

# New Hope Lutheran Church

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## Pastor:

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*April 5, 2020*  
*Palm Sunday*

## ALL EVENTS FOR THE COMING WEEK HAVE BEEN CANCELLED

*Please remember to send in your offering. We now have a **donate button** on our web site [nhlc.ca](http://nhlc.ca)*

*The office is closed, but phone messages and email are being checked regularly.*

### Prayer of the Day

Sovereign God, you have established your rule in the human heart through the servanthood of Jesus Christ. By your spirit, keep us in the joyful procession of those who with their tongues confess Jesus as Lord and with their lives praise him as Savior, we pray in the name of Jesus, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### IN OUR PRAYERS

Aline Hay, Fred Lahti, Pentti Puusaari, Esme Rintala, Martha Tapanila, Derek, Maria and Kai Erkkilä.

### First Reading Isaiah 50:4 – 9

**4** The Sovereign LORD has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed. **5** The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away. **6** I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. **7** Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. **8** He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! **9** It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me. Who will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up.

### Psalms 31:9 – 16

**9** Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief.  
**10** My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak.  
**11** Because of all my enemies, I am the utter contempt of my neighbors and an object of dread to my closest friends— those who see me on the street flee from me.  
**12** I am forgotten as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery.  
**13** For I hear many whispering, “Terror on every side!” They conspire against me and plot to take my life.  
**14** But I trust in you, LORD; I say, “You are my God.”  
**15** My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me.  
**16** Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love.

### Second Reading Philippians 2:5 – 11

**5** In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: **6** Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; **7** rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. **8** And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! **9** Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, **10** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

### Gospel Matthew 21:1 – 11

**1** As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, **2** saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. **3** If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.” **4** This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: **5** “Say to Daughter Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’” **6** The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. **7** They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. **8** A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. **9** The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest heaven!” **10** When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?” **11** The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

**April 5, 2020 - Palm Sunday**  
**New Hope Lutheran**  
**“Out of Focus”**

It seems that these days a lot of pastors are attempting to reach out to their respective flocks with videos, including yours truly. One colleague has even come up with a name for their imagined production company, that of “Church Mouse Productions”. It’s not too bad, as it conveys the sense that even though not much is going on in a building, there is still some action happening. It’s not a scene of total inactivity.

For me, if I were to come up with a production company name for what I’ve been doing, it seems that “Out of Focus” might seem appropriate. As pastors, many of us are feeling out of our depth, not really sure of what we are doing when it comes to making videos. Video production after all, was not part of our seminary training, and the ins and outs of putting something half decently coherent together is a bit overwhelming.

Another reason I feel “Out of Focus” might be a good name for our production company, is that I worry about how you, the parishioner, is taking in all this isolation and lack of weekly gatherings. It’s certainly not the same as things used to be, and my concern is if you are feeling spiritually fed, or feeling out of focus. Emailed sermons and prayers and the odd video seem to be a rather poor compromise compared to actually coming together as a group.

I also fear that because we are encouraged at this time to look after ourselves, we may wind up forgetting about others. Are we, as a congregation, beginning to lose focus on what we are about? Our recently approved mission statement says that we: *Encourage and support people in their Christian faith while reaching out, in love, to the community.* How are we doing with that in this time of self imposed isolation?

I had an interesting phone call recently from someone in another congregation who called to see if I had any ideas of how to help out others in this time of pandemic. We wound up talking about the needs of the Greater Sudbury food bank and how volunteers were dwindling, and this caller

then was moved to see what she could do to help out. After that call, the thought came to me that here was someone who had not lost the Christian focus in spite of events around us.

On Sunday we celebrate Jesus’ arrival into Jerusalem, but unlike other years, we do so without all the pomp and ceremony that goes with it. We aren’t singing “All Glory, Laud, and Honor” together as a group. We aren’t processing around a worship space or waving and blessing palm branches. It will probably happen next year, but not this year. The thought may sadden us and cause us to turn inward. Are we losing our focus?

For so many in that crowd on the original Palm Sunday, their focus was on Jesus, who, riding a donkey as had been prophesied, appeared to be a sign of hope for them. And it was easy for them to praise him, for they felt unthreatened. This could be the messiah! Let’s focus on him! Unfortunately, by the end of the week they too had put Jesus out of focus as many of them turned against him, and even his own disciples fled. Why? They were scared, focused on themselves, their own well being, looking after their own hides. In our time of turmoil, is this what we are called to do also?

I really don’t think this is what God has in mind for us. So how can we regain that focus? How about using our telephones to call others both in and outside of our congregation? Or we might send emails, Skype, or even write letters, like back in the old days! Check in with others on a personal level. Let’s encourage each other and not forget the ministry of our congregation by sending in donations. (They can be mailed in or you may use the new “donate” button on our website at nhlc.ca)

We are reminded today that Palm Sunday isn’t just about praising Jesus with words, hymns, and waving palm branches - as much fun as that might be. Today we are also reminded that we can also praise Jesus with our actions toward others. Actions that show God’s caring love to those who feel lonely, isolated, fearful, or just plain confused about this world we currently live in. Show that love. And praise Jesus in doing so. Amen.

## **Prayers**

*Turning our hearts to God who is gracious and merciful, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need:*

Merciful Lord, we feel ourselves caught in the turmoil of a pandemic and as though things are being ripped away from us, including our worship. Help us to not forget you or put other wants above you in this time. Save us from selfish thoughts and actions that may lead us away from you. Drive away fear and anger that cause us to turn against one another.

We pray for all those who are feeling lonely in their isolation. Be with them to comfort them with the strength of your presence. Inspire us to reach out to them with phone calls, emails, even posted letters. Guide us as we look for new ways to minister to others.

We pray for the thousands who are ill. Look over those who are physically suffering in any way that they may feel your healing presence with them. Bring peace to those suffering with chronic or terminal illness

We pray for the leaders of the nations. Be with them to make wise choices in this time of chaos and to resist the variety of temptations to put things above human lives. Guide them with your merciful wisdom.

Be with all who prepare to lead worship in a variety of ways in this coming Holy Week. May they find their inspiration in you so that the message of your word and saving deeds can spread far and wide.

*According to your steadfast love O God, hear these and all our prayers as we commend them to you; through Christ our Lord. Amen.*