

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
July 19, 2020 7th Sunday after Pentecost

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

Words of Welcome

Questions of identity, who are we, how do we fit in the world, what is our purpose? These are big conversations and often come with some amount of fear that we are unworthy or don't measure up, but also hold the most promise for a full life. Let's see if today we can unpack just a little more for ourselves who we are and our purpose.

Call to Worship

We worship the God who inhabits our world
and indwells our lives.

We need not look up to find God,
we need only to look around:

 within ourselves,
 beyond ourselves,
 into the eyes of another.

We need not listen for a distant thunder to find God,
we need only listen to the music of life,

 the words of children,
 the questions of the curious,
 the rhythm of a heartbeat.

We worship the God who inhabits our world
and who indwells our lives.

~ posted on the Presbyterian Church USA website. https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/peacemaking/pdf/mlk-resources.pdf

Today we are thankful for the gift of music shared with us by Gregory Lewis and Pamela Lewis. The words for both the hymns we are singing today come from the gifts that Andrew's Donaldson brings to the world as a member of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. We sing...

Hymn

Wordless, ancient earth's foundations

714

1. Wordless, ancient earth's foundations cradle fragile in your palm;
speechless, boundless constellations voice their awe in soundless psalm:
hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, you are all creating, one.
2. We, our earth's stored treasures spending, foul its soil and stain its seas;
we, our human grasp extending, landscapes bruise, proud towers raise.
Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, kyrie elision, lead us home from wasted ways.
3. Heal us, feed us by your Spirit; all earth's torment is your own.
Name us, send us each as servant, working, bearing Christ's shalom.
Maranatha, maranatha, maranatha, so we pray: Christ Jesus, come.

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Opening Prayer

God who promises to transform us and creation, calling us children of God, heirs with Christ, we give thanks for your power as experienced in creation through bright sunshine and blue skies, dark clouds filled with rain as lightening flashes and thunder roars across the sky, mountain glory and valley beauty, ocean depths and dense forest. You are our God who holds the promise and hope for the redemption of creation and all people. We come before you this day in prayer, song, word, and thoughtfulness and ask to know you present with us.

Forgiving God, we also come before you knowing that we are imperfect and struggling. Sometimes we cry out in pain and anger, other times we hide away in fear. Often our reactions to life bring pain or sorrow to others, leaving them to feel that they have done something wrong instead of us taking responsibility for our own choices. Forgive our fear, lack of courage, and weakness. Send your Holy Spirit to teach us how to do better for ourselves and others and in so doing strengthen us in faith and hope.

Open your Word to us so that we may hear, see, and understand more fully through the teachings of the saints who have come before us. We ask this in the strong and loving name of Christ. Amen.

©Joyce Yanishewski written for the 7th Sunday after Pentecost, Year A. July 19, 2020.

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the word of the Lord.

In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus,

God says unequivocally, irrevocably:

you are my own;

you are forgiven;

and I need you to be about my business in the world!

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

Scripture Reading Romans 8:12-25

¹²So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— ¹³for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

¹⁸I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will

be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

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The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Message Children of God

Identity. It is something that we all look for in order to feel validated, a way to measure our worth. Depending on our lens we may see ourselves differently in various circumstances. When I was a young girl, I knew that I had value as the daughter of my parents. They always let me know that I was intelligent, capable and loved. Even when I didn't quite do things they way they may have hoped, everything was a learning experience that would help me into adulthood. Even around other adults I did not doubt myself. I was fortunate enough to have some very wise and good people around me in my church family and in work places.

Somehow though, those feelings of be capable and worthy left me as soon as I hung out with friends. It was not that my friends were always unkind, we had a lot of fun together, but I always questioned whether or not my presence made any difference. I viewed myself as not having as much worth as those who I hung out with. This was not fault of their, it was something in me. Still, at times, I watched as friends were easily discarded. In order to hang out with the in crowd I was guilty of treaty friends as if they didn't matter when deep down, I was hurting because I knew that I had not acted with integrity or courage. Eventually I was one of the discarded friends.

Of course, there are many stories that go into a lifetime of choices and experiences but I would say that going through a time of depression was when I felt most worthless and hopeless. Thankfully I did not stay there. A big reason, along with counseling, medication, and people who cared, I finally placed my identity firmly in God's hands. This brought about a transformation that is still ongoing becoming a story of healing and wholeness. I began to live out and believe that I was a child of God.

This is what Paul is trying to tell us in this part of the letter to the Romans. It is not like he is trying to hide the truth and make us figure out the puzzle. Four times in these verses he uses the phrase, "children of God". Paul wanted the people hearing this letter, as it was read aloud, to know that they could find their hope, identity, and purpose in the fact that they were children of God.

Not only that, he uses other words to describe the relationship that God wants to have with us, words like brothers, sisters, Abba, Father, adopted into the family, heirs of God

and joint heirs with Christ! This is what Christian community is about. It is why it is so important. We are hanging out with people who love God and because of that love one another.

