

New Hope Lutheran Church

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November 15, 2020
24th Sunday after Pentecost

Coming Events

Nov 22 10:00 Finnish worship service **Voima Hall**
2:00 Worship service † **Regent St**

In our prayers Fred, Pentti, Esme, Martha.

Funeral Jack Rautian 77 yrs.

Prayer of the Day

Righteous God, our merciful master, you own the earth and all its peoples, and you give us all that we have. Inspire us to serve you with justice and wisdom, and prepare us for the joy of the day of your coming. This we pray through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

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

Psalm 90:1 – 12

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

¹⁻² Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. **Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.**

³⁻⁴ You turn people back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, you mortals." **A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.**

⁵⁻⁶ Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death— they are like the new grass of the morning: **In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered.**

⁷⁻⁸ We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. **You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.**

⁹⁻¹⁰ All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan. **Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.**

¹¹⁻¹² If only we knew the power of your anger! Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due. **Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.**

First Reading Zephaniah 1:7, 12 – 18

7 Be silent before the Sovereign LORD, for the day of the LORD is near. The LORD has prepared a sacrifice; he has consecrated those he has invited.

12 At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, 'The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad.' **13** Their wealth will be plundered, their houses demolished. Though they build houses, they will not live in them; though they plant vineyards, they will not drink the wine." **14** The great day of the LORD is near— near and coming quickly. The cry on the day of the LORD is bitter; the Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry. **15** That day will be a day of wrath— a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness—**16** a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers. **17** "I will bring such distress on all people that they will grope about like those who are blind, because they have sinned against the LORD. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their entrails like dung. **18** Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the LORD's wrath." In the fire of his jealousy the whole earth

will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live on the earth.

Second Reading 1 Thessalonians 5:1 – 11

1 Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, **2** for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. **3** While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. **4** But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. **5** You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. **6** So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. **7** For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. **8** But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. **9** For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. **10** He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. **11** Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Gospel Matthew 25: 14 – 30

14 "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. **15** To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. **16** The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. **17** So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. **18** But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. **19** "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. **20** The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.' **21** "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' **22** "The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.' **23** "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' **24** "Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting

where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. **25** So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ **26** “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? **27** Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. **28** “ ‘So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. **29** For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. **30** And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Sermon

“Substitute Players”

I have a sneaky suspicion that everyone here is familiar with the game Monopoly. In that game one goes around the board purchasing plots of land and developing them with a set sum of money each player is given to begin the game. The greater number of properties you have, and the more housing or hotels you gain, the more your net worth grows. As the game progresses, the \$200 you collect as you pass GO becomes mere pocket change – if you are doing well.

Now imagine that in the middle of a game you are called away and ask someone else to take your place for a while. If your substitute simply circles the board paying rent and the various fees, but doesn’t make any attempt to gain more property or buildings, what might the result be? It is quite possible that you could return to find you haven’t lost or gained anything, but more probably, and worse yet, your wealth is severely depleted. They may have failed to collect rent. They may have wound up in jail and just stayed there, feeling that is a safe place to be in order to avoid incurring more expenses, and not even collecting the \$200 for circling the board.

I’m sure we would be rather disappointed in that player. I think then, when choosing a substitute player, we would want instead someone who is going to enhance that monopoly wealth while we are away from the game, someone who will take some risks and end up with some gains on our behalf.

In essence, this is the setting for today’s gospel parable. Servants are entrusted with large amounts of cash. One talent (or bag of gold as our translation reads), could be compared to about 15 years wages for a regular laborer today. The point is that they are entrusted with something very valuable, something with great potential, and they are given free rein for how to use it.

Now, since we just heard the story, I don’t have to go into detail about how that turned out. But let me ask you: which servant did you most identify with? And if you’re not sure how to answer, let me ask: what kind of substitute Monopoly player are you?

Are you one to play it safe sitting in jail as the game goes on? Are you someone who calls out other players when they land on a property you are in charge of? Or do you just let it go because its not really your property anyway? Are you the kind of substitute player who is aggressive and takes risks; maybe even more risks than the player you’re replacing?

I know it might be difficult to identify with the servants in our parable, but when we put ourselves in the place of Monopoly players, does that help us identify a little easier? Where do we stand? What do we do with what is entrusted to us?

What I find interesting when playing Monopoly is how it seems some of the rules are different, depending on whose board you are playing. Take Free Parking for example. Some just put a \$500 bill there and that is it. Others put down the \$500 and add in all penalties and fines incurred by all the players, and then (depending on how often Free Parking is hit), the lucky player gets the whole pot, which can be quite a tidy sum. It can change the outcome of the entire game – kind of like God’s grace can turn a person’s entire life around. One can be poor as anything in the game, hit the Free Parking, make a few lucky moves, and in an hour be leading the game.

