



newhope news

Lutheran Church - Agoura Hills

April, 2020

Holy Week and Easter in a Season of COVID-19

Well, I miss you and being together. There, I said it.

This virus is described as novel and so are the ways our lives are shaped in response to it. We can each list the holy and common things we are missing: toilet paper, hand sanitizer, human touch, Holy Communion, dinner out.

I don't know about you but I've been learning things about myself. Here are a few:

- I'm having a hard time keeping track of days – my week schedule has radically changed. We now have Wednesday Sundays (because we record Sunday's worship on Wednesday morning).
- I need a new look -- the result of so many hours looking at myself in zoom meetings!
- I require supervised visits to the refrigerator! Access is too easy while working at home!
- I never knew that I had, all along, a favorite brand of toilet paper. Who knew, right? Absence really does make the heart grow fonder!
- I've also learned the importance of having a daily routine.

So what are you learning? More importantly, what are *WE* learning as a Christian community?

Here are a few learnings I've heard from you:

- We've learned the importance of connecting with one another.
- We've learned to use new tools to connect and to worship, like Zoom.
- We've learned what we most need during the pandemic is human relationship.
- We've re-learned that we are not invincible.

Of all the enormous human achievements, it is ironic that a micro-organism has got us all on the run! The famous and the unknown, the powerful and the powerless, the wealthy and the poor become equal, reduced to our common biology, before a virus. It would be a mistake to grant to COVID-19 "invincible" status. It is not invincible. Remember that, especially those among us who are most afraid.

But this virus has shown us the truth of our vulnerability. It is an uncomfortable truth but, it is not a new one. Psalm 103 reminds us "*All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like a flower. The grass withers, the flower falls. But the word of the Lord endures forever.*"

Repeat with emphasis: The. Word. Of. The. Lord. Endures. Forever.

That word is Jesus. The One who has victory over sin and death.

One of the best things to recall in a difficult time are our spiritual resources. It would be an over-simplification to say that faith alone will save us from a virus. But it would be fully true to say that the spiritual life will help you cope with

its effects and byproducts, while doctors treat your body for it. Spiritual work adds inner resilience, not by putting on airs of invincibility but by searching out God in our holy insecurity. “You can’t get to courage without rumbling with vulnerability” wrote sociologist Brene Brown in Dare to Lead.

Now the church enters the sacred time of Holy Week - when we consider a God who becomes vulnerable in order to transform our lives by Christ’s brave grace. God is courageous through vulnerability, perhaps? Holy Week reminds us that when the darkest door of a tomb closes - there is yet hope. What did Jesus say to Martha at the grave of her brother? “*I AM the Resurrection and the Life*” and he raised Lazarus. Therefore, the message of Holy Week/Easter gives me high hopes in this particularly strange time.

We have hope in any circumstance *because we have help* from the Source of life itself, befriended and saved by the One who was crucified *AND IS* risen! This hopefulness can be contagious, too. I mean, if God can raise Jesus from the dead, God can certainly raise a vaccine from scientists working in labs, performing tests, perfecting a cure. Throughout history God’s grace and human tenacity have seen us through many existential threats. In this era, God has put the wisdom of micro-biology (and many other sciences) into human minds, unlocking mysteries of which our ancestors never could have dreamed. Not only is Corona virus *novel*, so are we!

COVID-19 reveals truth about human beings. We’ve seen altruistic acts of compassion and bravery. We also see the worst when we hoard instead of share! I pray, my brothers and sisters in Christ, we can use this opportunity for learning, as a moment of evolution. There is so much in our current cultural conversation and our times that must be transcended and transformed. Maybe this is that time. I hope.

You might say I have high hopes for this time of pandemic (I also hope for this virus’ quick demise!).

Why hope when everyone seems so fearful? I’m confident because of the God who rose from death to life on Easter. I hope you will be hopeful, too. And, growing in faith, active in love.

The Lenten tools of prayer, Bible study, service, and giving have been training us for a moment like the present. I hope you will use those tools and enact your faith for yourself and your neighbors.

And don’t forget to open your hymnal. There are encouraging gems and insightful prayers in the hymnal, I like the words from “God of Grace and God of Glory” (ELW 705) which form my closing prayer:

*From the fears that long have bound us
free our hearts to faith and praise.
grant us wisdom,
grant us courage,
for the living of these days.*

Remember: He is Risen!

