

New Hope Lutheran Church

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February 5, 2023

The 5th Sunday after Epiphany

Coming Events

- | | | |
|--------|--------|---|
| Feb 6 | 1:30 | Worship & Music Zoom |
| Feb 7 | 2:00 | Kammari Impola |
| | 7:00 | Eng Bible Study Zoom |
| Feb 8 | 10 – 1 | Kahvi Time Regent St. |
| | 11:00 | LCW Regent St. |
| | 6:30 | Council meeting Regent St. |
| Feb 9 | 6:30 | Finnish Bible Study Zoom |
| Feb 12 | 10:00 | Finnish Worship Service Voima Hall |
| | 11:30 | English Worship Service Regent St. |

In our prayers Eero, Ron, Marilyn.

Prayer of the Day

Lord God, with endless mercy you receive the prayers of all who call upon you. By your Spirit show us the things we ought to do, and give us the grace and power to do them, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

First Reading “Isaiah 58:1 – 9a”

¹ Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins. ² Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God. ³ “Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?” Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. ⁴ Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. ⁵ Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? ⁶ Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? ⁸ Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. ^{9a} Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

Psalm 112:1 – 10

¹ Praise the Lord. Blessed are those who fear the Lord, who find great delight in his commands.
² Their children will be mighty in the land; the generation

of the upright will be blessed.

- ³ Wealth and riches are in their houses, and their righteousness endures forever.
⁴ Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for those who are gracious and compassionate and righteous.
⁵ Good will come to those who are generous and lend freely, who conduct their affairs with justice.
⁶ Surely the righteous will never be shaken; they will be remembered forever.
⁷ They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord.
⁸ Their hearts are secure, they will have no fear; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.
⁹ They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor, their righteousness endures forever; their horn^[c] will be lifted high in honor.
¹⁰ The wicked will see and be vexed, they will gnash their teeth and waste away; the longings of the wicked will come to nothing.

Second Reading “1 Corinthians 2:1 – 12”

¹ When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. ² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.
³ And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. ⁴ My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. ⁶ Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. ⁷ But we speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him”— ¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us

through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.

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

Gospel **“Matthew 5:13 – 20”**

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus said: “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”
*The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.***

Sermon

*By Rev. Charles Nolting
“Job Description”*

Last week in the gospel we heard the beginning of the sermon on the Mount; an immensely long discourse Jesus gave to the most dedicated of his followers who had the determination and stamina to follow him up that mountain overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Last week was about the Beatitudes, where Jesus began by telling us about what we have to look forward to; the best part.

And then today we begin hearing about what is expected for those who see those benefits. Now, Jesus isn't saying that you have to do all these things before you can see any payoff, (this isn't a work for rewards program) but is pointing out that some of the benefits are already present in us, like the desire to be filled with God's spirit because we find a certain emptiness to life. Jesus is in essence saying that once you've experienced some benefit, you will want to do something more in return, but we might be asking ourselves, what can we possibly do?

And this is where we begin today. Today we are told that we are “to be”. We are to be Salt, and we are to be Light. Of course Jesus doesn't mean this literally, he means it figuratively. We are to be the salt that flavors life, the thing that keeps life from being bland and ordinary. Now, if you've never had to live though a salt free diet, this may not mean much to you, but just try going one day completely without salt. It's rather difficult since most foods have it already added in. Salt brings out the flavor of food. It allows people to enjoy food, rather than food just being something to fill an empty stomach. So this is one thing we are to do in the world, to bring flavor and joy to people's lives. We are to be salt.

The other part of the job description Jesus gives in today's lesson is that we are to be light. Now, if you've

ever stumbled around in the dark during a power outage, you know full well that, in the dark, everything looks the same. That's why you can't tell for sure if there is a roller skate or a toy car when you are at the top of the stairs, just waiting for your foot to come down on it. Life in the dark can be dangerous business.

And for people who live in “the dark”, they are going about some dangerous business. As much as many may feel they've got it all under control, they live amongst dangers they are totally unaware of. Now as humans we can live with a certain amount of danger in our lives, especially if we are aware of it and if we know how to deal with it. That's why we have no problem driving cars at 80 to 100 kilometers an hour down the road; even though people 150 years ago might have thought we were taking our lives in our own hands. It can still be dangerous, but these days we know how to minimize the danger to a point where it's not usually problematic. You could say that various engineers and experts have lit up the darkness of how to drive fast safely, and we all benefit from it.

