

New Hope Lutheran Church

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December 6, 2020
2nd Sunday in Advent

Coming Events

Dec 9 6:30 Council Meeting **Regent St**
Dec 13 2:00 Worship service **Regent St**

Finnish services have been paused,
until Christmas morning.
Finnish sermon emailed and on website nhlc.ca

In our prayers Fred, Pentti, Esme, Martha.

Mission Statement

Encourage and support people in their Christian faith while reaching out, in love, to the community.

*We now have a **donate button** on our web site nhlc.ca
Previous Sunday sermons and bible studies can be found
on the website.*

Order of Service

Psalm 85:1 – 2 , 8 – 13

- 1 You, LORD, showed favor to your land; **you restored the Fortunes of Jacob.**
- 2 You forgave the iniquity of your people **and covered all their sins.**
- 8 I will listen to what God the LORD says; he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants— **but let them not turn to folly.**
- 9 Surely his salvation is near those who fear him, **that his glory may dwell in our land.**
- 10 Love and faithfulness meet together; **righteousness and peace kiss each other.**
- 11 Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, **and righteousness looks down from heaven.**
- 12 The LORD will indeed give what is good, **and our land will yield its harvest.**
- 13 Righteousness goes before him **and prepares the way for his steps.**

Prayer of the Day

Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming strengthen us to serve you with purified lives; we pray through 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 40:1 – 11**”

1 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. 2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins. 3 A voice of one calling: “In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. 5 And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” 6 A voice says, “Cry out.” And I said, “What shall I cry?” “All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. 7 The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. 8 The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.” 9 You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good

news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, “Here is your God!” 10 See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. 11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

Second Reading “**2 Peter 3:8 – 15a**”

8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. 11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. 14 So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. 15 Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

Gospel “**Mark 1:1 – 8**”

1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, 2 as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way” — 3 “a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’” 4 And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. 6 John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Sermon

“For the Love of God”

I think a lot of people would be wondering just how John the Baptist could attract such a large crowd. I mean, it's not like you could just hop into a car back then and make the hour journey to the Jordan river from the city of Jerusalem. Back then most people walked, so you would be looking at completing at least a day trip, (maybe even more if you came from somewhere else), just to run out to the heat of the wilderness, hear John's message, perhaps get baptized, and make it back home before dark. What was the draw? Why would people do that? What was it that attracted people to go hear him?

Of course I could ask the same question of those people who have been recently defying provincially mandated laws not to gather for worship in a couple of our provinces. You may have heard that a few churches in British Columbia have been holding worship services in spite of provincial health orders aimed at limiting the spread of COVID 19, a province with a positivity rating of 8.5% on their tests.

We might wonder just why people would want to gather in person when health officials, (whose job it is to ensure people's good health), are against such actions. Well, apparently some worshippers think that the rising numbers of COVID positive cases are due to faulty testing and the people have a right to question it. Some think that because liquor stores are allowed to be open, that churches should also be open – they share so much in common, I guess. Some of the church leaders feel that restricted gatherings violate the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

But the best reason I heard from those church leaders is that God has a requirement that they attend public worship every Sunday. Now I don't know about you, but I've yet to find where it explicitly says that. I know that we are to worship God above all else. I know that we are to keep the Sabbath day holy. But a command to be at public worship each and every Sunday? Could you imagine how full this place would be if we could figure out where that comes from? Even the exiled Israelites I spoke of in our newsletter didn't keep that one. Once the

temple was demolished and they were hauled away, they had to rethink their whole worship schedule – just as we have.

We might also ask why people in Manitoba are drawn to attend a couple of congregations south of Steinbach and in Winnipeg despite pandemic restrictions on worship there. Mind you, they were drive in events, held in parking lots, with people in their cars, but the COVID 19 test positivity rate around Steinbach (which is just south of Winnipeg), sits at 40%, which is the highest in Canada, meaning the health authorities have also closed down those type of events.

