

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church**  
**July 26, 2020 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

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

**Words of Welcome**

Can you begin to understand the depth of God's love for you?  
May this day, this time of worship, assure you  
that there is nothing that can separate you from that love!

**Call to Worship** (based on Romans 8:26-27, The Message)

We've gathered together in the presence of God  
to offer our praise and our prayers.  
We come before God with confidence,  
knowing that even when we can't find the words,  
God's own Spirit is right here with us,  
praying in us and for us,  
giving shape to our wordless hopes and longings,  
and pleading for us before the throne of grace.  
So let's come with joy to offer our worship  
to God who knows and loves us all.

<https://re-worship.blogspot.com/search/label/Proper12A>

**Hymn**

*Let Christian faith and hope dispel*

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| 1. Let Christian faith and hope dispel<br>the fears of guilt and woe;<br>the Lord Almighty is our friend,<br>and who can prove a foe?      | 2. The Saviour died, but rose again<br>triumphant from the grave,<br>and pleads our cause at God's right hand,<br>omnipotent to save.           |
| 3. Who then can e'er divide us more<br>from Jesus' saving love,<br>or break the sacred chain that binds<br>the earth to heaven above?      | 4. Let troubles rise and terrors frown,<br>and days of darkness fall;<br>through Christ all dangers we'll defy,<br>and more than conquer all.   |
| 5. Nor death, nor life, nor earth, nor hell,<br>nor time's destroying sway<br>can e'er erase us from his heart,<br>or make his love decay. | 6. Each future period that will bless<br>as it has blessed the past;<br>Christ loved us from the first of time;<br>Christ loves us to the last. |

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**Opening Prayer** (based on Romans 8:26-34)

Father God,  
Your extravagant love has called us together.  
Long before we even knew You,  
You already knew us,

and had chosen us to be part of Your own family—  
sisters and brothers with our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.  
What amazing love You have shown toward us!

And so we come before You with praise and thanksgiving,  
offering You the worship of our hearts and lives,  
and opening ourselves to the prompting and leading of Your Holy Spirit,  
asking you to forgive that which has brought harm to ourselves and others.

Receive our worship—our praise and prayers and offerings—  
through the intercession of Your Son, Jesus Christ,  
our Saviour and Lord.

May the time we spend here in Your presence  
bring honour and glory to Your Name. Amen.

Adapted from <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/search/label/Proper12A>

## **Assurance of Pardon**

Hear the good news! Who is in a position to condemn us? Only Christ—  
And Christ died for us; Christ rose for us,  
Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us.  
Friends, believe the good news of the gospel.  
In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven and set free by God's generous grace.  
Thanks be to God!

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## **Scripture Reading**      Romans 8:26-39

<sup>26</sup>Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. <sup>27</sup>And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. <sup>28</sup>We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup>For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. <sup>30</sup>And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

<sup>31</sup>What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? <sup>32</sup>He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? <sup>33</sup>Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. <sup>35</sup>Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all day long;  
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”

<sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

**Message** God reflecting human beings.

What would it take for you to know how deeply God loves you?

In a world where people are discarded, divorce a common occurrence and broken homes the by-product, abuse of all kinds rampant in companies, organizations, systems, and homes, where families live in poverty, and shame is a common experience, sex has been used as a way to dominate, and people are just plain tired, for many it can be hard to comprehend a divine pure love that will go to any length to bring you into right relationship with that love, with yourself and with others. And yet, that is the love that is at the heart of the gospels and also at the heart of the letter to the Romans.

Paul, the letter writer, cannot express strongly enough what lengths God has gone to in order that we might experience a new creation in our lives and that of others, a creation in which we become as N.T. Wright puts it, “fully functioning, God reflecting human beings.”<sup>1</sup>

So, what does it mean to be a fully functioning, God reflecting human being? That is what Paul has been writing about throughout this letter as he shares what Christ has done for us in his life, death, and resurrection. When we find our lives are so closely tied to Christ’s dying to sin, and rising to life that we become who God has always known us to be, that is when we begin to see the new creation unfolding in ourselves and others. As has been said before this is a process of becoming, of transformation that continues over a life time.

The passage that we heard read today is assurance that we are not alone in this. Paul writes, “...the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” (Romans 8:26,27 NRSV)

These words have brought comfort to so many who have found themselves in situations in which they had no words to say or pray. The anguish so deep, the hopelessness so dark that uttering any words was too much. Yet they could trust that the Holy Spirit would intercede on their behalf with sighs, too deep for words, to match what was going on inside them. This personal knowledge of God’s love is so important, but there is more to this

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<sup>1</sup> Wright. N.T. *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus’s Crucifixion*. Harper Collins Publishers. New York. 2016. P268.

passage as well. This passage is about God searching the heart, the place of love, and also knowing the mind of the Spirit, and prayers being offered according to the will of God.

That's what's often missed, the fact that God answers prayer in a way that is in accordance with God's will, which does not always fall in line with our wants and desires. God's answered prayers will have the whole of creation and the people in our lives in mind. Which is why people often misread the next line of scripture. They read it with their wants and desires in mind, rather than trusting the God of love. Paul writes more, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." So often I have heard this quoted as, "We know God works together for the good of those who love him." People use this verse and hope that God will grant them their desires, but those last words and more to follow indicate that there is more going on than we may be considering.

