

New Hope Lutheran Church

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March 5, 2023

The 2nd Sunday in Lent

Coming Events

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| Mar 7 | 2:00 | Kammari Impola |
| Mar 8 | 10 – 1 | Kahvi Time Regent St. |
| | 5:30 | Souper-Time Regent St. |
| | 6:30 | English Lenten service Regent St.
upstairs |
| | 6:30 | Finnish Lenten service Regent St.
downstairs |
| Mar 9 | 6:30 | Finnish Bible Study Zoom |
| Mar 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

O God, our leader and guide, in the waters of baptism you bring us to new birth to live as your children. Strengthen our faith in your promises, that by your Spirit we may lift up your life to all the world through your Son, 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 55:1 – 9**”

¹“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. ²Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. ³Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. ⁴See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a ruler and commander of the peoples. ⁵Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations you do not know will come running to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor.” ⁶Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. ⁷Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. ⁸“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Second Reading “**1 Corinthians 10:12 – 13**”

¹²Don't be so naive and self-confident. You're not exempt. You could fall flat on your face as easily as anyone else. Forget about self-confidence; it's useless. Cultivate God-confidence. ¹³No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God

will never let you down; he'll never let you be pushed past your limit; he'll always be there to help you come through it.

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

Gospel “**Mark 9:17 – 29**”

Glory to you, O Lord.

A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.” “You unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.” So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?” “From childhood,” he answered. “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” “If you can?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.” Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.” The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He’s dead.” But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up. After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?” He replied, “This kind can come out only by prayer.”
The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Sermon

By Rev. Charles Nolting
"Help Our Unbelief"

For those of you who've ever done a Bible Study with me, you are aware that one of my first go-to questions is: "*what strikes you as odd, or unusual in this passage?*" The sentence that got to me comes after the boy is brought forward and Jesus is diagnosing the boy by interrogating the father, while explaining how, "*everything is possible for one who believes.*"

What strikes me as odd is the father's reply: "*I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!*" What is he saying here? It sounds to me like the father is saying that "*I believe what you are saying is true, but I don't believe it can happen to me.*"

It's kind of like when we are exposed to those advertisements that claim they can help us make cash fast! I believe that could be true for the person telling me this information, but I don't believe it would actually apply to me.

So, what are we to make of this line? In many ways, it suggests a certain helplessness, as if there is nothing one can do about a situation themselves, so we need to get someone else to take care of it.

Such an attitude isn't helped when we read that the disciples wondered why they couldn't cast out the spirit themselves. Jesus answer to them is prayer. They need more time with God, they need to improve their relationship with the creator because the more time you spend with someone, the more you understand how they work, and the more knowledge you gain from them.

I realize that there are times when we may have the same feelings as those disciples; we may ask ourselves why can't we seem to do anything? We may perhaps first want to look to that father of the ill son, who felt that Jesus was the only one who could heal. For him to

overcome his unbelief, or for us to overcome any of our own unbelief, Jesus advice to the disciples would also apply. Deepen your relationship with God through prayer, and things will happen.

I believe that applies very much to us as well. Look at how far we have come in the past years. A new congregation, a new location, and a new ministry focus. While some may have felt there has been a lot of loss, I hope we aren't forgetting what we are actually gaining.

Think of the man from Matthew 13:44, who sold everything, absolutely everything he owned, so that he could purchase a field that he knew had a great treasure in it. Think of how Jesus absolutely emptied himself on the cross so that we all might gain. The kingdom of heaven isn't about constant acquisitions and building more, but about giving it all up, so that we might be renewed and gain the very best.

Jesus sets no limits on the power of faith. While I'm certain we believe, perhaps our job at this time is to ask God to: "*help us with our unbelief*". Help us to feel God's presence moving us forward. Help us to build each other up. Help us to reach out in any way we can to the world around us. Help us to let go of what used to be in order to embrace the greatness of what can be. Dear Lord, help us with our unbelief so that we can courageously move forward to the future you have in mind for us. Amen.

Prayers

Sustained by God's abundant mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all of creation.

O God, you so love your church. Raise up leaders who care for your people. Bless lay theologians, seminary and college professors, and all who are called to the ministry of teaching, that they form and inspire us for the work of the gospel. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

O God, you so love your creation. Breathe new life into our planetary home. Guide the work of researchers, scientists, and activists who love your earth and who inspire us to care for the natural world. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

O God, you so love the world. Uphold leaders who resist tyranny and oppression. Strengthen organizations that promote peace and harmony. Direct their work to alleviate human suffering and to address its root causes. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

O God, you so love your people. Draw near to all who live with mental illness, depression, or addiction, and accompany them in healing and recovery. Hear the cries of those who look to you in their distress. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

O God, you so love your children. Bless the young in our midst, and delight us with their joy, wonder, and curiosity. Revive our ministries with children and youth and equip us all for faithful discipleship. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

O God, you so love your saints. As our ancestors in the faith have been a blessing to us, so inspire us by their example of holy living to be a blessing to those who come after us. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We lift our prayers to you, O God, trusting in your steadfast love and your promise to renew your whole creation; through Jesus Christ our Savior.

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.**