May this week be a time for holy reflection, and the next a joyous, hope-filled Easter!

Pastor Craig



KEEP UP WITH EACH OTHER:

We encourage you to visit our Facebook page and website for latest updates on our community life. We strongly encourage you to join one of our Zoom groups to cultivate your spirit!

Each week the following groups host a Zoom Meeting:

SUNDAY: Sunday Study and Discussion (9 AM) – see Pastor Craig
Kids' Amplify Meeting (9:30 AM) – see Merylee Blair
MONDAY: Monday Night Bible Study (7 PM) – see Lorie Paulson
TUESDAY: Tuesday Morning Bible Study (10 AM) – See Pastor Craig
Book Club (Not weekly) (11:45 AM) – See Gail McGinnis
WEDNESDAY: Middle School Confirmation (5:30 PM) – See Pastors Scott/Craig
THURSDAY: Men's Group (7:30 AM) - See Dr. Terry Paulson



Easter Communion:

New Hope Lutheran Church is a sacramental church. We gather around God's Word and Sacrament in worship each week. Due to the "Safer at Home" policy we have been unable to provide Sacraments.

But on Easter, we will be having Holy Communion in your home. It is not virtual communion but real communion with wafer and grape juice provided in a clean individually wrapped cup/wafer. Our church has long provided communion to people in their home or at the hospital in special circumstances. COVID-19 has provided us with special circumstances calling for special ways to deliver and provide Holy Communion.

Here's what will happen:

- During Holy Week we will video record worship including a service of Holy Communion at which the Pastor will consecrate the individual communion cups/wafers.
- Next Wednesday and Thursday (April 8-9) a team of volunteers will visit all member homes with packets of communion elements for you and members of your household. We will provide enough for all members in the directory who we know live at your home. A bag will be placed on your doorstep – there is no need for interaction.

We do need healthy volunteers to make these deliveries. Please email me (Pastor Craig) if you can help (craig@newhopeagoura.com).

If you do not receive your package by Thursday afternoon, please call or text me (Pastor's cell: 805-796-9000) and I will arrange for a drop off.

In your bag will be individual communion cup and wafer packages for each person, and directions for home communion. We would like you to receive communion between 10-11 AM on Easter morning. You might take the sacrament at the appropriate point while watching the recorded worship service for Easter morning.

We hope home communion will be a moment of spiritual intimacy within your family and with your church family. I ask you to consider it as that kind of opportunity. It will be a real moment of Holy Communion where each person who trusts in Christ's promise, of forgiveness, life and salvation will be fed.

This is a rare practice in an extraordinary circumstance. Even in this time of quarantine, we won't do this often. If

the “safer at home” policy stays in effect for a longer period than currently planned, we might consider doing this every four to six weeks. All of your church leaders pray that we will commune together as soon as it’s safe.

For now, we hope you will join us on Easter for Holy Communion and online worship.

Now Thank We All Our God

The other day I was contemplating Martin Rinkart and humming his hymn, “Now Thank We all Our God” (ELW 839/840). Later the same day, Phyllis Rickert, and I spoke about this hymn as well. Maybe there was more to this than coincidence so its important to know Rinkart’s story.

The witness of Martin Rinkart (1586 - 1649) serves as an inspirational hope in a crisis. Rinkart was a gifted musician at several prominent churches in Saxony, Germany, before turning to the pastorate. He then served as pastor to the people of Eilenburg for 30 years before his death - years that almost exactly overlapped with the dreadful Thirty Years’ War.

Because it was a walled city, refugees from the surrounding countryside, besieged by invasions of the Swedish military, poured into Eilenburg. It didn’t take long for famine and pestilence to set in. In 1637 alone, 8,000 people died of disease - including other clergy, most of the town council, and Rinkart’s own wife. Rinkart was left to minister to the entire city, sometimes preaching at burial services for as many as 200 dead in one week. Known as a faithful and caring pastor, he gave away everything he owned except for the barest essentials to care for his family.

