

# New Hope Lutheran Church

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*September 13, 2020*

*15<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.

## Prayer of the Day

O Lord God, merciful judge, you are the inexhaustible fountain of forgiveness. Replace our hearts of stone with hearts that love and adore you, that we may delight in doing your will, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

## First Reading Genesis 50:15 – 21

**15** When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" **16** So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: **17** 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept. **18** His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. **19** But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? **20** You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. **21** So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

## Psalm 103:8 – 13

**8** The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. **9** He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; **10** he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. **11** For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; **12** as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. **13** As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.

## Second Reading Romans 14:1 – 12

**1** Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. **2** One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. **3** The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. **4** Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand. **5** One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. **6** Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does

so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. **7** For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. **8** If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. **9** For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. **10** You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. **11** It is written: " 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.' " **12** So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

## Gospel Matthew 18:21 – 35

**21** Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" **22** Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. **23** "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. **24** As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. **25** Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. **26** "At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' **27** The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. **28** "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. **29** "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.' **30** "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. **31** When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. **32** "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. **33** Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' **34** In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. **35** "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

**September 13, 2020 – 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
From the Summer Sermon Series 2020  
by Rev. Adam Snook

I have always enjoyed reading. From whimsical story books about the little-engine-who-could, or saying goodnight to the moon as a child...to pouring over great Canadian fiction, or the classics, on a Saturday afternoon in the summer. Reading is one of my favorite hobbies.

As a teenager—I became quite attracted to those *Choose-Your-Own-Adventure* books. You may recall them! Essentially, and if you're not familiar: at any given point in the book you would be presented with a choice to make: *Should you open the rattling door...if so, keep reading. If not, skip to page 71. Or, would you like to climb the mountain in search of the legendary lost treasure...if so, keep reading. If not, skip to the final chapter.*

That sort of thing...you get the idea.

I so enjoyed the suspense of these books. I appreciated their creativity. But perhaps most of all, I valued the fact that if you didn't like the ending...you could simply go back to the beginning, make a few altered choices, and craft something completely different. Something a bit more appealing.

In this morning's gospel reading from Matthew (the story of the unforgiving servant), we encounter a parable about a King who wished to settle his debts. The story begins with the King demanding repayment from a servant for the outstanding balance of Ten Thousand Talents. **It's an absurd amount of money!!!** One talent alone was the same as 130lbs of silver...and would have taken a servant 15 years to earn: which means that 10,000 talents was equivalent to 150,000 years of labour. It's incomprehensible. So unbelievable, in fact, that early Greek manuscripts would often reduce the number to make it a bit more palatable. **But the absurdity is critical to the story.** It would have been impossible for a servant to repay such a debt, we know that. So, and with no real other choice, the indebted servant pleads for forgiveness—and the King, who was excessive in severity, also chooses to be excessive in mercy.

He forgives the debt, forgives the loan, and forgives the servant.

But this is where things get complicated.

Because it seems that such excessive mercy is lost on the servant. In turn, he quickly denied forgiveness to someone who owed him a far smaller...far less significant amount of money: only about a day's wage (in comparison to 150,000 years). It's a cringe-worthy turn of events that leaves the reader shocked and confused. The parable closes ominously with the unforgiving servant being handed over for punishment, and a stern warning for those who follow after.

Needless to say that when the parable of the Unforgiving Servant rolls around in the lectionary cycle, I find myself wishing that I was back in Jr. High school...wishing that I was reading one of those choose-your-own-adventure books and somewhat able to alter the outcome.

**I don't like this one.**

I want the servant to be so moved with gratitude—that he cannot help but to live a new life.

I want him to be so moved with gratitude—that he cannot help but to skip through the streets in joyful praise.

I want him to proclaim forgiveness...and to proclaim mercy...and to proclaim love from the very rooftops that nearly came crashing down—to everyone, and for everything.

I want the outcome to be different!

Sounds good, doesn't it?

But you and I both know that forgiveness isn't always easy.

