

New Hope Lutheran Church

189 Regent St. 12 Collins Dr.
Sudbury, Ontario Copper Cliff, Ontario
P3C 4C4 P0M 1N0
705-673-2933 705-682-2511
email: office@nhlc.ca
website: nhlc.ca
face book: New Hope Lutheran Church

Pastor:

Rev. Charles Nolting
phone: 705-920-3573 email: pcn@nhlc.ca

July 26, 2020

8th Sunday after Pentecost

**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*

*Previous Sunday sermons and bible studies can be found
on the website.*

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

IN OUR PRAYERS

Fred, Pentti, Esme, Martha, Derek, Maria and Kai.

Prayer of the Day

Beloved and sovereign God, through the death and resurrection of your Son you bring us into your kingdom of justice and mercy. By your Spirit, give us your wisdom, that we may treasure the life that comes from Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading 1 Kings 3:5 – 12

5 At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." **6** Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. **7** "Now, LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. **8** Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. **9** So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" **10** The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. **11** So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, **12** I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.

Psalm 119:129 – 136

129 Your statutes are wonderful; therefore I obey them. **130** The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple. **131** I open my mouth and pant, longing for your commands. **132** Turn to me and have mercy on me, as you always do to those who love your name. **133** Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me. **134** Redeem me from human oppression, that I may obey your precepts. **135** Make your face shine on your servant and teach me your decrees. **136** Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed.

Second Reading Romans 8:26 - 39

26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. **27** And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. **28** And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. **29** For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the

firstborn among many brothers and sisters. **30** And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. **31** What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? **32** He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? **33** Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. **34** Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. **35** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? **36** As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." **37** No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **38** For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, **39** neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Gospel Matthew 13:31, 33, 44 – 52

31 He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field.

33 He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."

44 The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. **45** "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. **46** When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. **47** "Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. **48** When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. **49** This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous **50** and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. **51** "Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked.

“Yes,” they replied. **52** He said to them, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”

July 26, 2020 – 8th Sunday after Pentecost
From the Summer Sermon Series 2020
by Bishop Michael Pryse

During the brief few years of his public ministry, one thing Jesus never tired of describing was the kingdom of heaven; the reign of God. And Jesus’ descriptions of the kingdom often came as contradiction to what his listeners expect or want to hear. They sought a new reign – a new kingdom - that would come to God’s people in a big way; powerfully, decisively and quite deservedly! But, instead, Jesus persists in describing the kingdom using common imagery from everyday life, as a reality that comes slowly, unexpectedly and “most undeservedly!”

It’s all about grace and the parables included in today’s Gospel lesson are pictures that describe a kingdom of grace; a reign of grace. The tiny mustard seed grows into a tree that becomes a nesting place for the birds of the air! The birds didn’t and couldn’t do anything to make it happen. The seed – the kingdom – grew of its own volition and nature! It’s pure grace!

Likewise the yeast – “the kingdom” – is mixed by a baker – “God” – into three measures of flour – “the world.” Keep in mind that those three biblical measures are the equivalent of a bushel basket; 128 cups or 16 five-pound bags of flour! Furthermore, when the baker adds the 42 or so cups of water needed to make it come together, you are talking about 100 pounds of dough throughout which she needs to disburse the yeast! (This woman must’ve had forearms like Popeye!) But she does it. God kneads that dough until the yeast - the kingdom - is disbursed throughout the dough; until its everywhere! That’s the only way dough can become bread. The yeast breathes life into the loaf. It is a gift of grace.

Jesus then goes on to liken the kingdom to a great treasure that someone “found.” He didn’t earn it or make it. He “found it.” It’s a straight-up gift! And the finder considers it to be so valuable that he sells all his possessions in order to keep it. Likewise with a pearl merchant who “finds” one pearl of great value, perfect in size, composition and colour. It’s a once in a

lifetime find. It’s grace; an amazing, wondrous and unexpected grace. Again, it is worth everything that he has!

Jesus concludes his kingdom riff by describing the kingdom as being like a net, the kind you drag through the sea. It catches fish of all kinds, seeming without any discrimination until the net is full. Good fish, bad fish; it makes no differences. They are all are caught up in the kingdom. It’s a picture of God’s grace; about the amazing breadth and capacity of the reign of God!

And it is only then, after laying out these five parable pictures of this grace-steeped, grace-infused kingdom that Jesus finally turns to the question of what will happen in eternity, at the end of the age, when after the great resurrection, there is a time of judgement. And let’s be honest, that’s the place where most of us would prefer to begin the discussion of the kingdom! “Enough with these cryptic fables!” Finally we get the kind of “gun barrel justice” we would expect from any king worthy to wear a crown!

But don’t be so quick! Context always matters and we need to read these words recognizing that the rhetorical weight of Jesus’ whole discourse has to do with the graciousness and universal breadth of the reign of God. The kingdom is a free and undeserved gift that you can’t earn, create or manufacture. Therefore, inasmuch as God will one day provide judgement, we can assume and trust that this is a judge whose nature it is to acquit everyone, to free everyone.

