

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
6th Sunday of Easter - May 17, 2020

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

Words of Welcome

How many times have you started a sentence with Holy!
I will sanitize it with Holy Moly, but fill in the blank with whatever is your go to.
It seems like the Holy makes it into our common language and experience when we want to exclaim our shock, disbelief, concern, surprise or joy, but how many times have you considered the Holy Spirit? Today we will do just that.
We begin with a call to worship.

Call to Worship

Come to worship, people of God, with praises on your lips.
Even when we are feeling isolated and fearful,
we can glorify the One who holds our hands in our loneliness.

Come into the presence of the One who makes holy every place, every space, holy and sacred.
Even where we continue to stay safe in our homes,
the doors of grace are flung wide open for us.

Come and hear the stories of the One who loves you.
In living rooms, on laptops and devices,
We will sing our songs and tell those tales
of the peace and of the hope which is ours.

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The Spirit is an advocate for us, one of the three persons of the Trinity that comes along side us to guide, teach, comfort, and so much more. As we sing may you imagine or even know the Spirit of the living God falling afresh on you.

Hymn

Spirit of the living God

400

1. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Melt me, mould me, fill me, use me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me!
2. Spirit of the living God, move among us all;
make us one in heart and mind; make us one in love:
humble, caring, selfless, sharing.
Spirit of the living God, fill our lives with love!

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Opening Prayer

Lord God of heaven and earth,
Creator of our world, and everything in it,
yet as close to us as our own breath—holy is your name.

In you we live and move and have our being;
we are your own children, the work of your hands.

We pray that your Holy Spirit would move among us as we worship,
opening our eyes to your presence, opening our ears to your Word.

Forgive us when we turn our hearts away from your desire for us,
when doubt, fear, anxiety, and distrust hinder or harm our relationship
with you and others.

Receive the worship of our hearts and minds and bodies;
may it be a pleasing offering to You.

We pray in the name of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ,
in whose death and resurrection we find life. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Despite everything we do, God loves us. This is grace, pure and simple.
This grace is why, when everything says we should not, we can dare to hope.
We will witness to this grace with every breath we take, with every gift we offer,
with every word we share with others. Thanks be to God, we are forgiven. Amen.

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Scripture Reading John 14:15-21

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

¹⁸ “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

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The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Reflection The not so silent partner

What a night it must have been. Food and drink, conversation and friendship, then a touching moment as the man at the center of attention takes a bowl of water and a towel and begins to wash the feet of everyone in the room. One of the friends doesn't want

this gift, it seems too much that the man he admires and reveres should stoop to do the job of a servant. A short exchange of words, and the friend allows the action.

Then the leader continues on with everyone in the room...one foot and then another, and another and another. After this, a serious conversation, and the evening once filled with joy and awe now turns to uncertainty, unknowns, and questions. There is also fear, as the leader speaks of his impending betrayal, suffering, and death.

To help us understand the emotions of that evening, imagine if you will, a household where everyone is gathered for a celebration. Sons and daughters are home with their partners, grandchildren are playing games, and in the midst of it, like a slap on the face, the celebration is brought to an abrupt halt as a parent reveals that there has been infidelity. They have fallen in love with another and this will be the last time they gather in this way, as this kind of family.

One can imagine the reactions. One son blows up, the other tuns and walks away chin quivering as he holds back tears. The daughter who always has something to say is left speechless. The partners turn and look at each other wondering what to do. The children stop their games as they realize the mood in the house has shifted drastically. There is an immediate sense that everything has changed and will continue to change and no one can turn back the clock. The course of events, the chain reaction, and the fall out has been set in motion.

This might give you some indication of what happened on the night that Jesus celebrated the Passover with his followers and then told them that everything was going to change. He was going to be betrayed, and he would only be with them a little longer, his death is imminent. Peter is like the son who blows up. Thomas tries to get a handle on things by asking questions, Phillip attempts to understand the situation through conversation as others stand by, waiting, not sure what to say.

Yes, we are in the Easter season, we have celebrated the resurrection, but now we reflect as did the disciples, on all that went before. There were promises made and now those promises are understood in a different light. Seeing Jesus after the crucifixion, after they thought all was lost, the disciples begin and will continue in their lifetimes to unravel and consider all that they had heard Jesus speak, all they had witnessed, how he had healed and loved especially those who seemed to be worthless in the sight of others.

The words of scripture that we are gifted with today came after those times of reflection. It is always important to remember that the gospels were written after the fact, after reflection, and each gospel writer chose to focus on what was important to the people that they were in community with. What they felt were the things to take away from their experience of Jesus. For the writer of John his purpose was to prove that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, Emmanuel, God with us. So when we come to read these words of scripture we approach them with that line of understanding.

We hear “On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me: and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.” (John 14:20-21) Henrietta Mears writes that in the gospel of John, “Discipleship is tested not by the creed you recite, not by the hymns you sing, not by the ritual you observe but by the fact that you love one another. The measure in which Christians love one another is the measure in which the world believes in them or their Christ. It is the final test of discipleship.”¹

Love is the key to recognizing Christ, knowing God in us, and love is the key to others recognizing Christ in us. But let me back up for just a moment. The first verses said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.”

That is so packed with amazing good news! First of all, we are promised another advocate. Christ has come as our advocate and in this moment, after showing them love through the washing of feet, as Jesus shares the peril of what lay ahead, he says, “I will not leave you orphaned.” (John14:18)

Not only is Jesus with them, but another advocate, the Spirit of truth will abide with them, will be in them, and that promise extends to all believers. We are included in the promise that the Spirit of truth, the advocate that we have come to know as the Holy Spirit, one of the persons who have power along with God the Father and Jesus the Son, is not only with us, but actually in us, abiding with us. This is truly incredible!

