten you.”  
<sup>8</sup> Ask of me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance and the ends of the earth for your possession.  
<sup>9</sup> You shall crush them with an iron rod and shatter them like a piece of pottery.”  
<sup>10</sup> And now, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth.  
<sup>11</sup> Submit to the Lord with fear, and with trembling bow in worship;  
<sup>12</sup> lest the Lord be angry, and you perish in a sudden blaze of wrath. Happy are all who take refuge in God!

## Second Reading “2 Peter 1:16 – 21”

<sup>16</sup> For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. <sup>17</sup> For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” <sup>18</sup> We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain. <sup>19</sup> So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. <sup>20</sup> First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, <sup>21</sup> because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.  
The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## Gospel “Matthew 17:1 – 9”

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

<sup>17</sup> Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves.

*And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."*

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

## **Sermon**

*By Janelle Lightbourne*

*Seminary Student at Martin Luther University College*

The conversation within the Black community around what kinds of images and adjectives are used to portray and describe people of the African diaspora is ever evolving. It has been interesting to see it develop. Perhaps this conversation evolves so readily because of the heavy stereotypes that exist, shaping a narrative of Black people as comical, lazy, loud, and thuggish. These images are hard to witness especially when folks who identify as Black are aware of their own diversities and complexities. There is a pressing need to use self-reflective descriptors and write authentic narratives. This need is balanced with the struggle of knowing how to portray Black culture and identity in a way that best captures a full range of emotions and experiences. In part, the work of reshaping this narrative has come in response to the overwhelming amounts of negative images of Black people in the media, (especially

images of Black men who are victims of police brutality). And so, to counter the negativity and fill out the narrative, images of victims in a graduation cap and gown or pictures of them smiling and laughing while holding their children are widely shared and promoted. Recall the picture of George Floyd, who was murdered by police in 2020 holding up a Bible with his Bible study group, shared in answer to the videos and photos of him on the ground struggling to breathe.

This year, there has been an influx of pictures of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and his wife and co-laborer Coretta Scott King, not on the front lines of marches with stoic expressions, but on the beach, lounging by the pool, laughing together and relaxing.

A statue in honor of the Kings was unveiled in Boston in January. The creator, Hank Willis Thomas drew inspiration for the statue from a photograph that was taken of the couple after Rev. King won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. In the photo, both of Rev. King's arms are wrapped around Mrs. King in a tight hug. She has her eyes closed and both are smiling widely, looking proud and joyful, almost playful. Aptly, the statue is called "The Embrace".

It seems that this statue, 'The Embrace', and the photograph that inspired it are a part of this evolving conversation. There are more and more voices inviting others to see all the different parts of a Black person's experience--the joy and the hardships--and regardless of the image, to still see that person as a beloved human being deserving of respect and dignity. The art piece has received mixed reviews but the artist made his point clear. In his own words, the statue is 'about the capacity for each of us to be enveloped in love'.

At the transfiguration, God gives the disciples and the Matthean church a fuller vision of who Jesus is. We don't have any definite answers on the purpose of this event or this text, but there are many explanations that help us make sense of this story. A lot of these

explanations focus on the disciples, Peter, James and John and the original hearers of the text.

Matthew's community was experiencing much suffering and conflict with the Roman Empire and amongst themselves and needed a reminder of the resurrected Christ who they were following. In our text, we read that Jesus climbs up a high mountain with Peter, James and John and there on this mountain by themselves, Jesus is "transfigured before them." His face and clothes shine. He is awe-inspiring and brilliant. Jesus radiates light and Jesus *is* light.

It is posited that for the disciples and this first century community, this image of Jesus in his radiant glory was to be an image that stayed with them as they endured their hardships. The words "This is my Son, the Beloved...listen to him!" affirmed their belief in Jesus as the Messiah and recommitted them to a life of obedience to Jesus. The transfiguration was a source of hope and strength to keep following and walking in the way of Jesus in spite of the trouble.

Reading this text in light of Black History Month, however, invites us to wonder what purpose the transfiguration served *for Jesus*. Before the transfiguration, Jesus had been going about his ministry as usual--preaching, healing, being tested by the religious leaders and misunderstood by his own disciples. Matthew 16:21 tells us that Jesus began to show his disciples another part of his experience and share a bit more of what his road ahead was going to look like: he was going to Jerusalem. He would suffer at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes. He would be killed and raised back to life. Even though Peter gets his confession right that Jesus is the Messiah, he still doesn't fully understand what his confession means for Jesus. Jesus' experience--what he knew about himself and his journey--goes unheard and is denied.

Perhaps Jesus himself needed a space where all the different parts of his identity and his experience could

be fully seen and acknowledged--a space where he was reminded that he was beloved. The transfiguration offered him that.