And that's why, I believe, this parable is so important. Because, and as much as I might wish to identify with the king in Jesus' parable, the truth of the matter is that (most days) I'm sitting right next to the servant with the absurd amount of debt. The one who can't dig themselves out. The one who need

forgiveness. The one who messes up. And the one who struggles to forgive others in return.

Sound familiar?

And so let me ask you a question: what if...what if, instead of trying to shy away from the depth of this passage...what if, instead of trying to re-write or avoid it's weight—we alternatively choose to lean into it...to embrace it!

Embrace the truth—that we can't do it on our own.

Embrace the truth—that forgiveness is more than just some nicety or kind platitude.

Embrace the truth—that we ARE going to mess up.

Embrace the truth—that for most of us, forgiveness is a struggle...a challenge.

Because, and it occurs to me, that when we do so (when we lean into all of our worries and fears surrounding this portion of scripture), what we will quickly discover is that forgiveness is not primarily God's expectation...but rather, that forgiveness is first, and is foremost, and is forever God's gift. And that even when such forgiveness may not seem possible for you...and certainly feels insurmountable for me: we can still be comforted by the fact that such forgiveness **IS** possible for God.

And that, dear friends, is GOOD NEWS.

Because God's unbelievable, nearly inconceivable, amazing, absurd, and utterly astounding forgiveness—changes everything! Everything!

Now that, gives me hope.

And I pray that it may inspire you, also!

You know, about the same time I was reading those choose-your-own-adventure books, I also started working at Lutheran Camp Mush-A-Mush in Nova Scotia. I remember sitting in the chapel early one morning, as the visiting pastor spoke about forgiveness. Truth be told, and while caring for a cabin of eight-year-old boys who were more concerned with throwing rocks at one another than they were with listening to the pastor (shocking, I know!), I really didn't hear much. BUT I

do recall her yelling...at the top of her lungs so loudly that it echoed across the lake with crisp clarity the words: YOU ARE FORGIVEN!

**I mean...she belted it out!** But even more memorable than her words, was the feeling I felt after hearing them. In that moment, I felt free and unencumbered. In that moment, I felt inspired and hopeful. In that moment, everything seemed possible.

Siblings in Christ, God's beloved, hear these words when I repeat them to you (words that, I pray, you have heard time and time again throughout your lives):

You...are loved!

You...are forgiven!

God's grace...has set you free!!!

Let the echoes of these words reach into the very core of your being.

Let their resounding cadence seep into each and into every aspect of your life.

And may God's astounding forgiveness awaken us to the hope...and to the life...that such a grace makes possible.

Thanks be to God.

**Amen.**

### **Prayers**

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

You welcome us when we are weak in faith. Uphold your church throughout the world; make it a place of welcome. Strengthen faith through Bible studies, time for quiet contemplation and youth ministries. In these changing times nurture new ministries of education and growth.

The heights of the heavens show us the vastness of your steadfast love. Have compassion on your creation. Where human selfishness has brought ruin and destruction, we look to you to heal, renew, and redeem your world.

Make your ways known to the nations. Speak kindness to our bitter grudges. Settle our hearts when we want to settle accounts with violence. Bless our leaders with patience and wisdom.

Bring healing and justice wherever harm is dealt. Provide vindication for all who are oppressed. Free victims of human trafficking and forced labor; deliver all who are bound by debt. Feed all who hunger, and guard refugees fleeing famine, poverty, and war.

Teach us to forgive. Remind us that you do not always accuse us. Still our tongues when we are tempted to pass judgment and argue over opinions. Make this congregation a community of mercy for one another and for all our neighbors.

We pray for those who are facing disasters in all the shapes and forms it comes: today we pray especially for those who have been affected by hurricanes as well as those affected by massive wild fires. Be with them in their trials and grief, and may your presence and your people be with them to give them comfort and the necessities of life. Look over them as they wait in these uncertain times.

Whether we live or whether we die, we are yours. We thank you for those who have showed us faithfulness, for the knees that taught us how to bow to you and the tongues that taught us to praise you.

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

**Amen.**