

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
May 10, 2020 – 5th Sunday of Easter**

207 South Brodie St. Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>

Words of Welcome

Blessings to you on this Mother's Day. Know that I am thinking of you especially today as we cannot celebrate as we are accustomed. It is a day to be aware of both joy and sorrow.

It is also a day to give thanks for the Lord is God and his steadfast love endures forever. So let us gather in spirit as we begin with a Call to Worship.

Call to Worship

Come to Jesus, a living stone,
chosen and precious in God's sight,
and like living stones,
let yourselves be built into a spiritual house,
to be a holy priesthood, God's people.

Today we welcome guest musicians Gregory Lewis and family. We give thanks for their willingness to share the gift of music that God has blessed them with so that our worship and praise of God will be lifted up in beauty. Listen or sing...

Hymn

I know not why such wondrous grace

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| 1. I know not why such wondrous grace to me God has made known; nor why, unworthy as I am, Christ claimed me for his own, | 2. I know not why this saving faith to me God did impart, nor how believing in the word brought peace into my heart, |
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Refrain

Refrain:

but I know whom I have believed
and am persuaded that Christ is able
to keep that which I've committed
unto him against that day.

3. I know not how the Spirit moves,
convincing me of sin,
revealing Jesus through the word,
creating faith in him:

Refrain

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Prayer is a gift of conversation between us and God who loves us, so we take a moment to lift this time of worship in prayer.

Opening Prayer

Wondrous God, we are connected with one another through the wonders of technology in various media. You have given us creative minds that reflect your own creative energies. Through music, art, science, as well as countless other endeavours, you allow us to express, experiment and enjoy the gifts that you have given us.

Today as we worship may our hearts and minds come together with your Holy Spirit in songs of praise, prayers of thanksgiving, a word spoken, and hope for what may yet be.

Forgive us when our short sightedness, hardened hearts, apathy, and lack of imagination get in the way of you being revealed to us and others. Renew us this day as your Word is opened to us. May our ears hear and our eyes see your grace in all that is expressed this day. Amen.

©Joyce Yanishewski written for the 5th Sunday of Easter, Year A. May 10, 2020.

Assurance of Pardon

The goodness of God is the news of this day, for it brings to us a forgiveness not beyond belief but rather at the hearts of belief. All thanks and glory be to God.

© Glen E. Rainsley. Hear Our Prayer: Resource for Worship and Devotions. United Church Press. Cleveland, Ohio. 1996. P103.

Scripture Reading John 14:1-14

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going.” ⁵Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” ⁸Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” ⁹Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

¹²Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

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The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Message

A questioning faith

If you are Canadian you have most likely heard of the investigative journalism program call W5. Hard to believe that it is now in its 54th season. The job of the program and its writers is to find the answers to questions, the who, what, where, when and why of things, and if possible, the how. Often their stories are about current events as they try to get some of the back story. Sometimes they research more obscure stories in order to shed light where there was little even known. This kind of reporting tends to start with a question. Why is something happening, who is involved, where and when did it take place, what is the fallout from the circumstance, and how could this be. The questions don't always come in the same order, but it would seem for the human mind we don't feel like we have the complete picture until those questions have been asked and answered.

Think of the most recent tragedies in Nova Scotia, or even something more local to you. What are the questions you asked? I know for me it often starts with, "What?!" "How could this have happened?!" As the information is received and the shock settles in, I want more details, who, where, when, why and how. These questions arise from a call that someone has fallen, to an accident, to a job promotion, a move, natural disaster, or human tragedy that affects a country or world. We have questions. All day long on newscasts you can hear questions being asked, answers given, and on and on it goes.

So why is it that people think that one lacks faith if we ask questions when questions are so important to be able to ask in most any given situation?

The scripture reading from John takes us back to the meal before the crucifixion, even though we have just celebrated Easter a few short weeks ago. Yes I know that isolation has made it difficult to count weeks, but really it was only a month ago. Maybe that is also why it is good to go back to this point after these few weeks to look at what happened in the scriptures and reflect on the conversations the day before Jesus died. Time allows for deeper understanding and grants a little more clarity when things are unclear, as they were for were Jesus' followers in the days prior to his death.

So many questions were asked over that meal. Maybe the best answer to all of the questions comes with Simon Peter's question as Jesus kneels to wash Peter's feet and he asks, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" and Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." (John 13:6-7).

That is the way with questions. Like a two-year old's, "Why is the sky blue?" question, we often don't know, or maybe more correctly, don't understand the answer until later. When Jesus says to the disciples a few verses later, "Where I am going, you cannot come," (John 13:35c) Peter responds again with the questions, "Lord, where are you going?" and "Lord why can I not follow you now?"

When Jesus says in chapter 14, ““And you know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to him, ‘Lord we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ Philip had a question too, though it came more in the form of a questioning statement. It follows Jesus saying, “If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” Philip said to Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” (vs7,8) A question of knowing.

Though Jesus was sharing with his disciples all he could to prepare them for the struggle and difficulties ahead, the uncertainties, the fear, the unknowns, they still had questions. They didn’t understand the depth and complexity of what was being said, and did not have the wisdom and distance of time to help them comprehend and even be comfortable with not having all the answers. This did not stop Jesus from sharing with them what he wanted them to know. Jesus knew that they would reflect on all they had heard and seen in and from him, and in that reflection, they would come to have answers and have deeper understanding, as well as faith.