Up until this point, the disciples and his community had known him as a teacher, a healer and even a prophet like Elijah or Jeremiah. To be sure, each of these is a role that Jesus fills, but none *alone* captures his full identity.<sup>1</sup> On the mountaintop, every part of Jesus' identity was on display in front of God, his Holy Parent who knew him through and through and on display in front of his most trusted disciples. Perhaps the words of affirmation, spoken by God "This is my son, the beloved in whom I am well pleased" were Jesus' own much-needed source of strength and hope.

And after a short moment of glory and radiance, the world went back to what it was. No prophets of old. No audible divine voice. No light emanating from Jesus' face. The world has gone back to what it was but the disciples cannot return to their same old image of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> They have been changed into a community that would be able to hold onto Jesus' radiance and his glory even while they walked the long road to Jerusalem. As they descended, they carried the seeds of a community that would be able to see that this radiance was also a part of who Jesus was and even as the glory faded, see that Jesus was *still* glorious and beloved regardless of his suffering, his circumstances or what he looked like.

Glorious on the mountain and in the valley. Glorious as he begged for a different path on his knees in the garden of Gethsemane, glorious as he suffered on the cross, glorious as he laid in the tomb, glorious in the garden as the risen Christ.

Let's imagine how Jesus felt even for the short while that he was on that mountain. Did he have a sense of safety and wholeness? Vulnerability? Was he relieved? Understood? We cannot say what Jesus' exact experience was, but we know that these kinds of safe spaces are what we all long for and deserve. We all

want to be in relationships and communities where no part of us needs to be hidden, where we can be fully known and still counted as glorious and beloved.

For many Indigenous people, Black folks and People of Color, (BIPOC) these kinds of spaces are few and far between. This is especially true in Canada where Indigenous and Black communities experience marked disadvantages in employment, housing and home ownership, and education and where they are grossly overrepresented in prisons and the criminal justice system.

The response to this kind of environment is to split and hide away parts of the self, not because of a lack of confidence, fortitude or self-understanding. This hiding or more aptly, safe-keeping of one's personhood is done in order to survive in a society that creates these very real inequities. Perhaps you have heard of code switching where members of marginalized groups (often unconsciously) change the way they talk, dress, and act in order to make others feel comfortable. This is done in exchange for fair treatment, quality service, and employment opportunities.<sup>3</sup> Scholar and civil rights activist W.E.B. Dubois describes code switching as "a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others...One ever feels [their] two-ness...two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."<sup>4</sup>

This is *exhausting*. And it invites us all to ask - Where are the spaces where BIPOC can feel some relief from this hiding? And even if the ideal of being fully understood is not realized, where can BIPOC simply be safe and whole? Are our churches that safer space and community? Can they be?

My siblings, God is continuously creating safe spaces for those who need them most. These are spaces where each person's voice is valued, where folks apologize and are held accountable when wrongs

inevitably occur, where we are all allowed to be ordinary and messy and still be treated as beloved.

I hope you hear in these words today a deep need and an invitation to be a safer space. May we be *or become* communities where folks who are on the margins can turn their code switchers off for just a little while. May we hear the call of the transfiguration to look and listen and to acknowledge light where we did not see it before. May we truly see each other and name each other glorious and beloved as we continue to walk with God on the long road of wholeness and liberation. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Audrey West, 2008, Commentary on Matthew 17:1-9.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Barreto, 2020, Commentary on Matthew 17:1-9.

<sup>3</sup> Harvard Business Review, *The Costs of Code Switching*, 2019. <https://hbr.org/2019/11/the-costs-of-codeswitching>

<sup>4</sup> W.E.B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903.

## Prayers

Called together to follow Jesus, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

Embolden your church as it witnesses to the majesty and mercy of your Son. Equip lay preachers, deacons, and pastors. Move us to share our stories of your faithfulness and forgiveness; may our lives proclaim your greatness. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Dwell with your whole creation, from the tallest mountain peak to the deepest valley. Bless the work of conservation organizations and protect vital habitats. Support the work of disaster relief agencies around the world. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Guide and give wisdom to all in authority: our mayor and local leaders, our provincial and federal legislators. Bring freedom and justice to all nations. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Give shelter to those lacking safe homes. Spur communities to work for fair housing for all. Protect our neighbors whose dwellings do not keep out dangerous cold or heat; accompany with your touch those who are homebound, sick, or isolated. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Make us eager to receive your Word in scripture. Help us recognize Jesus' voice in the needs of our neighbors; make us confident to follow the way of the cross. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Receive our thanksgiving for the holy ones who have guided us in faithfulness and gathered even the unlikely as your people. With our forebears in faith and all who have hoped in you, teach us to wait with courage until the promised day dawns. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We bring to you our needs and hopes, O God, trusting your wisdom and power revealed in Christ crucified.

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.**