

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

June 14, 2020 2nd Sunday after Pentecost
207 South Brodie St. Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>

Words of Welcome

How are you doing this week?

With all that surrounds us, still living through an active pandemic,
yet the country trying to safely open up.

A world in turmoil as people who have been the victims of racism
and marginalization rightly claim their right to be seen, heard, valued.

Each of us is coming to and through all of it differently.

May this time of worship bring you peace, reflection, and much hope.

Call to Worship

Jesus Christ summons us
to answer God's call of mercy.

Christ gathers us and gives us power
to be healed and to heal,
to be forgiven and to forgive,
to be freed from sin and to set others free,
to tell one another and the world:

God's presence is at hand.

Let us worship God.

Feasting on the Word Worship Companion: Liturgies for Year A, Volume 2 P.30 © 2014 Westminster John Knox Press

As this is National Indigenous History Month I have included the words for verse one of Amazing Grace in this print version of the service. It is a small way to acknowledge these traditions and people.

Hymn

Amazing Grace

670

Cree

Mohawk

Ojibway

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Mamaskach sakihewin
Kapimachihwet
Pikwataw nikiwaihon
Anoch maka niwap | 1. loh ne ra a kwat ra o ten raht
ne se wa ah tsia tah kwen
wa ka a tsia a tah ton ha tie es kwe
ses ha tsia a tah tsen rion. | 1. Kihcishawencikewin
kaapimaaci' ikoyaan
Ninkakippiinkwenaapan hsa
Nookom itahsh niwaap |
| 1. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found
was blind, but now I see. | 2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed. | |

3. Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'tis grace that brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.
4. The Lord has promised good to me:
this word my hope secures;
God will my shield and portion be,
as long as life endures.
5. What thanks I owe you, and what love,
a boundless, endless store,
shall echo through the realms above
when time shall be no more.
6. When we've been there ten thousand years,
bright shining as the sun,
we've no less days to sing God's praise
than when we'd first begun.

Words: public domain

We open ourselves up to all this time of worship has to offer with a prayer.

Opening Prayer

Faithful God, we come before you in thanksgiving for all that is good and precious in the world; the growing season, a creation that is healing, people who are loving and wise. We give thanks for your faithfulness in sending Jesus to be an example of faithfulness for us to follow, and for the empowering Holy Spirit, given as a gift to guide and teach us.

We confess that too often we neglect our relationship with you and with others. We fear what we do not know and so form opinions and take actions that are based in that fear rather than in the knowledge of your love and concern for every being. Sometimes Lord we do not know what we do not know and close ourselves off from learning from others. We ask your forgiveness.

Open to us your scriptures through prayer, song, and message. Open our eyes, and ears to your teaching and leading each day through those we encounter and all we experience. We ask this in the healing name of Jesus. Amen.

©Joyce Yanishewski written for the 2nd Sunday after Pentecost, Year A. June 14, 2020.

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news of God's love: in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Thanks be to God! Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Reading Romans 5:1-8

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not

disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

⁶For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

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The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Message Romans 5:1-8 Being a hope-filled servant

If there has been anything of late it has been suffering. Covid 19 alone has taken millions of lives around the world, to date over 8,000 deaths in Canada. Think about that. That is 8,000 families in Canada grieving from deaths that have occurred over the last three months from one disease. That doesn't include all those who are grieving because of other causes of death. Overlay that with the fact that many people have not been able to be close to loved ones, or were restricted in their access, and the grieving is prolonged in new ways because there has been no funeral or time to gather and the grief is compounded.

We know that social and physical distancing has been hard on the mental health of many and there are families that are in pain as there has been no reprieve from the abuses afflicted on them from care givers who can't go to work or children who can't be at school. And there are the many other tragedies in the world that have not gone away even though we hear little of it on the news. People still live in poverty, there are still children separated from parents at borders, even caged in some cases. People are going hungry and refugees are still looking for a safe place to call home.

Add to this the now overarching theme of systemic racism and we find ourselves and our world in a crisis that few of us have experienced in our life time. Into all of this we come to worship and we hear these words, "We also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

The Apostle Paul wrote these words to the church in Rome when Nero was emperor. This is the same emperor that blamed the great fire of Rome in the year 64 on the Christians who were growing in influence. This gave him an excuse to arrest, torture, and execute Christians on the pretext that they had caused the fire. Though the letter Paul wrote happened before the fire, to be a Christian in Rome was already a fairly risky choice at that time.

There was suffering when these words were penned, but what does it mean to read the words from the Book of Romans in our context where racism and pandemic, as well as power, wealth, and influence in our world today is converging in a moment in time?

When I speak of context it is also important to recognize the context of this passage in the whole of the Book of Romans. We started with the word, "Therefore." "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God." (Romans 5:1-2). This "therefore" comes out of the verses preceding this, where Paul is writing about the important of faith and grace, both as gifts from God and our response to God. All that is being written and spoken about by Paul comes from an understanding that Jesus died so that we might access God's love and grace in ways that had not been available to the people before Christ's death. Any boasting we do comes from our hope of sharing the glory of God.

This is not boasting because of anything we have done ourselves. The hope comes from recognizing God's faithfulness to us, the faithfulness of Christ as he lived and died for all not as a leader but as a servant, and that inspires us as followers of Christ to imitate Christ's faithfulness. Everything we do comes from a place of servanthood, just as Jesus came to serve.