In the depths of the communal suffering that surrounded him, Rinkart wrote a hymn text with words now familiar to many of us:

“Now thank we all our God,
With heart and hands and voices;
Who wondrous things has done,
In whom this world rejoices.”

In another verse, Rinkart speaks of a bounteous God staying near us through our anxiety:

“Keep us all in grace,
And guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all harm,
In this world and the next.”

It’s a hymn worth coming back to when COVID-19 fears force us to hole up at home and wonder when we’ll see our most precious natural resource fully restored.



From the Deacon

Welcome to what looks like another month of sheltering in place. For some of us, it doesn't look much different from "normal" life, and for others it's a different kind of normal. Personally, I've gone through genealogy records to remind myself that while this may be a new strain of virus, the idea of quarantine is hardly a new one. Joe's mom was born during the time of the Spanish influenza outbreak in 1918, and last week celebrated her 102nd birthday. Granted, it was a very quiet occasion, with phone calls instead of visits, but there was ice cream, I'm sure. She's the only person I know that was alive when we went through this kind of global pandemic before on this scale.

History tells us there have been things like this everywhere, and in every time. How do we respond as God's people? A rabbi I follow on Twitter gave us all a great reminder this week. She was quoting Numbers 12, where Miriam "became leprous" after speaking ill of her brother Moses. God punishes her by making her skin white and scaly, and Moses prays "God, heal her!" God assures Moses that Miriam will be healed, but only after she's spent seven days in quarantine outside the camp. Rabbi Danya pointed us all to one verse: "15 So Miriam was shut out of the camp for seven days; and the people did not set out on the march until Miriam had been brought in again." As God's people we suffer together, we do what we have to, but we don't leave folks behind. May it always be this way.

Blessings, Deacon Lynn



*Loving God, as I take up my
hands to wash them and reassure
my heart, I pray for healing
and wholeness for the whole world.*

*I remember that every life is
unique and of infinite value:
From those living throughout our
world to our friends
and family members.*

*Let me use my hands for good to help
bring hope and compassion to others.*

From Pastor Scott

Daniel 6: 1-23



In times like these I am reminded of the story of Daniel in the lions den for many reasons. First, unfortunately is the behavior of the Satraps in the story. For those who are wondering what a Satrap is, they were essentially local governors in the ancient Persian empire. The story begins with them looking for reasons to arrest Daniel and can find no fault in him, so they decide to trick King Darius into making actions that Daniel practices regularly, an illegal act. Knowing that he will surely break this rule. We are currently in a time where we are taking in so much information on a daily basis and so many of the things we are thinking about and doing are of great importance. But we have very difficult navigating to do, how do we know what we are reading is true or not? How do we know someone is sharing or posting something for the right reasons? Because we have to sometimes base our actions off of this information. And in our story King Darius, because of this deceitfulness, is forced to punish Daniel according to this decree. With the coronavirus we are clearly seeing how we all interpret different sources of information. There are people who are hunkering down and buying up all the toilet paper and thinking this might be the end of the world and there are those who have no problem storming the beaches as usual and have no issue because they are young and it probably won't affect them. We must remember during this time that, like the actions of King Darius, how we talk and how we act will have consequences, both good and bad.

The other part of the story that obviously comes to mind in these interesting times is the fact that Daniel is confined to a den, now I hope you feel safe in your quarantine space. But for many of us even though we feel safe at home, it is obviously not ideal, but it is an unfortunate situation that we find ourselves in, sometimes it just doesn't feel fair or we can question why is this happening to me? Especially those who are at a higher risk and have to be extra cautious it can be frustrating to have to change the way we are living at the drop of a hat. And we are wondering what the future holds, how will our lives be different, how will the world change because of the current circumstances. Those unfortunately are things that we can only speculate about.

The thing we can count on is the fact that God is here with us and is working. And that is one thing I want you to think about. In our story we see God keeping Daniel safe. Where do you see God in all of this? We can sometimes see a lot of the negative in this, but where is God showing up? Second question to ponder, how have you been able to care for yourself or others in this time? Even though Daniel is in a dire situation he is cared for and protected by God. So what have you been able to care for in this time? Maybe you have had some extra time to reconnect with someone or take some time for yourself that you maybe didn't have before. And finally, how can you take time for prayer this week? Daniel finds time to pray even when a decree says he shouldn't. In this time we cannot forget to continue practicing faith and prayer is as important now as it was a month ago.



