

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
August 2, 2020 9th Sunday after Pentecost

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

Words of Welcome

Can you imagine a world in which every person felt assured that they were steadfastly loved, in fact were promised and knew it to be true? This is what is offered when we take God's promises seriously. Join me as we explore what it means to trust God's promise and experience God's sure and steadfast love.

Call to Worship

The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.
Our eyes look to God, for God gives us food in every season.

The Lord is near to all who call on him in truth.
O God, you open your hand, and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

The Lord fulfils the desire of all who fear him and watches over all who love him,
So our mouths will speak the praise of the Lord,
and God's holy name forever.

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Hymn

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun

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1. Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
does its successive journeys run;
his kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
till moons shall wax and wane no more.
2. People and realms of every tongue
dwell on his love with sweetest song,
and infant voices shall proclaim
their early blessings on his name.
3. Let every creature rise and bring
the honours due our glorious King;
angels descend with songs again,
and earth repeat the long Amen.

Words: public domain

Opening Prayer

Mysterious and merciful God,
we praise you for the many ways you come to us and offer us abundant life.
When the sun rises and the earth blooms around us,
we are filled with grateful thanksgiving for your gift of a new day.
When evening falls and we find ourselves in deserted, lonely places,

we count on you to provide for our needs.

For the times you show us the way when we are in need of guidance, we praise you. For the times you provide healing when we are broken and hurting, we rejoice. Your grace makes the poor rich, the hungry satisfied, and the weak strong; and so we worship you as the Source of life and love, comfort and courage.

Gracious and merciful God, as we gather to worship, we are aware that we have fallen short of the life you desire for us. So we confess:

Through Christ you have shown us the way of compassion, generosity and forgiveness, yet we neglect the suffering of others. We blame and judge in the very moments you call us to act with kindness and mercy. We cling to what we own rather than share our blessings with others. Free us from greed and from grievances. Open our hearts as we worship and hear the scriptures read so that we may embody the teachings of your Son, our Saviour. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

Whatever inhibits community or causes separation between people, God calls us to set aside.

By grace we are drawn together – as children of the earth’s Creator, as persons welcome in the family of faith. Glory be to God.

© Glen E. Rainsley. Hear Our Prayer: Resource for Worship and Devotions. United Church Press. Cleveland, Ohio. 1996. P106.

Scripture Reading

❖ Isaiah 55:1-5

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

²Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

³Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

⁴See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.

⁵See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

❖ Romans 9:1-5

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit—²I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my

kindred according to the flesh. ⁴They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; ⁵to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

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The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Reflection Sure, steadfast love

This past Advent and Christmas we had the delight of watching each Sunday as children placed hand made wooden symbols on a tree branch as part of the Jesse Tree story. Each wooden symbol was explained and spoke to the promises God had made to the Jewish people throughout their long history. The reason for doing this was to connect us to our long history. The Christian church is deeply rooted in the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures.

This is important as God chose the Hebrew people as his own. A nation in which all nations would be blessed through them. These promises are steadfast and unchangeable which is important because if those promises are not sure and steadfast then how can we trust any promise that God has made in the New Testament. In the scripture from Isaiah we read, “you [Israel] shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.” (Isaiah 55:5)

It is because of these promises from the God of Israel, our God, and the Apostle Paul’s understanding of God coming in the person of Jesus Christ, that he is in deep anguish for the people of Israel, his people. He knows God’s promises are true, and yet it has become evident that though Jesus came as a Jewish man to the Jewish people they have not understood that God has shown up.

As an aside, here is a little art history lesson. Jesus was not a white European as the most popular images of Jesus today would suggest. In fact, there is nowhere a description of what Jesus looked like. There is no picture of the man, but as with so many things throughout history, white European settlers have created an image that resembled themselves and that image traveled with them as they colonized other countries. It is another way that white supremacy has taken something and used it as a way to control and show power.

Still, the image of the head of Christ that you can find on pretty much anything, was not created until more recent history. Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of South Carolina, Anna Swartwood House has studied the history of the images of Christ and writes, “the all-time most-reproduced image of Jesus...is Warner Sallman’s light-eyed, light-haired “Head of Christ” from 1940. Sallman, a former commercial artist who created art for advertising campaigns, successfully marketed this picture worldwide. Through Sallman’s partnerships with two Christian publishing companies, one Protestant

and one Catholic, the Head of Christ came to be included on everything from prayer cards to stained glass, faux oil paintings, calendars, hymnals and night lights. Sallman's painting culminates a long tradition of white Europeans creating and disseminating pictures of Christ made in their own image."¹

This Europeanisation of Jesus has also happened in movies, as it is almost always a white man that represent Jesus.

Jesus was Jewish that is a given. Think of any middle eastern man and what he looks like and you will have a better indication of an image of Jesus than anything that tends to hang in homes and churches or you would see in the movies.

Jesus also did not have our Bible. One of the stories that sticks with me is of a friend whose husband said if the King James Bible was good enough for Jesus, it is good enough for him. Two things here. As I said, Jesus did not have a Bible, he only had the Hebrew scriptures that he would have studied as a child. He would have known all the promises made to the Hebrew people in those sacred scriptures. He quotes them many times in his teachings. Second, and obviously the King James Version of the Bible first published in 1611, though beautifully poetic, was definitely not around in the time of Jesus. It also does not have the advantage of the biblical scholarship that we have benefitted from over the last few decades, so not necessarily your best go to when trying to discern as closely as possible the original intent of the Hebrew and Greek that the scriptures were originally written in.

I state these things, because we forget that Jesus was Jewish, that what we now know as the Bible is the Hebrew scriptures, plus stories and letters written by those who either lived at the time of Jesus or experienced great change because of their faith in Jesus.

