

# New Hope Lutheran Church

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*June 28, 2020*

*4<sup>th</sup> 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](http://nhlc.ca)*

*Previous Sunday sermons can be found on the website.*

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

## **IN OUR PRAYERS**

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

## **Prayer of the Day**

O God, you direct our lives by your grace, and your words of justice and mercy reshape the world. Mold us into a people who welcome your word and serve one another, we pray through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

## **First Reading Jeremiah 28:5 – 9**

**5** Then the prophet Jeremiah replied to the prophet Hananiah before the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD. **6** He said, "Amen! May the LORD do so! May the LORD fulfill the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the LORD's house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon. **7** Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people: **8** From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. **9** But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the LORD only if his prediction comes true."

## **Psalm 89:1 – 4, 15 – 18**

**1** I will sing of the LORD's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. **2** I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself. **3** You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, **4** 'I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.' "

**15** Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, LORD. **16** They rejoice in your name all day long; they celebrate your righteousness. **17** For you are their glory and strength, and by your favor you exalt our horn. **18** Indeed, our shield belongs to the LORD, our king to the Holy One of Israel.

## **Second Reading Romans 6:12 – 23**

**12** Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. **13** Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. **14** For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace. **15** What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! **16** Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? **17** But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you

have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. **18** You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. **19** I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. **20** When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. **21** What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! **22** But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. **23** For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## **Gospel Matthew 10:40 – 42**

**40** "Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. **41** Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. **42** And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward."

**June 28, 2020 – 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
*"Looking for Direction"*

So often, especially when times are difficult, we long to hear good news. But a question we have before us today is: Is it better to hear good news that isn't true, or to be given the full honesty of bad news? So which kind of message would you rather hear?

This was the dilemma facing the prophet Jeremiah in our 1<sup>st</sup> reading for today. It helps to understand that Jeremiah was pretty much a prophet of doom right from the beginning. For years he foretold of the threat from Babylon if the Israelites didn't pay more attention to God. Few cared for his gloomy predictions, and the king surrounded himself with prophets whose message was more in line with what the royal house wanted to hear.

And then the Babylonians came, destroyed towns, took anything worth taking from the temple, and hauled away all citizens who might be in a position to cause trouble in the future. They did leave a puppet king, whose favorite prophet is the one Jeremiah is attempting to address in this lesson. Hananiah claims everything will be back to normal in 2 years. Jeremiah claims the Babylonians will return to totally level Jerusalem. Both claim to speak on God's behalf. Clearly, one of them must be wrong.

So which message is more desired? *"Everything will soon be back to normal"*, or *"Things are going to go downhill from here"*. How can we pick the one that directs us the best?

This is an important topic for us these days because there are a lot of views out there regarding current events. Some are asking if the pandemic is even real, or if it is just a bad case of the flu going around. People are questioning whether we need to be as careful as health officials say. Do we really need masks or visors to go shopping? Why can't we just open everything up and see what happens? If the provincial government says we can go to worship, why don't we have worship?

In a similar way we are faced with questions about racism. Does it actually exist in our country? In our community? Are there really groups of people who constantly look over their shoulders because they have grown up being treated as if they are somehow worth less than others?

If you really want some helpful answers, why not ask those who are most affected? My experience tells me that if you want to find out about racism, we need to talk to those who are different, those directly affected by it, rather than over the fence to our next door neighbor. If you want some answers regarding the COVID-19 virus, talk to people who have had the virus or those who lost loved ones to the illness. You may however, have to prepare yourself for some bad news.

To me, these are real and current threats. In jokes, snide comments, and a variety of other ways, racism is real in our community. Maybe we don't think such actions have much impact, but I have seen in Israel how it evolves into walls, guard towers, and massive injustices. And regarding the pandemic, just because the government allows worship doesn't mean people can't become ill if we offer it. Ask those who have been affected. I assure you these things are real.

Another way to access what is real and what isn't; is to ask ourselves what our motives might be to act in such ways. Does it make us feel better about ourselves to sound somehow superior to others who are not like us? If we feel we have something to lose with regards to equality among races, isn't it then true that we must be benefitting in some way from white privilege?

And what might be our motive for wanting everything back to something we call "normal"? For some, we just want to be able to hug our relatives and close friends. For some, we want to visit with people again because we find this time rather lonely. Some might just want to get back to work. Those don't seem to be bad motives, do they?

How do we figure out where God might direct us then? Looking in our gospel we are reminded that to do something for *"one of these little ones"*, or *"the least of these"* is an action of blessing. In other words, we are blessed in doing something for others. How many of the reasons above are about what we want? How many of those reasons are about protecting the health and dignity of others? Are we concentrating on "the least of these", or ourselves? The decision to continue with closing worship for the summer is to protect us all.

Difficult news is always hard to take, and we hate to hear it. It can anger us because it makes us feel so helpless and maybe a bit lost. But is this not also a time when we can lean into God's promises to take care of us regardless of what is happening in our world? Is this a time to learn to trust God even more? Isn't it when we hit rock bottom that we most realize we can't find our own way out, and we find the greatest help in the Lord?

Sometimes, for our own good in the long run, bad news must be presented. Think back to our lesson from Jeremiah; was it really helpful of Hananiah to prepare people for what was to come by falsely raising their hopes? Would they not be better served by having a more honest idea of their prospects so they could prepare themselves accordingly?

We are also reminded today that in those times when good news seems to be lacking, those are the times God is most easily found for those who are seeking. These are times we look for new direction, for where God is pointing us to be as individuals, and as a congregation. May God bless our efforts. Amen.

## Prayers

Called into unity with one another and the whole creation, let us pray for our shared world.

God of companionship; encourage our relationships with our siblings in Christ. Bless our conversations. Shape our shared future and give us hearts eager to join in a festal shout of praise.

God of justice; we pray for those who face injustice on a daily basis around the world. Be with all who strive to stand and speak out, those who choose to defend, and those who suffer. Help us to understand the consequences of injustice to our society.

God of generosity; we pray for those in need. For those who seek jobs, shelter, food, health, love, and friendship; we ask their needs be met by your bountiful compassion and our community's action.

God of restoration; wherever there is brokenness, bring healing. Bind up our wounds, teach us compassion, and dry our tears. Be especially with those we name to you in our hearts, who are suffering from illness. Give them comfort, reconciliation, and hope.

God of mercy; your grace is poured out for all. Inspire authorities, judges, and politicians to act with compassion. Teach us to overcome fear with hope, meet hate with love, and welcome one another as we would welcome you.

Receive these prayers, O God, and those too deep for words; we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**