Caring Corner

Let us remember the following people in our prayers.....

Irene Bright recently had a back procedure but is home recovering.

Continued prayers of healing for Tom Appleton, Barbara Artinian, Floyd Bealer, Steve Blair, Elisabeth Brown, Chris Chigaridas, Sandy Cowden, Holly Dolliver, Jill and Chris Fisher, Steve Frye, Lyla Grant, Bob Green, Sandy Hansen, Del Hultgren, Denny Koons, Joyce Lawson, Reeta Leland, Ava Grace O'Connell, Cheryl Merrill, Nick and Cindy O'Hare, Janel Perez, Ahoo Pilehvari, Sharon Pryor, Arnold Reuter, Wayne Rickert, Jane Taschereau, Rose Topliss, Britt Tsumpes, Jax Rains-Turk, Susie Turner, and Pastor John Wilker.

Prayers for our servicemen - Landen Anderson, Gerren Blair, Taylor Blair, Heather Brown, Keith Brown, Patrick Clohessy, Cynthia Colby, Jonah Hershman, Kyle McCarley, Ikenna Olelewe, and Jason Retter.



New Hope in a Mug!

How do you start your day? Does it involve coffee, tea, hot chocolate, hot water with lemon, or almond milk with turmeric? No matter what you put in your mug, why not start your day with a positive, uplifting, faith-based message?

We have what you need. New Hope mugs are not just for visitors. Upgrade your mug collection or gift a friend or family member who needs some inspiration. For a \$5 donation, you can have your very own mug!

If you'd like to reserve a mug or two or three or four, call Laurie in the office and she'll be happy to set aside your "Hope in a Mug."



Altar Guild Guru

Are you naturally endowed with a spirit of hospitality as well as a spirit to serve others? Would you enjoy being trained to lead the Altar Guild by our very own Karen Ingram? Do you enjoy coordinating the gathering of many hands to make light the work? If so, notify Laurie Scott, Pastor Craig or Jax Rains-Turk, and let us know that you would like to be considered for this service-enhancing, faith-enriching, and spirit-renewing service to our congregation.



Prayer Shawl

Prayer Shawl has been busy these past couple of months. We want to thank those who have given us your handiwork, though you don't come to our meetings. Your shawls are much appreciated and we're sure will be a comfort to those who receive them.



From the Treasurer

Thank you for your generosity already in 2020! Your giving in February amounted to \$32,271. Our year to date giving amounted to \$113,586, which is about 25% of the budgeted giving. Our expenditures in February were \$33,957. Please contact Joe Bullock if you have any questions.



Giving Options in April

These are clearly extraordinary times. For all those who are currently donating to church using any of the available e-giving options, thank you! Your continued giving is supporting the church in a difficult time. For those of you that normally donate during Sunday services, please consider making your donations via mail for the next few weeks. Alternatively, you can contact Joe Bullock to learn about the various giving options.



Hey Tech Heads!

You know who you are! The mere thought of ticking the keyboard on a MAC, PC, Tablet, Cell Phone or Sound Board gets your heart racing. Or if you've ever sat in the service and said, "I could do that!", then don't delay, apply today. We are seeking additional tech heads to join our dedicated team to create a seamless, effortless slide and music experience for our worship. Is it YOU? Are YOU ready? Then let Laurie Scott know that you want to be added to the list for an upcoming training session where you will learn the ins/outs and little known secrets of the tech side of our house. The training session will be scheduled within a month or two. Don't miss out! Tech has become an integral part of our worship experience and your passion for tech excellence, skills and innate talent can help us take it to the next level.





MANNA FOOD PANTRY

Manna will gladly accept ANY unexpired (within 12 months prior to the "sell-by" date), non-perishable food items that are unopened and in good condition. Please leave any donations in the box the narthex. Any questions, call Ann Ashamallah at (818) 613-6818.

Top Priority Items

- 1 - Peanut Butter
- 2 - Pancake Mix
- 3 - Red/Kidney Beans
- 4 - Hamburger Helper
- 5 - Ramen Noodles
- 6 - Tomato Soup - Canned and Boxed
- 7 - Tomato Paste/Sauce
- 8 - Canned Vegetables
- 9 - Canned Fruit
- 10 - Flavored Rice (Rice-a-Roni)



Social Ministry

Hello Church Family!