Have you thought any more about which of the servants you identify with? I know we all want to identify with the first and second servants, but how often do we in real life? A lot of people seem to think that they have nothing to offer, (no talent or gift), and give that as a reason why they are unable to enhance the kingdom of God. The thing is though, just as nobody starts a Monopoly game penniless, each of us has actually been given some sort of gift or talent that can be used to bring greater glory to God. By not acknowledging that we have something to offer, we essentially

bury that gift. We become the substitute Monopoly player who spends most of the time jailed out of fear that we may lose another’s fortune.

Some good news for us though is that the gifts and talents we receive from God can only be lost if we don’t make use of them, or don’t bother to even discover what they are. Now I know that for some people it’s pretty easy to find their talents because they just do what they enjoy doing and are good at it. Some people like numbers and problem solving with them so they have math and financial skills. Some people just love to draw and have art skills. Some people like making music any way they can and have musical skills.

For a lot of people though, they don’t know what their skill or talent might be. They aren’t particularly interested in any one thing, even though they might like to be. How can such a person find their talent?

For one thing, listen to what other people are saying to you – about you. Any time someone exclaims that “*you’re so good at that!*”, they have spotted some talent in you. I would encourage you to build on those comments. In conjunction with that, another way to discover your talents is to try doing a variety of things. Some of them you may not like, or have any gift for, but that is a good sign, as it steers you to discovering just what God has given you.

Now, once in a while I hear people telling me: *Pastor you’re so good at...* whatever. But I want you to know that I didn’t realize I was any good at much of anything until I actually tried it; and some of the time I wound up doing something in spite of not being interested, but found not only that I could do something, but actually liked it! People tell me I have a voice that carries well. I never saw that as a gift, but my public school teachers did, and encouraged me to do some public speaking – which has come in quite handy over the past 25 years. During my former call, I wound up doing some negotiating between some congregations – even though I had absolutely no interest in doing it – but discovered that I have some talent in that area. I’ve always wanted to do writing, but never thought I was very good, until one of my university professors encouraged me and taught me a few things.

Our talents are there, and we all have them. But, by not taking a risk, by not willing to be vulnerable, or by just giving up,

we bury that which has been entrusted to us. As our gospel parable today reminds us, even for the few who don't have many gifts or talents, they can still use what they do have to advance the kingdom of God, even in small, yet important ways. Gifts such as being able to love, being able to give and forgive, as well as the patience to have a listening ear; are all talents that can show others God's profound love and mercy, and bring others to God. No one needs to be that 3rd servant. We are all capable of being substitute players in God's kingdom in one way or another.

So I encourage you to look for your talents, to develop your interests, and to always be on the lookout for opportunities to share God's loving grace, so that others may experience it, and come to trust in it. In doing so, may you also hear those words of encouragement; "*well done, good and faithful servant!*" Amen.

Prayers

Longing for Christ's reign to come among us, we pray for the outpouring of God's power on the world, and all in need:

Lord of the church, ignite your people with the passion of your love. By the fire of your Holy Spirit, unify us across ministries, congregations, and denominations. We remember before you our downtown congregations and today especially the congregation of Grace Family Church and their pastor, Bob Deppisch. We pray you would refine us all to participate in your activity throughout the world. Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Lord of creation; we stand in awe at the works of your hands and praise you for the beauty of nature. Bless the earth for your glory and restore its integrity where exploitation has caused ruin. Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Lord of all in need; search out all who cry to you in distress. Scatter the heavy clouds of depression, chronic illness, unemployment, and loneliness with your radiant light. Send us as encouragement and signs of your healing. Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Lord of the stranger; stir up holy restlessness in us to extend love to those at the margins of society. Release our desire for control and open us to learn from the perspective of others. Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Lord of healing; your blessed Son Jesus Christ went about doing good, **and healing** all manner of sickness and disease among the people: Continue this, his gracious work among us in regard to the spread of Covid-19 and other forms of illness. Cheer,

heal, and sanctify the sick; especially those we now name in our hearts, or aloud... Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Lord of peace; we pray for places where there is turmoil and unrest, and ask that lasting peace may be found, so that lives can improve, that the people may be satisfied. We pray that violence and oppression will come to an end, that people will be treated with dignity and respect and that leaders will be chosen who are honest and accountable. May your spirit of peace overcome the forces of oppression. Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Lord of nature; we pray for all whose lives are being overturned by a variety of natural disasters. Be with those whose homes have been damaged and destroyed by winds and rain. Comfort those who have lost loved ones. Cool those places where forest fires still burn and expose people to danger. Be with those who work at rescuing others in whatever capacity, and bless them with your presence. Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Listen as we call on you, O God, and enfold in your loving arms all for whom we pray, in the name of 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.