

# New Hope Lutheran Church

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## Pastors:

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*April 23, 2023*

*3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter*

## Coming Events

Apr 23 10 – 1 Kahvi Time **Regent St.**

Apr 27 10:30 Finnish Church Choir **Impola**

Apr 30 9:30 Finnish Worship Service † **Voima Hall**  
11:30 English Worship Service **Regent St.**

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

## Prayer of the Day

O God, your Son makes himself known to all his disciples in the breaking of bread. Open the eyes of our faith, that we may see him in his redeeming work, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

## First Reading “Acts 2:14a, 36 – 41”

<sup>14a</sup> Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed [the crowd], <sup>36</sup>“Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.” <sup>37</sup>Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” <sup>38</sup>Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup>For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” <sup>40</sup>And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” <sup>41</sup>So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

## Psalms 116:1 – 4, 12 – 19

<sup>1</sup> I love the Lord, who has heard my voice, and listened to my supplication,  
<sup>2</sup> for the Lord has given ear to me whenever I called.  
<sup>3</sup> The cords of death entangled me; the anguish of the grave came upon me; I came to grief and sorrow.  
<sup>4</sup> Then I called upon the name of the Lord: “O Lord, I pray you, save my life.”  
<sup>12</sup> How shall I repay the Lord for all the good things God has done for me?  
<sup>13</sup> I will lift the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.  
<sup>14</sup> I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all God’s people.  
<sup>15</sup> Precious in your sight, O Lord, is the death of your servants.  
<sup>16</sup> O Lord, truly I am your servant; I am your servant, the child

of your handmaid; you have freed me from my bonds.  
<sup>17</sup> I will offer you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call upon the name of the Lord.  
<sup>18</sup> I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all God’s people,  
<sup>19</sup> in the courts of the Lord’s house, in the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Hallelujah!

## Second Reading “1 Peter 1:27 – 23”

<sup>17</sup> If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. <sup>18</sup>You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, <sup>19</sup>but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. <sup>20</sup>He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. <sup>21</sup>Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God. <sup>22</sup>Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. <sup>23</sup>You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.

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

## Gospel “John 21:15 – 19”

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

*When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.” The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went*

*where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!” The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.***

## Sermon

By Rev. Johanna Porkola

I'm starting today a little romantically. How would the following dialogue sound to you as a married couple:

- Do you love me more than anything else?
- Yes, I like you.
- Do you love me more than anyone else?
- Yes, I think you're just fine.
- Good man, do you love me at all?
- Well, yeah, I do I do. Stop bothering me!

This sounds like a bad marriage comedy, or perhaps we remember a similar situation from our own lives. It's not fun to be the one asking for love in that situation. What I want to say with this dialogue is related to today's gospel text, where Jesus and Peter have a conversation like this. How is that possible, it doesn't say so!

We have to go a bit to the original text. The Greek language, especially the old Greek and also the Greek, called *koine* that was spoken at the time of Jesus and in which the New Testament was written, contains three different meanings for the word love. There is erotic love, there is brotherly love, *philo*, the love felt between friends, and then there is the extreme and highest form of love, *agape* love. This is the form of love with which God loves us. It's hard to even say if this kind of love is possible for any human being, at least without God. For one reason or another, Peter doesn't like to use the word. Some say that we shouldn't make too big a fuss

and conclusions about this, but that's what we are doing.

The conversation that Jesus and Peter are now having is so funny, that when Jesus asks Peter, if Peter loves him, using this highest form of love, Peter answers like a tired husband, using a word that means love, which more describes friendship. No wonder that Jesus asks, not only from Peter but from us. Do we love Jesus, our God above all else? This is the first commandment. For many, the answer can be quite difficult. We usually turn to God when we have no other choice. We love our God as if out of necessity, when there is nothing else we can do. When things go well, we are young and healthy at work, money comes and goes, we do what we want. WE don't need Jesus. Even Jesus suggests that, yes, without Jesus, life can seem easy and free. But something is missing. Even Peter left everything, his family for some years, to follow Jesus. I'm sure it was not easy, and it didn't get any easier. Still Jesus invites, every day: "Follow me!"

On the other hand, God's love is not something oppressive and demanding. We may know how in some sects and religious groups; a person is completely fed up with different rules and requirements. Jesus does not want our love to be compulsive and oppressive. God's love is encouraging, constructive and liberating. Jesus asks us in this text, along with Peter, to love with the love with, which we love God, to love our neighbors in the same way. To look for lost lambs as Jesus did. Jesus wants to know if his property will be taken care of, when he is not here. The love we direct to God, flows, radiates, or mirrors out. It doesn't curl up in us, it flows and goes towards other people. And there is such an idea that in fact God's love awakens in us love for him and our neighbors. That's how it should be. But like Peter, we are slow and bad in love. With our own strength, it is impossible for us.

In the Bible, Peter is not the only, let's say, failure. God's chosen ones are not heroes, flawless, not Moses, not David, not Samson at least. Still, God uses imperfect and strange people to preach the gospel, do his work, do his will. It may come as a surprise to some, that even in the church there can be conflicts and challenges between people. It surprised me a lot when I started working in the church. I was so naive. But we have to remember that we are imperfect before God and we make mistakes. We don't always know how to control our emotions and habits. Our daily prayer should be that God would teach us, change us through his Holy Spirit and encourage us to follow Jesus as he wants us to.

Peter was not perfect, but according to popular belief, Peter was killed in the 60s during Nero's persecutions. The writing called *Peter's Acts* tells how Peter was fleeing from Rome. Outside the city, Jesus meets him, whereupon Peter asks: "Lord, where are you going?" When Jesus announces that he is going to be crucified again, Peter turns back. Peter was nailed with his head down of his own free will, because he does not want to die as honorably as Jesus. This story tradition is something that is not in the Bible. WE have to approach it with some kind of caution, but it is clear that Peter loved Christ until the end.

Few, if any of us will be martyred for Jesus' sake, at least now we can be sure of that. But what kind of sacrifices are we ready to make for Jesus and his church and congregation, and what about for our neighbors? God doesn't want bad things to happen to us, but sometimes it's good to get out of our comfort zone and do something that we wouldn't otherwise do for God and our neighbor. Usually, when you take that risk, you get the most out of it. You get peace and blessing and joy, and you know that you are in the service of the best employer in the whole Universe. That's for sure!

## Prayers

United in the hope and joy of the resurrection, let us pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

Ever-present God, you make yourself known in the breaking of the bread and in the bonds of community.

Reveal yourself to us in the faces of all we meet.

Strengthened by your body and blood, let us boldly live out your good news. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

As we know you in the breaking of the bread, we know you in the grains of the field and the flowing waters. Care for the earth you lovingly create. Strengthen those who safeguard threatened land and water. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You are the authority to whom we dedicate our lives. Help us keep the needs of those most vulnerable at the forefront of our community. Move us to care for any who are disregarded or oppressed. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Mothering God, you feed and comfort those who hunger. Open the hearts of those who hoard resources and lead them to share your abundance. We pray for anyone hungering for your comforting presence this day. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You pour out your love on those who are oppressed. Support and comfort anyone who is marginalized by gender or sexuality and those whose stories are not believed. Form this community to listen faithfully and speak honestly in our ministry together. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We remember with thanksgiving all your beloved saints. As you have raised them to eternal life, abide with us in your promise of resurrection. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Rejoicing in the victory of Christ's resurrection, we lift our prayers and praise to you, almighty and eternal God; through Jesus Christ, our risen 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.**