All this is important because God promised the people of the Old Testament, our ancestors in the faith, that God would be with them, that his love was steadfast and sure. Paul in this passage in Romans is struggling to understand how God's promises still stand in light of the fact that many Jewish people of his time were not turning and putting their faith in Jesus.

Paul had been a Pharisee, and Pharisees were known for their careful study of the Hebrew scriptures, he knew the promises. Paul also had come to understand that Jesus was the fulfillment of those promises and it broke his heart to see that his own people did not recognize this.

So, he laments over the people. He states, "They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises: to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever." (Romans 9:4-5)

¹ <https://theconversation.com/the-long-history-of-how-jesus-came-to-resemble-a-white-european-142130>. Accessed August 1, 2020.

History has often forgotten or misled people into believing that God has passed over the Jewish people, but if that were true than how could we now trust God to fulfill the promises that were given to us by Jesus. Promises about having abundant life, being forgiven, the promise of the Holy Spirit to be our guide, counsellor, and comforter.

It is recorded in Matthew 5:17 that Jesus himself said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill." (NRSV). To know the Old Testament stories is to come to understand the character of God, a faithful God who desire to be in relationship with those that were created in God's image.

This all goes back to love. We have come to understand that the love between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, was so abundant that it outpoured into creation of which human beings are a part. God wants to be in loving relationship with people, and in turn desires that we would be in loving relationships with each other.

God in Christ showed how great God's love was, so great that he became incarnate, in other words, took on human form, to experience life as we do, and then in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension, provide a way for us to be in closer, more personal relationship with God, promising God's sure, steadfast love and abundant life.

This is a promise. The same God who made and still honours the promises made to the Israelites, keeps his promises to us. We are loved, we are forgiven, we are never alone. It is not for us to understand God's ways and how God will bring all people to him regardless of their faith or lack of, it is for us to trust that what God has promised, God will fulfill.

It is part of why we can confidently share our Christian faith with others. There is so much need for people to experience love, sure and steadfast love, a love that is promised regardless of gender, colour of skin, your standing or lack of in society. A love that is sure and steadfast even in our own doubt and insecurity about our worthiness or the worthiness of others.

In the verses that came just ahead of this reading in Romans, and part of what frames Paul's thought is this, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor power, 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." (Romans 8:38-39)

Regardless of your experiences of love in life, whether you have been broken by love, disregarded in love, abused by someone who said they loved you, or have known wondrous human kindness and love, know that you can experience the sure and steadfast love of God who is faithful, created you, and wants you to have life abundant.

When you know this love of God share it through your words and actions so that others can experience God's love through you until they come to know it for themselves. May God's love radiate from God's people and become the beacon of light and hope for the world as we love as Jesus loved. Amen.

Closing Prayer

O God, we give you thanks for your goodness in all the times of our lives. Even in the uncertainties of this present moment, we are grateful for the strength and courage we find, knowing you are right beside us. Give us the wisdom and patience we need to face a future filled with many questions and challenges.

Aware of our own needs today, we are reminded by Christ's compassion that so many others nearby and much further away experience even greater struggles. And so we lift up our prayers for the world, seeking your guidance so that we may do our part to bring comfort, healing and hope.

We pray for all who are sick or in pain, that they may have the medical assistance they need and the gift of healing in body, mind, and spirit.

We pray for those who are grieving, that they may know the comfort of your presence and find hope in your promises.

Especially we remember those whose lives have been changed by COVID-19 and ask that you will support their recovery and heal relationships affected by this disease.

We pray for those who are hungry or homeless, and all those experiencing the stress of poverty and economic uncertainty. Give those with more resources the confidence to share generously.

We pray for leaders in our communities and in our nation, as they seek ways to recover well-being in the face of the global pandemic. Give them wisdom and courage to make decisions for the well-being of the most vulnerable.

We pray for those who seek to show hospitality to others in their homes, in their workplaces, in the church and the community, that their generosity will inspire others to open their hearts so that your goodness at work in the world will be multiplied.

We pray for prisoners and for those who work in prisons, especially for chaplains and volunteers who bring your word of love and grace to the incarcerated. After long weeks and months deprived of familiar contact, help us all understand the stress of being imprisoned. May those who represent the face of Christ in these environments find strength and wisdom in your companionship and offer ministry of reconciliation and renewal that you desire for everyone.

Lord Jesus Christ, you walk with us through all the days of challenge and celebration. Be our Bread for the journey of life, to sustain us and encourage us, whatever the week ahead holds for us. And so we pray together the words you taught us, 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

With great joy, we present tithes and gifts for the ministry of the church asking God to be with each of us as we commit ourselves to lives of joyful, thankful service.

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.

Trusting in God's grace and steadfast love we sing...

Hymn

All my hope on God is founded

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1. All my hopes on God is founded
who does still my trust renew;
through all change and chance God guides me,
only good and only true.
Love unknown, God's alone,
calls my heart to be God's own.
2. God's great goodness reigns eternal,
deep in wisdom, passing thought;
light and life are all God's splendor
bringing beauty out of naught.
Evermore from God's store
newborn worlds rise and adore.
3. Daily does Almighty Giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow,
God's desire our soul delighting,
pleasure leading where we go.
Love will stand at God's hand;
joy will wait on God's command.

"All my hope on God is founded," words by Robert Bridges and Joachim Neander
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Benediction

The Spirit sends us forth to serve.

Go in peace, knowing that God will always be by your side in all that you do.

Go in love, offering healing and hope to others.

Go in joy, that others may be lifted and inspired in service. Amen.

<https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/8302/worship-connection-august-2-2020>