Sadly, in our faith tradition, we have down played the activity of the Holy Spirit. We don't want to be thought of as one of “those people” who talk about spirit things – nice, but a little off. It has been joked that the Holy Spirit is the shy member of the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the silent partner, because we just don't talk about Holy Spirit. Yes, we give lip service, but if the Holy Spirit really is at work and abiding in us then we might feel a little like we have lost control and nobody likes that feeling.

I will tell you that the Holy Spirit is the only reason I am a minister. It was an experience of the Holy Spirit, nothing too crazy, but definitely out of the norm, that made me think this was the direction that my life was about to take. When I took a chance, as I have on occasion to share the details with someone close to me, the response I got sometime later was that the mind can do strange things. I have to admit that I was saddened by the response, but it did not take away my confidence in what I had experienced. There can be times when one just comes to know that God is at work in their lives.

Other times we just might have a sense that something we have lived, or shared, is about more than us or the people around us. Something else was at work. Somewhere in there

¹ Mears., Henrietta C. *What the Bible is all About*. Regal Book - GL Publications. Ventura. CA. 1983.P407.

was God. This is the Holy Spirit! Whether we chose to participate or not, God is at work in the world, in our lives, and it happens because of the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth that Jesus promised as an advocate.

An advocate is someone who comes along side, guides, comforts, encourages, and helps. The Advocate, is real, is present, is there for all. Jesus promised the Advocate would be with us forever. The Holy Spirit is far from shy or silent, but rather wonderfully present and active.

Let me be clear, if the Advocate is at work, it is through the power of love, and there is an expectation that you will check in with others in your faith community to make sure what you think is the Holy Spirit at work really is. If you hear voices or experience anything that would bring harm to another, you are not experiencing the Holy Spirit.

The scripture also says that the world cannot receive the Spirit of truth because it neither sees him nor knows him. That does not mean that only Christians experience God, the love of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. God reveals Godself to the whole of creation. We have no power to put limits on how God works in the world. If we think we do, we don't understand what God is up to.

As Christians our role is to help others recognize what they have seen and heard, what they have experienced when the Holy Spirit, the Advocate along with Christ is at work. Through this work we become advocates...helpers, guides, comforters, and encouragers in the world. Hopefully, if we have done our work well, we will be measured by how much we loved and we will be known as followers of Christ because Christ love was revealed to others through us.

May you know the blessing of love, the promise of the Advocate, the Spirit of truth, in your lives each and everyday. Amen.

We respond to the scriptures, message, and all that we have experienced in this time together with a word of prayer.

Closing Prayer

Loving God,

We thank you for calling us into a relationship with you, and setting us in the world you love. Through our prayers, we bring to you our doubts and fears, our joys and our concerns, and our deepest longings for your world.

Reconciling God,

We pray for our family and friends, those far away and those close by, any who are estranged from us and those whom we depend upon daily. Where our relationships are strained, bring understanding and new possibility. Bless and protect relationships that are joyful and life-giving.

Guiding God,

We pray for public officials, politicians and all who serve the public good day by day. Guide each one to uphold standards of good service above personal gain. Where they experience tension between their faith and their public roles, give them wisdom to make faithful decisions and courage when those decisions are unpopular.

Caring God,

We pray for the people we encounter every day, both those who are shining lights in our communities and those whose lights have yet to be discovered. Help us be respectful of every neighbour, and treat each person we meet with kindness.

Healing God,

We pray for those who are suffering from illness or chronic conditions, for those in grief or loneliness, and for any who feel frustrated or overwhelmed by what they face. Move in their lives with your healing grace and show them signs of your presence and compassion in life-giving ways.

Faithful God,

Your Spirit has worked in the world throughout all generations. We thank you that we belong to you in this generation. We pray for life-long believers and for those whose faith is new. May your church benefit from the wisdom of the experienced and the vibrancy of those beginning their journey. Help us work together in hope, so that our witness to your purposes and promises will invite others to discover life in you.

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We pray all these things in the name of Jesus, our Risen Christ, who taught us to pray together...

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

Our response to the abundant gifts of God, including the gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives and that of those we love, is to share what we have as a way of saying "thank you" to God. If you would like to respond with a donation or offering toward the life and ministry of St. Andrew's Presbyterian in Thunder Bay visit our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> for more information on how to do that.

Music can bring comfort when we are down, bring joy to our bodies as we dance, and just over all, lift our spirits.

1. Spirit, come, dispel our sadness;
pierce the clouds of sinful night;
come, thou source of sweetest gladness,
breathe thy life and spread thy light.
Loving Spirit, God of peace,
great distributor of grace,
rest up on this congregation;
hear, oh hear our supplication.
2. From that height which knows no measure,
as a gracious shower descend,
bringing down the richest treasure
we can wish or God can send.
O thou glory, shining down
from the Father and the Son,
grant us thine illumination;
rest up on this congregation.
3. Come, O best of all donations
God can give, or we implore;
having thy sweet consolations
we need wish for nothing more.
Come, anoint us now with power;
on our souls thy graces shower;
author of the new creation,
make our hearts thy habitation.

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Benediction

The love of God, the faithful creator,
the peace of Christ, the wounded healer,
the joy of the challenging and comforting Spirit,
the hope of the Three in One
surround and encourage you
today, tonight, and forever.

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