

# New Hope Lutheran Church

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## Pastor:

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*December 13, 2020*  
*3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent*

### Coming Events

Dec 20 2:00pm Worship service **Regent St**  
Dec 24 1:00pm Candle light service **Regent St**  
10:00pm Candle light service **Regent St**  
Dec 25 10:00am Worship service **Voima Hall**  
Dec 27 no service today

Finnish services have been paused, until Christmas morning. Finnish sermon emailed and on website [nhlc.ca](http://nhlc.ca)

**In our prayers** Fred, Esme, Martha.

**Remembering** Antero Tuhkasaari 79 yrs  
Pentti Puusaari 93 yrs



Comforting Lord; we pray for families that are suffering the loss of loved ones. Be with them as they grapple with death in their midst and in their grief. Hold them close to you at this time and bless them with your comforting presence; especially the families of Antero Tuhkasaari and Pentti Puusaari. We ask in Jesus name. Amen.

We now have a **donate button** on our web site [nhlc.ca](http://nhlc.ca)  
Previous Sunday sermons and bible studies can be found on the website.

### Prayer of the Day

Stir up the wills of your faithful people, Lord God, and open our ears to the words of your prophets, that, anointed by your Spirit, we may testify to your light; we pray 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.**

### Psalm 126

- 1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed.
- 2 Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them."
- 3 The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.
- 4 Restore our fortunes, Lord, like streams in the Negev.
- 5 Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.
- 6 Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.

### First Reading Isaiah 64:1 – 4, 8 – 11

1 Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! 2 As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you! 3 For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you. 4 Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

8 Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. 9 Do not be angry beyond measure, LORD; do not remember our sins forever. Oh, look on us, we pray, for we are all your people. 10 Your sacred cities have become a wasteland; even Zion is a wasteland, Jerusalem a desolation. 11 Our holy and glorious temple, where our ancestors praised you, has been burned with fire, and all that we treasured lies in ruins.

### Second Reading 1 Thessalonians 5:16 – 24

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not treat prophecies with contempt 21 but test them all; hold on to what is good, 22 reject every kind of evil. 23 May God himself, the God of peace,

sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

### Gospel according to John 1:6 – 8, 19 – 28 Glory to you, O Lord.

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

19 Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. 20 He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah." 21 They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." 22 Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" 23 John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'" 24 Now the Pharisees who had been sent 25 questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 26 "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. 27 He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." 28 This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

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

### Sermon

*"Potter's Clay"*

Something I'm noticing as this pandemic drags on is that our experience this year begins to shed a whole new light on our weekly lessons. They begin to take on a new meaning compared to what we have become used to. What this illustrates is the enduring agility of scripture, that it has the ability to speak to us regardless of what our circumstances are.

This week I was especially struck by our lesson from Isaiah, and how it speaks to us in these times. This section of Isaiah comes from the days after the Israelites had returned from their exile in Babylon, and their return involved a great deal of disappointment. After decades of being away, they had expected some improvements to the homeland, especially the

city of Jerusalem, their crown jewel. But they returned to find everything still pretty much demolished, and no sign of even an attempt to clean up or rebuild their beloved temple. They were angry at those who had been left behind, that they had accomplished so little in all those decades.

On top of that, they also had to put up with land claims, possibly expecting to immediately take over the properties they or their parents or grandparents had been forced to leave behind. Instead, they found that others had taken them over, assuming they were abandoned forever. Now while it may be difficult for us to envision the mayhem that caused, imagine if you went away for the winter, and when you came back in the spring someone else was living in your house, making it their own, because they assumed you had abandoned the place. Now also imagine that this has become the standard practice in Canada; and you may have some idea of what they were going through. Those were dark times for those exiled.

In light of that, I think we can relate to their predicament in an entirely new way. Things have been taken from us as well, cherished rituals included. We lost worship for 7 months. While we have returned to worship (for the time being at least), it just isn't what we had hoped for. We can't sing. We have to wear masks and keep apart from each other. Communion isn't the same. Perhaps worst of all for some, coffee and fellowship time has disappeared.

We've lost more than that, of course. Our home life isn't the same as so many are pretty much cooped up there. Foraging for food has become a challenge as well, where we attempt to only touch the items we want, and need the agility of Olympic figure skaters to keep our distance from others, while muttering under our breath into a mask about those who appear blind to arrows on the floor. We stay isolated from extended family and friends, and something as simple and life-enhancing as hugs are off limits. And now, with Christmas approaching, it seems that the spread is increasing, meaning that we may be even more restricted.

The worst, of course, is that we aren't really sure of what the situation will be even two weeks from now. How can one plan for anything when you don't know what even the near future will bring? Yet, while these are dark times for us, they actually bring us closer to the experience of the exiles, meaning that we can learn from their difficulties, and how they handled them.

