

New Hope Lutheran Church

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November 22, 2020

The 23rd Sunday after Pentecost

Coming Events

Nov 29 2:00 Worship service **Regent St**
Finnish sermon emailed and on website nhlc.ca

In our prayers Fred, Pentti, Esme, Martha.

Prayer of the Day

O God of power and might, you Son shows us the way of service, and in him we inherit the riches of your grace. Give us the wisdom to know what is right and the strength to serve the world you have made, we pray through your Son, 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 95:1 – 7a

- 1** Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; **let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.**
- 2** Let us come before him with thanksgiving **and extol him with music and song.**
- 3** For the Lord is the great God, **the great King above all gods.**
- 4** In his hand are the depths of the earth, **and the mountain peaks belong to him.**
- 5** The sea is his, for he made it, **and his hands formed the dry land.**
- 6** Come, let us bow down in worship, **let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;**
- 7** for he is our God **and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.**

First Reading Ezekiel 34:11 – 16, 20 – 24

11 “For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. **12** As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. **13** I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. **14** I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. **15** I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. **16** I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

20 “Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. **21** Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, **22** I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. **23** I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. **24** I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.

Second Reading Ephesians 1:15 – 23

15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, **16** I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. **17** I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. **18** I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, **19** and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength **20** he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, **21** far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. **22** And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, **23** which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Gospel Matthew 25: 31 – 46

31 “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. **32** All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. **33** He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. **34** “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. **35** For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, **36** I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ **37** “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? **38** When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? **39** When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ **40** “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ **41** “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. **42** For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, **43** I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ **44** “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ **45**

“He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ 46 “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Sermon

“A Word of Encouragement”

I want to begin by asking: how did that gospel lesson make you feel? I realize that, in some ways, the lesson may not seem to reflect the festival we celebrate today; Christ the King Sunday. Instead that lesson may make us feel like today should rather be titled: Christ-who-comes-to-judge-us Sunday. It can come across as a stern warning, kind of a: “*do what I tell you to do or else!*”, message. We may feel that this message hardly suggests a good benevolent king who wants nothing but the best for us.

While it may appear to be a wake up call for some, we might want to remember that people can hear the exact same message, and yet respond differently to it. For some people, they hear that gospel as a message that all those rotten people in the world will finally get what they deserve. For other people it may feel like a smug confirmation that they are on the right track, and have nothing to worry about. And yet other people’s response to these gospel verses might be argumentative, such as: *what if I’ve helped some people but not others, but the people I’ve helped outnumbered those whom I didn’t? Or what if I’ve only helped a few, but they were more important than all the others?*

I guess this all brings us to the question of; what is this gospel really trying to teach us? How are we supposed to take it? Is it a rebuke, a warning, or a pat on the back? Like a lot of gospel passages, it is probably a combination of all those. For those considered sheep in this lesson, it is a pat on the back. For those considered goats, it is a rebuke. For what is probably the majority of Christians, who don’t feel they totally fit in either category, it might be taken as a warning.

Essentially this passage asks of us; how well are each of us doing in looking after the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, the sick, and those in prison? I would suspect that those are not the only categories Jesus is interested in. I’m pretty sure we can also safely include those who are living with injustice, those who are refugees, those who are victims of any type of abuse, and a host of others whose lives are not what God would want them to be. How are we doing at looking after them? Let’s look at that.

While there are systems in place to take care of some of these; such as hospitals for the sick, food banks for the hungry and thirsty, shelters for the homeless stranger, and clothing banks for the naked, unfortunately we live in times when that is still not enough. There are still those in our streets who hunger and thirst and those who have no place to live. There are those who are not getting the medical treatment they need. There are those who suffer injustice because of a huge lag in the justice system.

Worst of all, most in our society accept things the way they are because such things don’t affect them personally, and they shrug it all off with the expression of: “it’s not my problem.” Today, going by our gospel, Jesus makes it our problem. Jesus puts himself in the place of all he describes. When we didn’t do something for a person in need, we didn’t do it for Jesus himself.

