

# New Hope Lutheran Church

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*September 6, 2020*

*14<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 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.

**Funeral** Vaito Aulis Peerla 86 yrs



O God, you are the hope of the saints, the light that filled their hearts, the love that never failed them. Comfort those who mourn, especially the family of Vaito Peerla, and in your time bring us to our eternal home. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen

## First Reading Ezekiel 33:7 – 11

7 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. 8 When I say to the wicked, 'You wicked person, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade them from their ways, that wicked person will die for their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood. 9 But if you do warn the wicked person to turn from their ways and they do not do so, they will die for their sin, though you yourself will be saved. 10 "Son of man, say to the Israelites, 'This is what you are saying: "Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?" ' 11 Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?'

## Psalms 119:33 – 40

33 Teach me, LORD, the way of your decrees, that I may follow it to the end. 34 Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law and obey it with all my heart. 35 Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. 36 Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain. 37 Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word. 38 Fulfill your promise to your servant, so that you may be feared. 39 Take away the disgrace I dread, for your laws are good. 40 How I long for your precepts! In your righteousness preserve my life.

## Second Reading Romans 13:8 – 14

8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. 11 And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and

debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. 14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

## Gospel Matthew 18:15 – 20

15 "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. 16 But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' 17 If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. 18 "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

## Prayer of the Day

O Lord God, enliven and preserve your church with your perpetual mercy. Without your help, we mortals will fail; remove far from us everything that is harmful, and lead us toward all that gives life and salvation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

## September 6, 2020 – 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

From the Summer Sermon Series 2020  
by Rev. Dr. Larry Kochendorfer

Welcome to this sermon series that our Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada is providing for congregations throughout the summer months and into September. I am Larry Kochendorfer and I serve as the Bishop of the Synod of Alberta and the Territories. It is great to be with you this Sunday.

As I prepared for today's brief sermon I want to acknowledge my appreciation for the writings of The Rev. Dr. David Lose who currently serves as Senior Pastor at Mount Olivet Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, and The Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis, professor at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota. I

have significantly borrowed their wisdom and insights, and their words, in the shaping of today's sermon.

Let us pray: *God of grace and mercy, enliven and strengthen each faith community with the promise of your presence, in Jesus' name.*

We begin today by singing a simple text and beautiful melody, used with permission of the composer, Bruce Harding. "Where Two or Three Are Gathered" was written as a gathering song for Sunday worship during the 2002 Easter season, using the text of Matthew 18:20.

The text of the song is very simple: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there, I am there." Please join me in singing as you become familiar with the text and melody (or use the following link to see composer, Bruce, and Cheryl Harding singing the song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26xik5R19j0>).

"Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there, I am there." These words seem particularly poignant in our COVID-19 pandemic reality. A word for our present experience where many are gathered in twos or threes, as families, as cohort units, as bubbles. A word of promise, for this time, that Jesus is with us, "I am there."

This word is good news for us this long weekend, in our present reality. It is good news proclaimed elsewhere in this gospel according to Matthew, too. At Jesus' birth, the child is to be named Emmanuel, which means, "God with us." And the final words of this Gospel proclaim a similar promise, "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

As we enter today's reading mindful of this good news, of Jesus' promise: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them..." I wonder if we hear today's reading as about rules or as about relationships? Are we here being given rules to live by or are we being invited to consider relationships over, well, over just about everything else in our life as followers of Jesus?

I have most often understood this reading as about rules. Maybe you have, too. Rules quoted in constitutions or bylaws about how we are to maintain order in the Christian community. I have heard them used by those who are more than eager to "go and point out the fault" of another. They have often been cited as a way of handling disputes and then used as a rationale of why someone should be shunned.

If this reading is about rules it is rather simple and straightforward: if someone offends you, confront them. If that does not work, try an intervention. If that fails, cut them off and toss them out. Excommunicate, exile, shake off the dust from one's feet, wash one's hands of the person, and move on.

But what if this reading is not about rules, but about relationships? What if it is not about providing simple and straightforward instructions, but about the never simple and often complicated work of building authentic Christian community? What if the intention here is not about systems or procedures or a rulebook to follow, but more about reconciling and restoring to the community a sister or a brother, a sibling in Christ? And what if this gospel writer's primary concern is not actually about settling disputes within the community of faith, but about creating a space, environment, room, opportunity where Jesus' presence, where two or three gathered, is able to bring forgiveness, healing, joy, hope, and life?