In the same way, Jesus tells us that as light we are not to keep secret what we know about sin and how to solve the problems of sin and the worries it brings from the world. We are to put that information out there for all to be aware of. And we do that by telling other people about it, and by showing other people how it is done. As followers of Jesus our job description is to act as salt and light because we have been seasoned and enlightened by the Spirit to do so.

So now, let me ask you: where is the salt and light in our congregation? What is God up to here, among us right now? So often, when asked such a question, we have a tendency to look back – at what once was, at how things were, and at our former successes and accomplishments as a congregation. Once upon a time, we had huge Sunday Schools, loads of youth, and so many responding to the call for church council that

not much more than a few terms in middle age was all that was expected of anyone.

Those times however, have come and gone and we live in a different era. Even the place of the church in society has radically changed. We can't go back to the so-called glory days of the 50's and 60's that some of us recall. To truly be salt and light, we must move forward. And to do that in a time when people don't come to us anymore for salt and light, we have to move out into the community and bring it to them.

That actually has always been our job description. In looking back on church history, we find that those glory days some of us grew up and lived in, those days were an aberration. They were abnormal for the support the church received from the community and society when compared to most of church history. Yet because so many of us lived through those decades, we used those years as a measuring stick, thinking that was normal, when it wasn't.

The thing is, if we keep trying to reclaim those times, we will always fall short, and we will always see ourselves and our churches today as failures, when they are not. (1)

In order to move ahead then, it might be a good thing to ask ourselves: Who benefits from the Christian community? Just as salt and light do not exist for their own benefit, our local community of disciples does not exist for itself but rather to model God's reign of forgiveness to others.

While community has an important place, what we do as individuals is also important. If we depend only on our church community to be salt and light, we might be like the story of the man who stood under the streetlight, with his head bowed, scratching in the snow with his boot. A friend comes along and asks what he is doing, and he replies; "*I'm looking for some change I dropped*". So his friend also begins scratching in the snow and looking in the same pool of light from the

streetlight. After a while the friend says; "*I'm looking, but I don't see any change. Are you sure you dropped them here?*" The first guy replies; "*As a matter of fact, I dropped them on the other side of the street, but the light here is so much better for looking.*" (2)

If we are going to be salt and light to the world, we need to uncover our lights, take them out of here and do our looking in the relative darkness of the world around us as well. That is our job description.

But we don't need to feel that it is up to each of us alone. We are in this together and while we will be alone in doing some spreading of light and salt to the earth, we always come together again to this place for support, for help, for advice, for God's guidance. We cannot do it all alone.

We need each other in this endeavor of fulfilling our job description to be salt and light to the world. Because we already have the payoff of being blessed with God's favor and seeing the world in God's light; we also have the ability to bring flavor and enjoyment for life to others. And we do this not by looking back at what we used to be, but by moving forward to what God says we can be. Being salt and light is not about existing for ourselves, but for the world around us. May that job description be written in each of our hearts. Amen.

(1) Bishop Gregory Mohr; Canada Lutheran;
Jan/Feb 2014 pg 19

(2) Bishop Cindy Halmarson; Canada Lutheran;
Jan/Feb 2014 pg 25

Prayers

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

Call your people to seek your wisdom in difficult conversations and action. Give the church everywhere courage to repent for the ways we have tolerated and practiced injustice. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Inspire our wonder at creation, from the light of dawn to the beauty of the dark night. Sustain the unseen depths of the ocean to the plants and animals we know well. Bring healing to lands and communities experiencing natural disasters. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Instruct the powerful in your ways. Provide upright leadership in business and industry, that workers are not oppressed. Throughout the world, inspire voters and raise up politicians to heed your call for nations to practice righteousness. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Loosen the bonds of injustice in our midst. Grant peace to endless quarrels, put an end to hunger, and break every yoke of oppression. Shelter all who flee abuse in their homes or violence in their communities. Satisfy those afflicted in any way. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Shape our congregation to be salt for the earth. Give us delight in your commandments, that we are generous with those in need. Make us steadfast in our trust in you, ready with tangible mercy and compassion for our neighbors. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

The cross and resurrection bring redemption from sin and death. We praise you for all whose unshaken faith in Christ shines forth in their witness. Keep them in our remembrance and bring us with them into the kingdom of heaven. 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.**