

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
7th Sunday of Easter May 24, 2020

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

Words of Welcome

How often in the last two months have you heard that we are in this together? Yet sometimes we can feel very alone. Aloneness doesn't just come when we are by ourselves, it can happen laying on a bed as doctors and nurses scurry around you. Feeling alone can be experienced in a crowded room and you don't think you fit in, or it can happen when family life just is crumbling around you. This morning we come to know that truly we are not alone – ever.

Let us begin with a call to worship.

Call to Worship

Jesus prayed for his disciples, giving them into God's eternal care.

Jesus prays for us, giving us into God's care.

Know that you have been blessed with the love of the Savior.

Live in that love and seek to serve God.

Open your hearts and spirits now to hear God's word and

may our lives be open to God's Spirit and reflect God's love.

Adapted from <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/2785/worship-connection-ascension-sunday-2020-option-1>

What a privilege it is to know that Jesus cares for us, calls us friends, calls us children of God.

Hymn

What a friend we have in Jesus

746

1. What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear;
what a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer.
Oh what peace we often forfeit,
oh what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer.

2. Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged:
take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful,
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness:
take it to the Lord in prayer.

3. Are we weak and heavy-laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge:
take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
in his arms he'll take and shield thee;
thou wilt find a solace there.

Words: Public Domain

Opening Prayer

God of history and eternity, you came among us in Jesus, so that we might come to know you and love you, as he did. Through Jesus' life you have given us a pattern for living, and taught us to love one another and forgive as we have been forgiven. So we ask your forgiveness as we lay before you our brokenness, the times we have been hard to deal with, when we have been unforgiving of others, when anger and frustration have led us to be unkind and thoughtless.

By Jesus' death and resurrection, you promise that nothing can separate us from your love. In ascending to be united with you, Jesus is now present to every creature in every corner of creation. And so we wait with hopeful anticipation for the fullness of your redemption, relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, now and always. Amen.

Adapted from ©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 7th Sunday of Easter, May 24, 2020 Year A

Assurance of Pardon

Although you have not stood on the mountaintop
to see his ascension to God,
yet believe in the love and power of Christ
who taught you how to be faithful and joyful disciples.

Rejoice, and believe in him who came that you may have abundant life. Amen.

<https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/1064/worship-connection-ascension-sunday-2020-option-2>

Scripture Reading John 17:1-11

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, ²since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. ⁵So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

⁶"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. <http://nrsvbibles.org>

The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Message John 17:1-11 You are not alone

Most of us would not have found ourselves in a crowded room in the last two months, but it is not so distant a memory that you couldn't bring yourself back into a moment when the room was crowded. When I thought of that for myself, I immediately went back to community and school dances. I am dating myself, as I don't think those things even happen much any more, but those are times when I could be in a crowded room and feel invisible. All of my insecurities and self-doubt had a way of sneaking into my mind. I would feel alone. I think I hid it pretty well, smiling when the people around me were asked to dance and I continued to sit there. I think that comes to mind more than anything else, as the one thing I loved to do was dance, but that sense that I was alone in the world could be with me often.

I also felt alone and fearful when post-partum depression became an eight-year span of darkness. And now as I sit in my home alone due to the social distancing measures in place during the pandemic, again I am experiencing aloneness. I wish I could say these were the only times that aloneness accompanied me, but I could give more examples. Still you get the picture and hopefully, my experiences may have given you opportunity to pause and consider those moments in your own life. It is not that being alone is a bad thing, just when one feels alone in the world. Like I said it can happen in a crowded room, it might happen as your children keep screaming for attention, or as your social life diminishes with age and mobility.

Though one can feel desperately alone, let me assure you that you are not. I can say that because of the prayer that the disciples overheard Jesus pray to God after they had enjoyed a wonderful meal with him. An evening where he had washed their feet as a sign of the kind of leader he was and what he expected from his followers, that they would be teachers and healers. His next steps will be taken toward the cross and Jesus knew this. But in this moment, he prays, first for himself, then for his disciples, and finally for all believers.

Our scripture reading today ended before the prayer ended, but there is a lot going on in these verses already and I want to start with one of the last lines we heard. Jesus said, "I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one." (John 17:11).

We know that the relationship between God and Jesus was as one. Jesus had come from God, lived as one of God's people in the world and was going back to be one with God again as it was in the beginning. One of our Christian understandings is that the love between God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit overflowed into creation. There was so much love in the God head that God created a world teeming with life and possibility. So when Jesus speaks of being one with the Father, this is a relationship where love abounds. Jesus asks that we be bound with them in that relationship as one as well. That is amazing and a gift.

As he started this prayer, he knew his hour had come. Jesus knew what lay ahead of him, the being put on display, the beating and belittling, the agonizing death, the utter despair at feeling abandoned by God. He knew it was coming, but he did it anyway. Jesus understood, as much as he did not want to go through this suffering, that it meant for the world that God would be glorified, that he himself would be glorified. Then in time he would be glorified in those who followed his example of teaching, healing, and justice. Jesus understood that this horrific moment would turn into a lifetime of hope and no one would ever be alone again.

Let's turn to a couple of things that often make people stumble over Jesus words. The first is glorify. This word can turn people right off when it comes to Christianity but I think it is because we have not come to understand it in its context. We think of glory in terms of someone who has achieved something glorious, having won an honour, distinction, or fame. It sets people apart from us. We often look up to people who have gained glory when they have worked hard to earn it, but there are also those who want glory simply because they think they are important enough to deserve it.