Our God wants to be in relationship with us and through Christ made that desire as personal as God could. It is through Christ's life that we find our own purpose in life. We are to be transformed into children of God so that we can be evidence of hope for others. This is what keeps the church from being insular, or least should be. Yes, we gather together to be with one another in worship, to celebrate, and to strengthen one another, but we are also to go out and share that love, identity, and experience with others so that they too may come to know how much they are loved by God.

Living in the Spirit, not living according to the flesh, in other words, our desires that lead us down a path of broken relationships, but rather living in the Spirit, begins a process where we are transformed and as that happens others are transformed. Transformation, becoming people who bring hope, love, joy, courage, and newness to relationships, can change everything from our own families, to a community, to a government.

Paul likens this transformation to groaning in labour pains. If you have ever experienced or watched a birthing process you will know that it does not come without pain, some fear, and a desire to get it over with. But there is also the wonderful anticipation of what is yet to be, of new life, of seeing the other side of all of it. We call this living in the in-between. In between Christ having lived and when Christ will come again and all things will be restored. In between where we were and where we are headed as people of God living in a creation that itself is in a process of transformation.

Our lives, if lived in the Spirit, can be a lifelong work of transformation. At times we can see the fruit of our transformation as work places are made to be more thoughtful of the people, not just people being used as a means to an end. As we work on our own transformation and live more and more in the Spirit, in time we may be able to soften the hard heart of the person sitting across the table from us, the person whose own pain and feelings of unworthiness have led them to be angry or downtrodden.

Part of our work is to help others know through our words, responses, actions, and reactions, that they are of great worth, trusting that at the same time the Spirit is at work in them, with the hope that one day they too will know that they are children of God, imperfect but transforming.

This takes patience and it will not always go smoothly. In fact, more than likely it will be tumultuous at times. Let me share with you a gospel story as told by Mary Hinkel Shore, that I believe illustrates what I am talking about.

The field was planted with good seed. It was going to be so beautiful as it grew to maturity, but an enemy sowed weeds among the wheat, and even as the crop matured, the field was a mess; the crop was threatened, and the workers nearly made things worse by trying to take control of the situation. At the owner's

insistence, the field hands endure the wait between weeds appearing and a crop maturing. "Redemption" in the parable of the weeds and wheat comes when the harvest results not only in grain but a batch of kindling besides. [The owner] has both his wheat safe and some free kindling as well."¹

This is transformation, it does not come without effort and patience, but the reward is to know that you, your loved ones, your co-workers, acquaintances, friends, and strangers are all worthy, valuable, and beloved children of God. Children of God is our identity. Our purpose is to live in a way that transforms our lives and the lives of others.

In Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen.

Closing Prayer

God who is full of kindness and love,
hear our prayers for the world, for one another, and for ourselves:

For this congregation and for the church around the world: that we may be faithful and courageous in the face of all challenges that arise day by day;

For mercy, justice, understanding, and peace in relationships between nations: that in this time of anxiety about the future there will still be generosity for all in need.

For those who work in fields and forests, in mines and offices, in hospitals, schools and shops; and for those who cannot find work: that as the economy is reorganized, all who do work will be fairly treated and those seeking work will not lose hope.

For those who travel by land, air and on water, and for those on vacation taking time to explore your creation: that as we recover from the pandemic, we will remember to cherish the earth and treat it wisely.

For those who are teachers and students, for schools, colleges and universities, who plan for a new season of learning in challenging times: that creativity and commitment will lead to discoveries about the world you love and the truth rooted in your wisdom.

For all those in danger and need: for the sick and the dying, the poor and the oppressed, for those standing up against injustice, and for all still at risk from COVID-19.

For those who are closest to us, for friendships that have stood the test of many years, and for those who love us enough to tell us the truth about ourselves: that they may know our love and appreciation.

Hear now the words that Jesus taught us, summing up our spoken and unspoken prayers this day:

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¹ [Mary Hinkle Shore https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4515](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4515)

Accessed July 16, 2020

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Invitation to make an offering

God demonstrates such great generosity in response to our needs and requests. We are much loved. We have an opportunity to share God's love with others in the presentation of our tithes and offerings.

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

"Abba, Abba, hear us," we cry

785

1. "Abba, Abba, hear us," we cry; God's Spirit cries in us
and proclaims that we are slaves no more but heirs, the heirs of God.
All creation waits, eager and longing;
for the glorious freedom of God's children soon will be revealed.
2. With the whole creation we cry, groan as in child birth:
soon all sin, all death's decay will be no more; we shall be free.
All creation waits, eager and longing;
for the promised glory that we soon shall see we wait and pray.
3. As we pray, the Spirit breathes sighs, sighs far too deep for words;
God who searches hearts and knows the Spirit's mind, hears all our prayer.
All creation waits, eager and longing:
as we live in hope, we know that in all things God works for good.

Words: Romans 8; paraphrase, © Andrew Donaldson Music: Korean traditional. Used by permission.

Benediction (based on Romans 8:15-17)

As we go from here, remember this:
As followers of Jesus Christ,
we have not received a spirit of fear,
but one of hope and confidence.
For we are children of God,
members of God's own family,
and heirs with Jesus Christ himself.
So go out with joy to love and serve the Lord.

<https://re-worship.blogspot.com/search/label/Proper11A>

