

New Hope Lutheran Church

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November 1, 2020 All Saints Sunday

Coming Events

Nov 8 10:00 Finnish worship service **Voima Hall**
2:00 Worship service † **Regent St**
Nov 11 6:30 Council Meeting **Regent St**

In our prayers Norma, Fred, Pentti, Esme, Martha.

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you have knit your people together in one communion in the mystical body of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Grant us grace to follow your blessed saints in lives of faith and commitment, and to know the inexpressible joys you have prepared for those who love you. This 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.

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 34:1 – 10

¹⁻² I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. I will glory in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice.

³⁻⁴ Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together. I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.

⁵⁻⁶ Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles.

⁷⁻⁸ The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

⁹⁻¹⁰ Fear the LORD, you his holy people, for those who fear him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

First Reading Revelation 7:9 – 17

9 After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. **10** And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." **11** All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, **12** saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" **13** Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?" **14** I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. **15** Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. **16** 'Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,' nor any scorching heat. **17** For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; 'he will lead them to springs of living water. 'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'"

Second Reading 1 John 3:1 – 3

1 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. **2** Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. **3** All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Gospel Matthew 5:1 – 12

1 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, **2** and he began to teach them. He said: **3** "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **4** Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. **5** Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. **6** Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. **7** Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. **8** Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. **9** Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. **10** Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **11** "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. **12** Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Sermon

Mount of Beatitudes

Standing on the Mount of the Beatitudes in Israel, you find a rather stunning view. Almost directly in front of you, way down below, is the Sea of Galilee, and on the shore to your right can be seen a vista of fields, orchards and vineyards. In contrast, on the other shore to your left, you see what appears to be huge sand dunes without any vegetation on them at all.

When you are at the place that legend says marks the spot where the words of today's gospel were first spoken, and when that is combined with someone actually reading those words; the "*blessed are you*" verses – you get a sense of what it may have been like on the day Jesus spoke them.

I was there 7 years ago and, while you could see that some people (especially the seminary students) were really getting into the moment, their eyes glistening somewhat with tears – there were also a few like myself who have heard and preached on those same words so many times and in so many different ways, that we were more easily distracted. In my case, wondering what model of John Deere tractor the neighbor was running over in an adjacent field.

Something I found interesting in Israel was that at each of the “holy places” throughout the Galilee, you would have a spot of land, usually a couple of acres where there would be the necessary church built over what was considered “the most holy spot”, and then some grounds to walk around on. I think it’s done that way to give you a sense of what things may have been like 2000 years ago, but at the same time, on that day on the Mount of Beatitudes, we were all aware that at the time when Jesus spoke those famous words, there was no sound of a John Deere tractor clunking around in a nearby field.

I suppose that a lesson to be learned here is that as hard as you might try to, you really can’t totally replicate an experience by pretending. Sure, you can do some of the actions, you can locate yourself at a certain point on a certain day and at a certain time of the day, but there is still something missing. It is possible however, to gain some new insight into a historical event.

So as I later wandered around the site to get a glimpse of John Deere, I wound up at the edge of the property, and I was struck by how steep the Mount of the Beatitudes is. And in thinking back to what I had heard of the verses read, I remembered that those people who first heard those words had walked up there following Jesus. They hadn’t ridden in a bus like our group had.

So not only is the Mount of Beatitudes fairly high, it’s also a steep hill. In our gospel we are told that when Jesus saw the crowds, he then went up this mountain. So he didn’t do the climb for the exercise but it would appear rather to get away from the crowds to a place where he could be a little bit more by himself. And those who did follow him in that climb, were – as The Message puts it – the committed. Those who were truly dedicated to Jesus.

I’m pretty sure you can imagine the scene down at the foot of the mountain at the beginning of the gospel lesson. If you’ve ever been in a large crowd, you know what it’s like. People are

stepping on your toes, you’re getting jostled a little bit by the weight of the crowd, and one really gets the feeling of just being another person and nothing really special. We are told in several places that people flocked to Jesus, but not just to hear what he had to say. They also wanted to see his miracles, and maybe even be a part of them, especially if it involved free food. Jesus mentioned that occasionally.

It seemed that – for a time anyway – wherever Jesus moved around in the Galilee area, the crowds moved with him. And so, as Jesus headed towards this mountain, it’s pretty easy to imagine that the crowd started moving along behind. As Jesus walked where the fields start sloping upwards, the crowds were probably still with him.

And then as it steepened more, it’s not too hard to imagine how some would be thinking to themselves that they just weren’t up for a climb today, and maybe they had better get back to chores at home, so they may have wandered off. As it steepened even more we can imagine how greater numbers of people began to think about how it’s more comfortable at home, or how they miss the family, or how they probably should be getting back to work – and they fell back. It’s just too much of a bother and the climb is getting harder and harder. So by the time they get to the point where Jesus finally stops, it’s only the most committed that are actually with him.

And because of this, it was only the most committed that got to hear direct from Jesus lips (without the distortion of a John Deere) the words we heard today. And what those climbers, exhausted from the trek heard, was how blessed they actually were:

“You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope.

You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you.

You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are – no more, no less.

You’re blessed when you care.

You’re blessed when you get your inside world – your mind and your heart – put right.

You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight.

You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution.

To hear the Beatitudes, it would seem that those who have what is considered the roughest ride in life are the most

blessed. To many that just doesn’t make sense. But think of it this way – it was only those who actually did the climb up the mount, the ones who stuck with Jesus, the ones who chose to give up their personal comforts – they were the ones who got to hear those words right from Jesus’ mouth, along with the explanations. Those who did make the trip, who didn’t drop out, who kept going on regardless, they were the blessed ones.

And what they found was that the qualities described in the beatitudes are not only about the difficulties, the climb of life; they are also about the blessings that come from the climb. The good things that come out of struggle and help us to grow even stronger in our faith.

You see, our lives are not about just one event, or one place, or one thing we accomplish. It’s not about the glory days we once had, nor the ones we might hope for in the future. Our lives are an ongoing journey, and there are going to be times when it will be a steep climb in order to follow Jesus.

We are reminded here that it takes some sweat to follow Jesus, and that is pretty much what Jesus is pointing out in the Beatitudes. The followers, the saints we remember today, weren’t those who gave up when the going got tough, but are those who keep going, climbing to whatever point the master finally chooses. They are the ones who will get the best reward. They are those who will find the blessings Jesus spoke so highly of.

May God be with you in your climb of life. Amen.

Prayers

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

Lord of all the saints, we praise you for evangelists and martyrs whose sacrifices witness to your gospel across time and space. Inspire us by their courage to carry our faith to new people and places around us. Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Lord of every nation, guide the people of the United States as they participate in another national election. Kindle hearts eager to understand common needs and seek the common good. Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Lord of every venture, we pray for the congregations of our downtown churches. Today we pray especially for the congregation of All Nations Church and their pastors. Look over them in all aspects of their ministry. Bless them with your vision of what you want them to be. Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Lord of every blessing, your Son's blessing came to those living with poverty, grief, hunger, thirst, and persecution. Shape our vision of the saints to match his own. Awaken in us your call to serve all who suffer. Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, 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 every time, countless are the multitudes you have called by name and gathered to yourself. Comfort us as we grieve those who have died in the past year. In faith, may we join with them in ceaseless praise. 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.