

Spirit of Hope

Mount Hope Lutheran Church

Preschool and Childcare

December 23, 2020

Message from Pastor Fran Green

"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel" (Matthew 1:23)

We celebrate Jesus, God with us, once again as 2020 comes to a close. May we never tire of this miracle as we joyously and expectantly wait for Jesus' return. We are grateful for our shared ministry of the Gospel and for all of you, our Mount Hope family. Blessings and Merry Christmas!! Pastor Fran, Tammy, Zeke, Silas

All of our mid-week advent services are available online or DVD. The DVDs are available on a table near the east entrance of the church or call the church office and we will send you a copy in the mail. Our Christmas Eve service is available online on our website or YouTube page and also on DVD. There are some nice surprises of special guests involved in this service. Please invite your family, friends, and neighbors to join us in this unique celebration. Mthopelutheran.org/sermons

Our Christmas Day celebration service will be held on Sunday, December 27 at 9:30 in-person, also available by live stream, on our website/YouTube page, or DVD.

We continue to offer private communion on Wednesdays. These visits have been well-received and are a wonderful time to connect in a meaningful way with our Lord. Please contact the church office to get your spot to receive Holy Communion, Wednesday, December 23. If Wednesdays do not work, please let Kim know what does and I will work you in. Please note, there will be no appointments on Wednesday, December 30 and the church office will be closed that entire week (December 28-January 1).

Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:57

We are Mount Hope, Where Guests become Friends, Friends become Family!

Pastor Fran Green

Thank You!! We are grateful for the Christmas gift that you gave to our family. It is such a blessing to serve our Lord with all of you who are so generous, thoughtful, and caring.

Thank you so much! Pastor Fran, **Tammy, Zeke, Silas**



Sunday's Message

December 20, 2020

What is your favorite Christmas movie? My favorite is also my all-time favorite movie, It's a Wonderful Life. Yes, made in 1946, it is an American Classic. There are some theological concerns in the movie, most notably with angels. The Scriptures do not tell us that people become angels after death, needing to do things to earn their wings, which is what the angel Clarence in the movie must do. But there are some wonderful lessons that we can learn from this "Wonderful" movie.

George Bailey feels stuck in Bedford Falls working at the family business Bailey Brothers Building and Loan. He wants to go out and conquer the world building things and making a million dollars. There were several opportunities for George to leave the business and Bedford Falls, but something always came up to prevent George from leaving. Ultimately, it was his love of people and his dislike for the selfish and corrupt Henry Potter who controls most of the town's businesses, that keeps him in Bedford Falls. George does in fact, build things, including Bailey Park, which is a housing development rivaling Potter's overpriced slums. George actually cares for the people in his community, he is a servant in the city of Bedford Falls. George stands in stark contrast to Mr. Potter who is greedy and selfish. All of this comes to a head when absent-minded uncle Billy accidentally leaves \$8000 wrapped inside a newspaper, which Potter gets. Of course, Potter says nothing and keeps the money. All of this builds to the point where George figures he is not worth much more than his life insurance policy and decides to end his life.

God answers the prayers of the many who are praying for George and the angel Clarence shows up. George is given the gift of seeing what the world would have been like, had he not been born. He realizes that he has made an impact in Bedford Falls, he actually is a very rich man. Clarence shares with George the famous words, "You see George, you really had a wonderful life."

And so do you. And so do I. We have a wonderful life! Some may say, "Wait a minute, you haven't experienced my life." How do you define wonderful?

So many of us look for life in all the wrong places. George and Mr. Potter were focused on money and stuff. George was never content as he was thinking "wonderful" is out there somewhere. Pastor, author, and speaker, Paul David Tripp states, Somehow, some way, we all tend to look to the created world to give us life. We all carry around with us our personal catalog of "if-onlys". If only I could snag that job, then I'd be satisfied. If only we could buy that house, I don't think I'd want another thing. If only my marriage was better, then I'd be okay. If only my children would turn out right, then I'd be content. If only I could achieve_____, I wouldn't want anything more. If only our finances were more stable, then I wouldn't complain anymore.

The physical world was designed by God to be one big finger that points you to the only place where your heart will find satisfaction and rest. Your heart will rest only when it finds rest in God, and God alone.

AMEN to that!