Let us briefly look at the context of today's reading. The verses immediately before tell of the shepherd's delight in restoring to the flock a sheep that has strayed and the command to beware despising others, even those who seem of little importance. And the verses that follow set a new standard for forgiveness, first multiplying Peter's sense of appropriate forgiveness beyond imagination: "not seven times, but ... seventy-seven times," and then suggesting that our ability to forgive others may be the key as to whether we ourselves are forgiven.

Preceded by the story of the lost sheep and followed by a new standard for forgiveness, today's reading, seen in its context, is about relationships, about community, about reconciliation and restoration. It is offered by someone who knows that relationships take work to maintain and that

community is much more difficult to create and nurture than we might imagine. That working out conflict and disputes as a community together rather than simply declaring judgement can be very, very hard.

Jesus urges those in the faith community to have honest conversation in private with the offending party. No passive-aggressive behavior, no "triangulation," just straightforward conversation. This is so hard, I would rather complain to others about the one who has offended me than to talk to the offending person, but Jesus leaves no room for such behavior.

If the offending member refuses to listen, Jesus advises bringing along one or two others as witnesses for further conversation. And if the member still refuses to listen, the matter may be brought before the whole community. And if the member refuses to listen to the whole assembly of the faithful, then and only then is the member to be treated "as a Gentile and a tax collector."

Even here, dear friends, in the context of the Gospel according to Matthew, a Gentile or a tax collector is not someone who is beyond the reach of God's mercy, for throughout this Gospel Jesus makes a point of reaching out to the Gentiles and tax collectors. Religious leaders were outraged that at every opportunity Jesus extended himself graciously to them, even eating and drinking with them. He was known as a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 11:19).

Again, it is about relationships, about reconciliation and restoration, about forgiveness, healing, joy, hope, and life in community. And if it becomes necessary to exclude someone from the faith community for the sake of the integrity and well-being of the community, this is never a final judgment.

A community shaped by Jesus, by his life, message and cross, is a community always seeking to reconcile and to restore.

Make no mistake, the work of seeking authentic community, where two or three are gathered, is hard. But also, powerful. And healing. And, an incredible witness. It is difficult, it is challenging, to be sure, but also worth it. Always.

## Prayers

And when we grow weary following the path Jesus set, let us remind one another of the good news, that we have Jesus' promise that each and every time we try, where two or three are gathered, he is there with us – instructing us in the way of love, urging us on, forgiving us, and sending us to be a people, a community, of reconciliation and restoration, accompanying us wherever we may go.

Join me in singing: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there, I am there.”

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Where Two or Three are Gathered. Used with permission of Bruce Harding. Words: Matthew 18:20. Music copyright © 2002 by Bruce Harding. Evensong Worship Resources, [www.evensong.ca](http://www.evensong.ca) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26xik5R19j0>)

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“What Kind of Community Will We Be?” Sunday, August 28, 2011 David Lose  
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1601>

“Christian Community.” September 6, 2017 David Lose  
<http://www.davidlose.net/2017/09/pentecost-14-a-christian-community/>

“God Is With Us.” September 3, 2017 Karoline Lewis  
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=4961>

Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Unite your church, O God. Grant us the gifts of repentance and reconciliation. Bless the cooperative work of churches in this community. Strengthen ecumenical partnerships; guide the work of the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches.

Protect your creation, O God. Teach us ways that do not harm what you have entrusted to our care. Renew and enliven places suffering from drought, flood, storms, or pollution.

Turn nations and leaders from ways that lead to death. Shape new paths toward peace and cooperation, teaching us to recognize one another as neighbors. Guide legislators, civil servants, judges, and police toward laws that protect the well-being of all.

Tend to all in need of your compassion. Hear the cries of those awaiting justice and those yearning for forgiveness. Give community to the lonely and neighbors to the outcast. Shelter all who are vulnerable in body, mind, or spirit.

Sustain us in our work, O God, and give work to those who need it. Shape societies to ensure fair treatment for all who labor. Help us to love our neighbors in and through our work.

We remember with thanksgiving those who have died in faith. As you equipped them, equip us with your protection and power, until with them we see your salvation.

All these things and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your mercy, through Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**