My prayers are that everyone is staying safe! Our overnight shelters and Meals Program are cancelled to protect everyone's health due to Covid-19. Harbor House, LSS and Manna are on the front lines to secure and feed many now in unconventional ways. The fallout from the epidemic with things like job loss or furlough will put an unprecedented strain on our Social Ministry partners. I will be asking our

congregation to step up as we always do to safely offer our assistance. Weekly I will notify everyone of the current needs. We each can do much in a safe and healthy way. Please look for the email blast from me sent by Laurie about the requests from these agencies. Thanks to those who have already started answering that call. We are a New Hope in Christ.

Blessings, Merylee Blair



Support Our Military

A campaign is underway to honor and support our troops. Those on the front lines keeping us safe are often low on the basic necessities and treats. Please help us fill the collection box located in the narthex with travel size products such as soaps, shampoo, razors, lotions, deodorants, etc. Items like lifesavers, breath mints and hard candies make refreshing treats you can share too.



SCRIP gift cards are easy to give and fun to receive but did you know that a percentage of every SCRIP gift card purchased through New Hope comes back to New Hope? It's a WIN/WIN! Stop by the SCRIP table when we return back to our church building and choose from our current inventory. You can also pick up a list of the hundreds of gift cards that can be special purchased through New Hope for giving. See Kathy Rogers for more information.



Zelle
Give Better With Mobil Banking

For those who use mobile banking, New Hope has enabled e-giving via Zelle.

It's fast (via your phone banking app); safe (using our church email) and has no fees charged to our church. Note: It will default to general giving unless you designate Youth Fundraiser or Scrip gift cards in the note field. Be sure to confirm the email address is set to: laurie@newhopeagoura.com before sending money. Contact Joe Bullock or Kathy Rogers if you have any questions.

Did you Know?

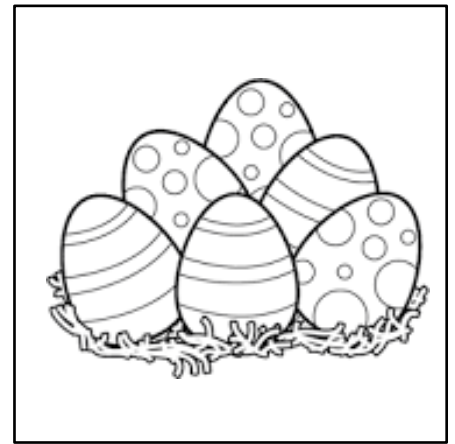
Your Church Council has been busy compiling valuable resources for our community. Visit the **RESOURCES** tab at **NEWHOPEAGOURA.COM** and you will find an extensive collection of information on **DISASTER PREPAREDNESS** that can assist you and your family in becoming prepared for the next event. Many of these resources are now available at our communications bulletin board in the hallway.

Giving By Text discontinued

New Hope began using Vanco's GIVING BY TEXT as an alternative donation option in August of 2018. Since then its use by our visitors and members has been minimal. With consideration for the additional costs associated with this program, the Church Council has voted to discontinue offering the GIVING BY TEXT option at this time. Donations and SCRIP gift card purchases can still be made with mobile giving apps such as Zelle. Thank you for your willingness to try new things!



"The two most powerful forces in the world are love and prayer. Use them!"



April Birthdays

- 2 Lorie Paulson
- 7 Linsey Blair
- 9 Fred Dunn
- 15 Brent Blair
- Sue Koons
- 21 Cindy O'Hare
- 23 Linda Barry
- 25 Sue Poulson
- 26 Sarah Olelewe
- 28 Steve Frye



"No matter how you feel. Get up, dress up, show up and never give up."

-- Guideposts



The deadline for all articles for the May newsletter is April 25th. Be sure to email them to gsmcginnis@roadrunner.com.

"It is better to look ahead and prepare than to look back and regret."

- Jackie Joyner Kersee

"It's not the absence of fear, it's overcoming it. Sometimes you've got to blast through and have faith."

- Emma Watson

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