Last Sunday it got to the point where there actually was a standoff between the RCMP and church-goers. What really caught my eye was that the pastor was videoed telling an RCMP officer something along the lines of: *“You're blocking God!”* To be honest, I was astounded. I mean the Egyptian Pharaoh and all his armies couldn't block God. The people inside the walled city of Jericho couldn't block God. Not even the mighty Roman empire was able to block God. But apparently the Royal Canadian Mounted Police can! I think that would make a great ad for their recruitment drive! *Be a part of the only institution in history with the power to block God!*

Of course, I don't really believe that. Perhaps a better quote from that pastor was the one where he told an officer: *“you're big time interfering with God right now.”* Now I suppose each of us humans is capable of interfering with God, especially when we put our own interests above others. We have a name for it. It's called “sin”. It's also the reason why Jesus came to earth and preached here – the event John the Baptist is foretelling today. And what we want to remember is that Jesus came; not for himself, and not for John the Baptist, but for us. Both John and Jesus came with a servant attitude. And that unselfish servant attitude is to be our example.

I think that's why I have a problem with communities that want to gather in spite of what health officials are telling them. While they may give a number of reasons why they should gather – the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the liquor store being open, somehow commanded by God – aren't they actually gathering for their own benefit? Are the poor, the hungry, or the homeless benefitting from such gatherings in any way? Are any who might catch this virus benefitting? And yet, isn't that

where our focus is to be at, the servant attitude such as shown by John the Baptist?

By his description in our gospel lesson, we might think of John the Baptist as a rebel, and maybe these folks today also see themselves as rebels. The difference is that John the Baptist had a unique message in that this wasn't a message about him, or how important he was, or what the constitution said about his personal rights. Going by his description found in Mark – clothing of camel's hair held together with a leather belt, and a diet of locusts with wild honey – one would assume that he wasn't in it for the money or the glory, or himself in any way. John in fact puts himself down when describing himself. He doesn't claim any kind of special powers or status, or anything that will benefit his own person, but rather openly says he is totally unworthy to untie the sandals of the one he is preparing the people for.

And maybe that was the draw of John the Baptist for people from all over Jerusalem and the Judean countryside. His message wasn't about him, but rather about regular, ordinary people, seeking something better. It wasn't about personal rights or views, but about community. And these people were in search of something bigger than themselves, a community where they could find themselves closer to God through removal of their selfish sin that kept them from God.

Being close to God, after all, isn't about making issues over our own problems or fears, but rather about taking fears away, so that we can share the gospel with others, and they can find the cleansing peace of God within themselves as well. Loving God isn't simply about worship alone, but about loving others to the point we want to keep them safe from harm. May we do all we can in this time of pandemic to keep others safe. Amen.

Prayers of intercession

God of power and might, comfort your people and come quickly to this weary world. Hear our prayers for all in need:

Faithful God, you teach us to wait for you with faithfulness and patience. Sustain and support us in our doubts and questions. Nurture our faith as we discern and enact your mission. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving God, you set the stars in the sky and breathe life into the earth. Renew the face of creation where it is in need of your healing touch. Mend the wounds of environmental

damage and restore balance to ecosystems so that all creation can declare your praise. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Leading God, you ask us to make uneven ground smooth. Make even the disparities between your people. Sustain and support people with physical and intellectual disabilities. Accompany disability advocates who work for a world accessible to all. Teach us to celebrate the great diversity in our midst. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Steadfast God, you ask that your people may be one. Be with the congregations of our downtown churches. Today we pray for our congregation, New Hope Lutheran. We ask for your guidance as we struggle to move forward in this disruptive time. We pray you will open us to ways we can still work with our fellow congregations in the downtown area even as we live in isolation. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Tender god, you know sorrow and joy alike. We pray for those in our families and congregation who are not joyful in this holiday season. Comfort those who grieve, be a companion to all who are lonely, tend those who are sick or struggling with depression, and gather all people in your healing embrace. We especially remember before you those we now name in our hearts, or aloud.... Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Mighty Lord, we ask you bless us in our efforts to speak your word to others. Be with us to guide our mouths and tongues in conversation with family, friends, neighbors, and strangers. When our efforts seem useless and unheard, remind us of the examples of your servants who went before us – to not be discouraged but continue onward. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Draw near to us, O God, and receive our prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who taught us to pray...

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