We have to be aware that we do not know or understand God's purposes, and if we are predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus, as Paul writes, we have to remember that part of that image is of suffering. As was shared in last week's message the whole creation is groaning as we are transformed into the people God calls us to be and knows we can be.

A note on predestination. It is not that God has predetermined all things in our lives, so it doesn't matter what choices we make. That is an incorrect reading of those words. What has been predetermined or predestined is that God will redeem people and all creation and God has firmly set that goal.

We are predestined and called to be a large family, a family where Jesus was the firstborn, and in this family, as it is being transformed through love and service, grace and forgiveness, we find ourselves living in ways that are life giving. Our desires, our wants, and our needs, conform to the will of God.

It is important then to understand that God's will is love, wholeness, restoration, and transformation. This is where all the experiences we have had with human love, that so often disappoints, must be set aside for the example of Christ who fully shows us in his living and dying how much God loves us – loves you – love the world. We have to let go of our preconceived and even broken experience of love and see that God loves us so much that he became one of us in Jesus Christ in order to know the struggle and pain of living, and begin the process of reconciling the world to himself in a whole new way.

The questions Paul poses are set against this backdrop of love. It is the same love that Paul talks about in his letter to the Ephesians where he says, "I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

So the questions are...

What then are we to say about these things?

If God is for us, who is against us?

He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?

Who will bring any charge against God's elect?

Who is to condemn?

Who will separate us from the love of Christ?

Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

The answers are a firm and emphatic, no one and nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Death, life, angels, rulers, things present, things to come, power, height, depth or anything else in all creation will not be able to separate us from the love of God.

Think about that for a moment. Regardless of what you know of love, you have never experienced a love that is this determined to love you, not for their own benefit, but for yours, so that you can have life and life abundant.

Personally, I do not have the capacity to understand that kind of love, a love that is so outpouring, so determined, so amazing, that it will not let me go...but, because of Jesus, and the knowledge that God loves me and every living being, all of creation... I can trust it.

Maybe that is a part of what faith is...the ability to trust God's love so much that you know God will not ever abandon you or those you love. God will not abandon anyone regardless of choices. Even if it appears that everything has gone wrong, God, through Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit has not left you or anyone for that matter. God's greatest desire is for us to become fully functioning, God reflecting human beings. It is a life time process, not all of us find our way, but God is always there, reminding us that we are loved and that our purpose is to show mercy and compassion to others as they discover God's love. May we all find ways to be God reflecting human beings in big and small ways, each and everyday. Amen.

### **Closing Prayer**

Good and generous God,

In Jesus Christ you came to us, promising us life in abundance.

We give you thanks today for the abundant gifts we receive in him:

Assurance of your love day by day;

Relief of mercy when we recognize our own failings;

Hope renewed when things seem bleak;

Peace that comes when we trust ourselves to your eternal keeping.

These are the gifts that matter, O God, so for all the times we experience these gifts we thank you in these moments of silence:

Generous God, the world is going through difficult times this summer. So we pray for all whose lives seem empty of joy:

Because plans have changed, and friends seem far away.  
Because hearts are filled with disappointment and loneliness.  
Because sorrow and grief rise up each day.

Support each one we name in this silence with your abundant compassion:

Generous God, so many things must be rearranged because of the pandemic and what it has revealed.

We pray for those whose lives are empty of purpose, and for those who do not know the respect of their neighbours:

Because they are without work.  
Because they face discrimination and are devalued in our communities.  
Because they have made poor choices and cannot find a way forward.

Support each one we name in this silence with your abundant mercy and show them signs of hope:

Generous God,

We remember before you in silence those whose lives are empty of peace and hope:

Because they struggle with illness or disability.  
Because they are powerless in the face of violence.  
Because old animosities rankle and opportunities for reconciliation are elusive.

Send your dove of peace and promise to create new possibilities for each one.

Good and generous God, fill us with the energy and compassion of your Spirit to reach out to those facing difficult times. May we become the gift we have received in Jesus for it is in his name we pray, saying...

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## **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**

The apostle Paul promises that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. We trust that God will bring forth good from that which we offer today.

*Rom. 8:28*

It is our privilege to participate in the unfolding of God's grace in the world.  
Let us give with grateful and expectant hearts.

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

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## Hymn

### *Thine be the glory*

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1. Thine be the glory, risen, conquering son,  
endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won;  
angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,  
kept the folded grave clothes, where thy body lay.

#### *Refrain*

*Thine be the glory, risen, conquering son;  
endless is the victory thou o'er death has won.*

2. Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb:  
lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom;  
let the church with gladness hymns of triumph sing,  
for her Lord now liveth; death hath lost its sting.

#### *Refrain*

*Thine be the glory, risen, conquering son;  
endless is the victory thou o'er death has won.*

3. No more we doubt thee, glorious prince of life;  
life is nought without thee: aid us in our strife;  
make us more than conquerors, through thy deathless love:  
bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above.

#### *Refrain*

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## Benediction

May God, who searches the heart, Rom. 8:26–28  
Jesus, whose love overcomes all division,  
and the Spirit, which helps us in our weakness,  
continue to lead you into life  
that you may serve with abandon and joy.

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