Most of the time I’m sure our answer to such a remark would mirror that of those in our lesson; “When did we see you in need?” Jesus response should shock us. Whenever we saw someone in need, it is the same as Jesus being in need. And I know what our answer for that might be. *Well, if I’d have know it was you Jesus, you know I would have been there for you!* But doesn’t such a response only mean we haven’t been looking for Jesus? Or looking for ways to serve Jesus, the king we celebrate today?

This is where the sheep in today’s gospel are truly remarkable. They don’t appear to be looking for Jesus, nor do they appear to be looking for brownie points from Jesus. They just did as they were instructed by God. They looked after those in need, as if it were some sort of reflex rather than a concentrated effort. The goats, on the other hand, don’t appear to even see those in need.

This gospel then, is a good example for us. Do we even see people in need? In today’s world of instant news and with such a variety of ways to consume news, it can be kind of a difficult case to make that we don’t see those in need. Are we totally unaware of the devastation in South America and the Caribbean from recent hurricanes and the thousands who have lost their homes? Do we not see the homeless wandering the streets or panhandling at intersections right here in Sudbury? Are we blind to the thousands of refugees still fleeing in the Middle East and elsewhere? The list goes on and on.

And that can be part of our problem. There are just so many people in need that we may feel overwhelmed. We may freeze up when we realize that we don’t even know where to start. The

important thing though, is to start anyway. Make some phone calls to the many that are feeling so alone in this time of isolation. Donate to the food bank or the Elgin Street Mission. Make a donation to Canadian Lutheran World Relief, or make use of the Gifts From The Heart catalogue (that should be arriving soon). Write to your MP or MPP regarding areas where you see injustice, or even just to let them know you are praying for them as they face difficult choices.

I think that for today, the gospel message is that Jesus encourages us to look around, to take a second look at the world around us, remembering that he is there in the midst of people in need. Depending on our actions in life thus far, it might be a rebuke, a warning, or a pat on the back – whatever our soul is in need of so that we strive to look after the needy. In the end God just carries out judgement based on what we have decided and shown in this life. The highest and most holy form of power is not coercive and domineering but, rather, self-emptying and servant like, encouraging us, rather than ordering us.

So while today’s message may appear harsh on the surface, it actually is a word of encouragement, an effort to steer us towards the best possible outcome for ourselves. Like a good parent, who guides their children away from all that might harm or endanger them, Jesus is wanting to guide us toward making the world safer and more abundant for all. And for this we thank our King, Christ our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Prayers

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

Sovereign of all, train our ears to hear your cry in the needs of those around us. Bless all social ministries of the church through which we seek to serve others as we ourselves have been served. Hear us O God, **Your mercy is great.**

Holy peacemaker; answer the cries of your people in nations caught in war and destruction. Guide national and international leaders to seek out diplomatic solutions to strife in our world. Hear us O God, **Your mercy is great.**

You cause rain to fall on the just and unjust alike. Direct our use of creation to provide for the needs of all people in ways that are sustainable for the earth.. Hear us O God, **Your mercy is great.**

Heal the sinful divisions we erect between us and release us from systems of oppression and prejudice. Restore our capacity to see you image in those whose dignity we have stripped away. Hear us O God, **Your mercy is great.**

Holy healer; Be with all **who are ill**. Comfort those who live with pain and mental anguish. Guide those who attend to the sick. Be with us all as the numbers of those affected with COVID increases. We especially remember before you those we now name in our hearts or aloud. Hear us O God, **Your mercy is great.**

Holy comforter; we pray for the congregations of our **downtown churches**. Today we pray especially for the parish of **St. Jean de Brebeuf**, and their Pastor, Fr. Jolicoeur. Look over them in all aspects of their ministry. Bless them with your vision of what you want them to be. Hear us O God, **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for all who are suffering the effects of hurricanes and typhoons. Be with all whose homes are in ruin. Comfort those who have lost loved ones. Be with them as they rebuild homes, lives, and careers. Hear us O God, **Your mercy is great.**

Receive our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, until that day when you gather all creation around your throne where you will reign forever and ever. **Amen**