Our Romans reading for today are the apostle Paul's final Words, they are what he deems most Important. It seems Paul is saying, You really have a wonderful life! Romans 16:25, "This message about Jesus Christ has

revealed his plan for you Gentiles, a plan kept secret from the beginning of time.” Jesus came for you too! You are blessed!

These last verses are a kind of benediction; they are not to be viewed in isolation but must be understood in context. These words counterbalance what he has written in verses 17-20 earlier in chapter 16. Verses 17-20 are a warning about wolves. Paul does not wish to end this letter without warning the Romans saints about a very real danger. Watch out for people who cause divisions and upset people’s faith by teaching things contrary to what you have been taught. (Romans 16:17) The negative thrust of verses 17-20 is offset by the positive note of verses 25-27. In these final verses, Paul turns the believer’s attention and focus on God rather than men. If wolves will cause Christians to divide into factions and to stumble, God alone is the One who unites and who makes them stand. Wolves seek to destroy our foundations; God is the One “who is able to establish” us. It is with this Godward focus that Paul closes the letter.

The emphasis is Godward, not things of this world. God is the One from whom all blessings originate. He is the One through whom all blessings flow. He is the one to whom all blessing and praise should be directed.

God is the source of all blessings. It was in eternity past that God determined His plans and purposes for all mankind and for His creation. This was known only to God, until the time when He chose to reveal it to man. It was a mystery, “which has been kept secret for long ages past,” from the time of its conception in eternity past to the time of creation.

Where are you looking for life/blessings? Where are you putting your hope for the New Year? What are your “if-onlys”?

The mystery was a plan which the “only wise God” (v. 27) predetermined. It was a plan no one could have imagined or planned. It was foretold by the Old Testament prophets and then accomplished in the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus. The mystery is now proclaimed as accomplished in Christ Jesus, through the preaching of the gospel.

This gospel is proclaimed by Paul and other, and it is preached to both Jews and Gentiles. The goal of the gospel is the obedience which originates from faith (v. 26).

The purpose of God in this mystery was not just to save both Jews and Gentiles, resulting in the “obedience of faith.” The purpose was to bring glory to God. The gospel is from Him (His eternal purpose and decree), through Him (through the work of Christ and the preaching of the gospel), and to Him. And so in the final verse of Romans, Paul praises God for His infinite wisdom and glory, through Jesus Christ. Let that be our praise too!

Salvation is God’s doing. It was His plan and purpose before man was even created. It was His doing, as revealed by the prophets, accomplished in Christ, and proclaimed through the gospel. It is thus God alone who should receive man’s praise and adoration.

As we leave this wonderful letter, let us leave it as Paul does, with our eyes fixed on Him who is “the author and finisher of our faith,” with our minds overwhelmed by His infinite wisdom, and with our hearts overflowing with gratitude, wonder, and praise because of His grace. To God be the glory! If-only? NO! It is finished! You already have a wonderful life. You are saved by blood of our Lord Jesus and the best is yet to come. AMEN.

Altar Flowers

Altar flowers are given to beautify our church. If you would like to sign up for a Sunday either sign up in the information hallway bulletin board or call Karen Mack 952-831-7428.

Sunday, December 27th altar flowers are given by Darlene Buelow in memory of her husband, Don, and daughter & son-in-law Cynthia and Dave Casel.

Action - Sharing Jesus' Love through December

Mitten Tree

We will be collecting outdoor gear for the children of Trinity First Lutheran School in Minneapolis. Hats, mittens, gloves, scarves, and gators can be placed on the Mitten Tree in the entryway hallway. Thank you for your donations!

KARA Project

Mt Hope is collecting monetary donations now through the end of the year by offerings and online donations for KARA (Kids At Risk Action Group). **ABOUT [VIDEO](#)**. The final dollar amount collected will be then sent directly to the organization in Hopkins, MN to support their efforts. Monetary donations are to support these traumatized and vulnerable children and fund the efforts of advocates to make a change at the government level. Please visit <https://www.invisiblechildren.org/> and learn how you can get involved in volunteering, signing petitions, sending letters to politicians and policymakers. -

Send your donation to: (write "KARA donation" in the memo)

Mt Hope Lutheran Church

Attn: Finance

3601 W Old Shakopee Rd

Bloomington, MN 55431

Donate online: mthopelutheran.org/giving/ (in the *Apply To drop-down*, select-Mission Outreach)

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Address Service Requested

Merry Christmas!