If we are to serve others at this time in the world it means that we have to also see ourselves as people who can learn from others. This can be really difficult as we often like to think of ourselves as wise. We like to believe that we have something to teach others. Especially in today's climate we think, if only people would see things this way or that. If they would just get a job, if they would see that all lives matter, if only they wouldn't put themselves out there flaunting their lifestyle that is so different from our own. I could go on.

What is trying to be conveyed is that in this time where #black lives matter and the #Me too movement, as well as June being both Pride Month and in Canada, National Indigenous History Month, maybe we could take the position of someone who comes to serve. If we are to serve others we need also to learn, to find out what they can teach us about themselves, and also what they can teach us about God. So often we come thinking that we have all the answers but the revelation of God is not fully given to any one person, group, denomination, or even faith tradition. And to think that we have all the answers or know better is to lose out on all that God has gifted and revealed through and to others.

As Christians, we get can get pretty cocky, rather than boasting in our sufferings, we get smug and enjoy a pretty comfortable place in society, particularly in Canada, even if many are no longer attending church. I have been taken aback over the years by the

number of times I have heard someone say cruel things about the very people Jesus cared for most. The people on the margins of society, those who were suffering the greatest economic burdens, and who were seen as less than. How often I have had to correct my own thinking and reactions, much of which has been taught from a perspective of privilege through a culture that has engrained in me the flaws and arrogance of colonialism. Coming to terms with the knowledge that I have been indoctrinated into my thinking through pop culture and education, as well as government decisions continues.

There are people, entire classes, colours, and cultures of people, who are suffering, enduring, and hoping right now. Each of us does this in our own lives at different times, but right now this is playing out on our screens on a global scale. There is much that we can learn from others about suffering, endurance, character, and hope. There is much that we can do to come alongside others and help create change that better reflects the love of God for *all* people not just the ones who act, look like, and agree with us.

These are challenging times, but it is also a time for hope. Hope that we can ourselves learn and change, hope that because black and indigenous lives matter it means that all lives really do matter. Hope that people will no longer have to fight for fair and just treatment from police and governments. Hope that seniors in our homes will always be treated with dignity and kindness. Hope that all people will have homes to live in and food on the table with equal opportunities for education. Hope that people who do not conform to our limited understanding of male and female will not live in disparity or fear.

As Christians, if we have hope to boast about, it will be because we are willing to suffer with and for others, in a way that produces endurance and character, and none of this because of something special in us, but “because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been give to us.” (Romans 5:6).

Christ’s model is that of a servant. The question is, how do we serve in times like these? The answer will be different for each of us, but each of us is called to serve. As long as someone is oppressed, we have a reason to serve in the name of Christ. As long as God is still revealing God’s self in everyone of us, then there is reason to learn and to hope. God proved his love for us in that while we still were sinners, and we are all still sinners, Christ died for us. Let us share God’s love through our servant work and hearts, in faith, peace and grace through the power of the Holy Spirit and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Closing Prayer

God ever creating, God ever loving, God ever leading:

We turn to you in uncertain times, trusting in your steadfast love. Wherever people are anxious about the future, overwhelmed by their responsibilities, or worried because of the upheavals the pandemic has caused, bring peace and hope.

God of all compassion:

Where people are lonely or isolated, longing for love, where people are trapped in unhealthy relationships or facing violence each day, where people are grieving the loss of routines or purpose in their lives, or the loss of someone beloved, bring courage and hope.

God of tender strength:

Where people feel pain in their bodies, in their minds or spirits, where people seek healing or help, where illness has eroded hope and desperation fills each day, bring healing and hope.

God of trustworthy truth:

Where leaders work to guide the world and their communities to renewed life, where professionals discern scientific, medical and economic insights to protect and restore the quality of life after the pandemic, where individuals still strive to care for the earth and its vulnerable inhabitants, bring wisdom and hope.

God in whom we live and move and have our being:

By your Spirit, tend your promise of new life amid the current struggles in the world you love. Where hope flickers, reignite its power; shine the light of Christ's love into each life and renew our trust in you

as we pray together in the words that Jesus taught us:

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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

We are so grateful for God's guidance through even the most difficult times. In response, we offer gifts to God and make them signs of God's presence at work in the world for those who need to be embraced by love and strength through Christ.

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.

Hymn

And can it be that I should gain

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1. And can it be that I should gain
God's riches through the Saviour's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain?
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
that thou, my God, should'st die for me?
Amazing love! how can it be
that thou, my God, should'st die for me?
2. 'Tis mystery all! the immortal dies:
who can explore his strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
to sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! let earth adore;
let angel minds inquire no more.
'Tis mercy all! let earth adore;
let angel minds inquire no more.
3. He left his Father's throne above,
so free, so infinite his grace,
emptied himself of all but love,
and bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
for, O my God, it found out me.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
for, O my God, it found out me.
4. Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature's night;
thine eye diffused a quickening ray;
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
chains fell off; my heart was free.
I rose, went forth and followed thee.
My chains fell off, my heart was free.
I rose, went forth and followed thee.
5. No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine;
alive in him, my living head,
and clothed in righteousness divine,
bold I approach the eternal throne,
and claim the crown, through Christ, my own.
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
and claim the crown, through Christ, my own.

Words: public domain

Benediction

May the love and faithfulness of God, *Rom. 5:1–8*
the grace of Christ,
and the Spirit's peace
be with you always.