One thing we can learn from them is where to turn when times get dark. They turned to God and God's promise to be

with them. They realized that the plans they had dreamt up on their own were not necessarily God's plans, and that – even in the darkest of times – God has a way of setting things straight again. The people of Isaiah's time came to understand that God was the one who fashioned their lives. God is like a potter making something of beauty, and we are simply clay in his hands.

Have you ever watched a potter at work? They generally use a circular table that spins around with a lump of wet clay on it. As the clay spins, the potter uses their hands to fashion some sort of vessel. If it isn't coming out the way the potter wants it to, they simply squash it down and begin over again, until they get their creation just the way they want it. This was the feeling of the exiles and it came about because they realized they hadn't been what God had originally created them to be and was now in the process of recreating them.

For those people involved, it wasn't an easy time. One could say it was a dark time, so something else they did was to look for glimmers of light as they went through the process of being re-created. Their return back to the land was one glimmer of light. Even though all that they treasured was in ruins, their ability to begin rebuilding the temple and their beloved city was another glimmer of light. The opportunity to call on God for forgiveness and restoration was still another glimmer of light. It took time, but they moved ahead with a sense of hope.

Something that came out of that experience was the understanding that regardless of how difficult times were, they were always able to reassure one another with God's word. While they weren't what they used to be as a nation, they continued to look for glimmers of light, of God at work in the world, and something they constantly looked for was the promised Messiah. So when John the Baptist came along, they were really hoping that he would be the one. Understandably, John's responses to their inquiries must have been somewhat disappointing, but he also gave them some hope. For many, he was at least a sign post pointing the way to something better arriving soon. And his job was to share that new glimmer of hopeful light.

In many ways, sharing a glimmer of hope is also our job these days. And while we may be struggling with the idea that, in this particular year, Christmas isn't going to be what we may have hoped for – when we look at the experience of the exiles, perhaps we can begin to understand that we may need a longer point of view than what happens in the next month or two. One

recent glimmer of hope is that vaccines have been approved and will soon be arriving in this country. The reality of course is that it will probably be many months before all of us have it. In the meantime, we have a job to do, to keep spreading hopeful glimmers of light as we wait – just as the exiles did for centuries.

How do we spread those hopeful glimmers of light? One way shown throughout the Bible story is by looking for promising signs of growth. Part of the reason John the Baptist was popular was because he showed promise. He spoke and acted as someone God might be working through, and people shared his message with others, increasing his visibility in that region. So we too can look for signs of growth, and share that. In these stagnant times, where have we been most successfully reaching out?

It may surprise you to discover that our most successful outreach in the past months has been our web page. While not massive, more people have been checking in with us than our normal attendance numbers. They are checking out sermons printed in Finnish and English, Bible studies, our videotaped services, and toolbox videos. And they are viewing them because they are looking for glimmers of light and hope in these times of darkness.

Each one of us can help them find those glimmers of light and hope that we all need in these days. First of all, continue checking in with our neighbors and family, seeing how they are doing. Everyone needs to know that somebody cares about their well being. And secondly (in these times when we are so limited in our contact with others), we can at least direct them to the contents of our web page, or print something off for those without internet access.

It seems to me that – like a master potter – God is reshaping us in this pandemic. We are being reshaped to better be like John the Baptist: witnesses who testify concerning the light of the world, so that all may come to believe. So spread glimmers of light and joy in this time of darkness. And may God bless us in our efforts. Amen.

### **Prayers**

God of power and might, shine your radiance and come quickly to this weary world. Hear our prayers for everyone in need.

God of preachers and messengers; you have entrusted your church with the work of proclaiming good news. Strengthen the witness of bishops, pastors, deacons, church

musicians, lay leaders, and all people who contribute their prayers and talents to public worship. Embed your word in their hearts. Hear us O God, **Your mercy is great.**

God of all peoples and nations; you plant us as your oaks of righteousness and ask us to care for one another. Be present with the leaders of every nation as they govern. Give them a spirit of righteousness, that your goodness and mercy is revealed through their actions. Hear us O God, **Your mercy is great.**

God of exiles and wanderers; you repair what was once destroyed. We pray for people who have been displaced from their homes by fire, flood, earthquake, or storm. Support the work of Lutheran World Relief, and all disaster relief organizations in their recovery efforts. Hear us O God, **Your mercy is great.**

God of the ill and suffering; Be with all who are ill. Comfort those who live with pain and mental anguish. Guide those who attend to the sick. Be with us all as the numbers of those affected with COVID increases. We especially remember before you those we now name in our hearts or aloud... Hear us O God, **Your mercy is great.**

God of the powerful and helpless; you clothe us with strength when our spirits are weak and weary. Bestow your spirit on the congregations of our downtown churches, especially today the congregation of St. Casimir's Roman Catholic Church. Empower us all to comfort the people who turn to us in times of need. Make your churches a place of refuge and healing. Hear us O God, **Your mercy is great.**

Draw near to us, O God, and receive our prayers for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**