They would look back on that night and recall Jesus saying to them, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.” They would come to understand that when Jesus spoke about preparing a dwelling place for them, he would be talking of what it meant to abide, to dwell with God the Father and Jesus the Son every day of life, in all the uncertainties, struggles, joy, and experiences. That to abide was to be in relationship with God and take God into all our relationships. To abide meant that in life and in death they would not be separated from God.

In time, the followers of Christ would know that Jesus showed them the character of the Father, the Creator, in every word he spoke, every person he healed, every moment he spent teaching, forgiving, and loving. They would understand God the Father and Jesus the Son were so much a part of each other that to know the Son was to know God. To see what Jesus had done was to know what God wanted to do for the world. To hear Jesus words of forgiveness was to know that one could be forgiven. That to experience healing from Jesus was to know what it meant to be restored to God, to others, and to ourselves.

It started with questions. The questions did not lead to people walking away. Rather, the questions lead to a deeper faith and trust, to becoming teachers and healers themselves, people who shared the Good News of Jesus even though they did not have all the answers. It took time and reflection. It did not take away the fear and uncertainty or even the danger, but faith, trust, some understanding that came with time, and belief brought life.

We still have questions. I have questions. There is so much in the Bible that I do not understand, so many questions that I have, still, I also have a richer more profound

understanding of God's work in me and in the world, maybe even a little wisdom because of the questions that have been answered, and the willingness to sit with the tension of a faith that allows questions, even unanswered questions, while still allowing me to also believe.

Being followers of Christ is not some grand design of being blessed and never again experiencing anything but wholeness and joy. We are still humans living in an imperfect world, but with Christ, in Christ and through Christ, with our questions, doubts, fears, and uncertainties, we can find our way into a loving, grace filled relationship with God, then with others and ourselves.

So go ahead, ask questions, wonder at the answers or lack of. Believe, have faith, get through the tough and rough times knowing that God is with you and can handle your questions and anything else you throw out there. Be aware that Jesus may say, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand" Then in faith like that of the all too human disciples and in relationship with Jesus align your will to God's, ask in Jesus name, wait in wonder filled anticipation of the answer so that the Father, God our Creator, may be glorified in the Son Jesus and in you. Amen.

We respond to all we have heard this day with prayers for God's people. Let us pray.

Closing Prayer

God of power and might, who raised Jesus from the dead,
you free our hearts from trouble
and prepare a place of joy for all your children.
And so we thank you for your promise and your peace which we need so
desperately these days.

In Christ, we know you as the way.
You deliver all who turn to you in moments of challenge or uncertainty.
We pray for those who feel lost or alone,
those who live with great anxiety and doubt
and any who are fearful of what tomorrow might bring.

God of the Way, open the eyes of those who are struggling
so that they can see that there is a new way filled with hope for them,
with the promise of rest and renewal.

In Christ, we know you as the truth.
You reveal the falsehood and lies that ensnare us in these confusing times.
We pray for those who have put their faith in false hope and flimsy promises,
those who are deceived by the fabrications of the power hungry
and any who are misled by distortions and twisted claims that circulate each day:

God of the Truth, reveal the shallowness of things that distract or mislead us and empower us to see what is true.

In Christ, we know you as the life.

You promise to overcome all that is rooted in death and decay by your resurrecting power.

We pray for people who struggle with illness or grief and all who live with deep sadness, depression or hopelessness.

We pray for those for whom each day seems like a chore, and those for whom opportunities for abundant life are cut down by acts of discrimination or the loss of what seemed like security just weeks ago.

God of all Life and each life, heal those who are suffering and make your justice known in our land.

Help each of us and your whole church to follow in the footsteps of Christ so that in our living and loving, your kingdom of justice and love is revealed.

This we pray in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray...

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Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen

Invitation to make an offering

While the season of Easter unfolds, the gifts of spring also remind us of God's generosity in Christ and in creation. The gift of a donation, or what the church calls an offering, is a response for God's goodness to us and the hope for abundant life in Christ Jesus.

If you would like to make a donation toward the life and ministry of St. Andrew's Presbyterian in Thunder Bay visit our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> for more information.

Once again I would like to thank Gregory and those joining him for sharing in our worship this day. You have blessed us.

As we close, I have chosen a song that often is heard at funerals because of the beckoning call to come home. Still, how often have we heard that home is where the heart is. As Christians our hearts and hopes are set on God so both in our living and our dying, we know that our home is with Christ.

1. Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,
calling for you and for me:
patiently Jesus is waiting and watching,
watching for you and for me.

Refrain:

"Come home, (come home,) come home,
ye who are weary, come home";
earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,
calling, O sinner, "Come home!"

2. Why should we tarry when Jesus is pleading,
pleading for you and for me?
Why should we linger and heed not his mercies,
mercies for you and for me?

Refrain

3. Oh for the wonderful love he has promised,
promised for you and for me;
though we have sinned, he has mercy and pardon,
pardon for you and for me.

Refrain

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Benediction (based on John 14:1-4)

Don't let your hearts be troubled.
Trust in God, and in God's son, Jesus Christ,
who is the way, the truth and the life,
and through whom we come to know the Father.
And may the blessing of God,
the grace of Jesus Christ,
and the presence of the Holy Spirit go with you.

re-worship.blogspot.com/search/label/Easter05Year20A