The Scriptures do of course tell us that, sadly, there are some who will reject this kingdom and the reconciliation that God gifts to us through it. And the outcome of that choice is a self-judgement. And who could imagine a worse hell?

Episcopal theologian and author Robert Farrar Capon describes it this way; “the very hell of hell lies precisely in the fact that its inhabitants will be insisting on a perpetual rejection of an equally perpetual gift. It will be an eternal struggle to escape from the gift of a love that will never let them go.” Can you imagine a darker hell than that?

It has been said, and wisely so, that it is only by being little that we can ever discover anything that is big. To a small child everything seems big. Mom and Dad are like giants. You go to school for the first time and the place is huge! It’s only when you grow up that you come to see that mom and dad weren’t so big after all and that the vast school only had eight classrooms. When you are little, everything seems big.

Likewise, in matters of faith, it’s only by being little that you can really imagine and experience those things that are big.

I think this is also a key point of the gospel. The kingdom that Jesus describes is always recognized from a perspective of smallness and humility; a perspective where the first become last and the last become first. And maybe the only way for us to start recognizing the reign that Jesus points toward, the only way for us to more fully experience God’s reign of grace; the kingdom of heaven; is by taking the risk making ourselves just a little bit smaller.

About 30 years ago Canadian author Douglas Coupland burst onto the literary scene with a novel whose title coined the now familiar term Generation X. In his follow-up short story collection entitled *Life After God*, Coupland describes the Gen-Xers as perhaps the first generation to experience a life without God. It reads as a lament for a generation that feels very much adrift but also carries prominent grace notes of hope!

Near the end of the book he tells a friend about an experience he had in Stanley Park in Vancouver "Did I ever tell you," I said, "about the time last year in Stanley Park when Mark and I went rollerblading?" "No." "There was this group of blind people, with white canes and everything; a CNIB tour or something. They heard us coming and they motioned for us to stop and we did. Then they handed Mark a camera and asked him to take their picture." "Blind people?" "Exactly. But the strange thing was, they still believed in sight. In pictures."

On the last page of the book Coupland shares a secret with us. He writes, "Now here is my secret. I tell it to you with an openness of heart that I doubt I shall ever achieve again, so I pray you are in a quiet room as you read these words. My secret is that I need God; that I am sick and can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give, because I no longer seem capable of giving; to help me be kind because I no longer seem capable of kindness; to help me love, as I seem beyond being able to love."

Although he might use different words to describe it, Coupland has taken the first and most important step toward discovering the kingdom, a state of being of experience that proceeds, not from bigness and power, but from smallness and humility; a state that is found in recognizing our complete neediness and dependence upon the grace and love of the one who is the author and source of all of existence.

I believe that our world and its inhabitants have a deep desire to experience that kingdom today. Many of us know the emptiness and hollowness of the false gospels upon which dominate much of life today. The hunger for a new way of living is evident all around us. As blind as our world sometimes seems, as blind as we often are, I think that most of us still believe in pictures; in the possibility of a better way, a renewed world; a new kingdom.

This time of living through a pandemic has amplified the pangs of that hunger. It has prodded and inspired acts of kindness and generosity; a renewed care for and love for creation and community. The righteous appeals of anti-racism protesters around the world have pulled at our hearts and pricked our consciences. We long for something better. We hunger for and long to see and experience that life which is life indeed; life in its intended justness, fullness and abundance; life in the kingdom!

Today we are given an opportunity to renew our residency in that special kingdom whose embrace has come to us as a gift that is predicated fully and completely upon God's grace; not upon what we have or don't have; not on what we've done or not done. The kingdom is already within us and around us! God's already given it! All we need to do is live it!

AMEN.

Prayers

Confident of your care and helped by the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

Merciful God, your reign is revealed to us in common things; a mustard shrub, a woman baking bread, a fishing net. Help your church witness to the surprising yet common ways you encounter us in daily life.

When your word is opened, it gives light and understanding. Increase our understanding and awe of your creation; guide the work of scientists and researchers. Treasuring the earth, may we live as grateful and healing caretakers of our home.

As the birds of the air nest in branches of trees, gather the nations of the world into the welcoming shade of your merciful reign. Direct leaders of nations to build trust with each other and walk in the way of peace.

Your Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for the saints according to your will. Help us when we do not know how to pray. Give comfort to the dying, refuge to the weary, justice to those who are oppressed, and healing to the sick.

You show steadfast love and direct us to ask of you what we need. Help this congregation ask boldly for what is most needed. Refresh us with new dreams of being your people in this place and time.

In you our lives are never lost. Strengthen us by the inspiring witness of your people in all times and places. Embolden our witness now and one day gather us with all your saints in light.

In the certain hope that nothing can separate us from your love, we offer these prayers to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**