For Jesus glory seems to have meant something else. He says in the prayer to God, "I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed." (John 17:4-5). I turn to theologian David Lose to say what I am struggling to write. He writes,

...the "work" Jesus speaks of completing – and hence the reason he is to be glorified – is the work of the cross, the unexpected, even unimaginable place of his ultimate glorification. Why unexpected and unimaginable? Because the cross is a place of extreme vulnerability, isolation, and complete identification with humanity; that is, with us. Perhaps it's also both unexpected and unimaginable because we tend to identify glory with strength, with victory, with triumph and success and adulation. Yet Christ seeks glory in service and servanthood, in suffering, vulnerability, and loss. God is glorified in these things.¹

To glorify God means to make visible the presence of God for and to everyone, so that all can see God through us. It started with Jesus and continues with us in our living. Our own life experiences will help us help others through difficult times when they think they are alone and vulnerable. And at all times we know that because of what Jesus did on the cross. I defer once again to David Lose who says, "This is the "sacrifice" Jesus makes – not a blood offering to an angry and just God – but the sacrifice of divine right and

¹ Lose, David. Posted by [DJL](#) on May 18, 2020 in [Dear Partner](#) | http://www.davidlose.net/2020/05/easter-7-a-a-peculiar-glory/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+davidlose%2FIsqE+%28...In+the+Meantime%29
Accessed May 21, 2020

power in order to communicate God's profound, limitless, and life-giving love for God's children."²

When Jesus talks about glory it is woven through with love for God and love for people. The words come from the one who knew fully what it meant to feel alone, even abandoned, but who trusted his relationship with God knowing that love would prevail, that hope could be trusted, that God would not leave him or any of us alone. Everything that Jesus had he has given to us, and though it doesn't say it in the passage we read today, within its context we know that the Holy Spirit is the way in which Jesus has given us all and that God goes with us.

And what has Jesus given us? Eternal life. Like glory, it seems to be one of those terms that appears to have little relevance to our day to day living and concerns, but what we miss, what has often been overlooked, is that eternal life is not just about one day being with God in the time when our lives have ended. Eternal life is about relationship with God everyday, in the present moment. Jesus said it himself in verse 3, "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

Jesus did not say that eternal life came only at death. Here eternal life is knowing God and knowing Jesus. That "knowing" is available to us right now in the moment, in every day, for a life time.

We are not alone, even in our most vulnerable moments, with people or by ourselves in homes or rooms where few enter because of fear of a virus. We are not alone. God is always present. Whether you feel it or not, God is with you, with me, with us. Trust it. Place your hope in it. Share it, revealing God's glory and hope and love to others as you do your best to connect. Remembering that it all came out of the work of the cross. Our hope is in one who knew what it meant to be alone and still went through with the work of the cross anyway, because of love. Know that just as Jesus and God are one we are one in Christ. You are not alone. Today we live in glory, unity, and protection, through Christ, in Christ, and with Christ. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, you desire unity for your people in the world, and unity between heaven and earth. We thank you for drawing us together as a community of faith, united in your love. Equip us to witness to your promise of resurrection and new life as we serve you in the world. Hear us as we pray for your world.

God, we worry about the way things are going. In so many places, daily life is uprooted by war, environmental devastation, and the consequences of a global pandemic. Send your Spirit of healing and reconciliation to lead people to peace with justice. Heal the earth and your people. Bring hope for renewed relationships.

² Ibid.

God, we are concerned about all the divisions we see around us. So many communities are torn apart by discrimination and hatred. Send your Spirit of healing and reconciliation to open hearts filled with prejudice, and ease the lives suffering its effects. Heal the hurt and bring hope for lasting unity.

This Sunday, we pray for the work of healing and reconciliation in Canada, between indigenous people and those who have settled in this land. Send your Spirit to guide our leaders and build trust and respect among us all. Heal the lives limited by misunderstanding, and bring hope for just resolutions to problems of long-standing.

God, we feel sadness for those whose lives are marked by isolation and fear, by grief or despair. Send your Spirit of healing and reconciliation to draw the lonely into friendships, and create a true sense of belonging for each one. Heal any burden of grief and bring hope through your eternal friendship.

God, we are hopeful for the church because it belongs to you. Send your Spirit to guide our witness in the world. Teach us how to share our experience of your love, and invite others to join the journey toward healing and reconciliation.

Together, we pray the words Jesus, our ascended Lord, has taught us

Adapted from ©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 7th Sunday of Easter, May 24, 2020 Year A

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

This Sunday brings the season of Easter to a close. Yet we will continue to receive the blessings God pours out for us in Christ and in creation, for God is so good to us. We offer to God our thanks for such goodness in our tithes and offering.

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.

Singing has a way of lifting our spirits. It is also a wonderful way to bring new understanding to the words written in scripture. I give thanks for Rob, Aidan, and Britton for sharing their gift of music with us as we join them in the hymn...

1. Before the world began
one Word was there;
grounded in God he was,
rooted in care;
by him all things were made;
in him was love displayed;
through him God spoke, and said,
“I am for you.
2. Life found in him its source;
death found its end;
light found in him its course,
darkness its friend,
for neither death nor doubt
nor darkness can put out
the glow of God, the shout:
I am for you.
3. The Word was in the world
which from him came;
unrecognized he was,
unknown by name;
one with all humankind,
with the unloved aligned,
convincing sight and mind,
“I am for you.”
4. All who received the Word
by God were blessed;
sisters and brothers they
of earth’s fond guest.
So did the Word of Grace
proclaim in time and space
and with a human face,
“I am with you.”

Words: Iona Community (Scotland) ©WGRG The Iona Community (Scotland) 1987.
All rights reserved. Reprinted under OneLicense.net A-723877

Benediction

The power and love of Jesus Christ is with you.
You are sent forth to be his witnesses in the world,
bringing the good news, healing,
establishing ministries of justice and peace.
Go in confidence and in the knowledge that the
power and love of God goes with you. Amen.

Adapted from <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/2785/worship-connection-ascension-sunday-2020-option-1>