

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
August 30, 2020 13th Sunday after Pentecost

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

Words of Welcome

Living with great energy, enthusiasm, and passion is something many of us hope to do. With God this is possible. Before we get to that conversion lets begin with a call to worship.

Call to Worship

We who dwell in the shelter of the Most High
Seek God here.

We who come to be inspired and changed
Seek God's Spirit here.

We who know how little we know
Seek God's Word here.

https://www.ucc.org/pentecost_13_august_30_outline

Hymn

Who's goin' to tell the story

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1. Who's goin' to tell the story? You and I!
Tell of the Lord's great glory? You and I!
Who's goin' to let the whole world know?
Help his disciples grow and multiply? You and I!
2. Who's goin' to bring the kingdom? You and I!
Who's goin' to spread the gospel? You and I!
Who's goin' to do the kindly deed?
Comfort the one in need and help supply? You and I!
3. Jesus came to bring us good news,
sent to earth by God above!
And the good news that he brought us
is the word of love!
4. Who's goin' to feed the hungry? You and I!
Care for the sick and lonely? You and I!
Who's goin' to let the whole world see
people can live in harmony? Let's try! You and I!

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Opening Prayer

Eternal and ever-loving God,
Deep is our desire for what is true and enduring.
Deep is our need to see clearly.
Deep is our longing for you, O God.

In you we live and move and have our being.

You are the root of love,
the fountain of knowledge,
the source of wisdom,
the path of right living.

You are the beginning and end of all things.
Our thoughts cannot comprehend your mystery
And so we worship you in humble praise,
Holy God, ever three and ever one.

Although you satisfy our deepest desires, O God,
we confess together that we have often turned away from you:

We have sought meaning in shallow places.
We have clung to old hurts and familiar habits.
We have nursed anger and envy.
We have been self-absorbed and lacked compassion.
We have turned our backs on those in need.

Forgive what we have been, amend who we are,
and guide us toward what we may become according to your grace.

God of wisdom, you teach us with your love, you touch us with your mercy, and you challenge us with your truth. Send us your Holy Spirit to help us understand the scriptures so that we may encounter you as we listen for your living Word.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

God's mercy extends beyond the bounds of even our collective imagination.
God's love seeps through any wall we could ever put up.
God's goodness holds more power than the sum of all sin.

Because of this, I declare to you in the name of the blessed and holy Trinity
that God forgives us all our sins. Thanks be to God.

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Scripture Reading Romans 12:9-21

⁹Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹²Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance

is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”²⁰No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.”²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

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The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Reflection Energy, Enthusiasm & Passion

Reader’s Digest editors asked readers for firsthand accounts of compassion.¹ Here are a couple of stories.

The Man at the Market

When the supermarket clerk tallied up my groceries, I was \$12 over what I had on me. I began to remove items from the bags, when another shopper handed me a \$20 bill. “Please don’t put yourself out,” I told him. “Let me tell you a story,” he said. “My mother is in the hospital with cancer. I visit her every day and bring her flowers. I went this morning, and she got mad at me for spending my money on more flowers. She demanded that I do something else with that money. So, here, please accept this. It is my mother’s flowers.” – *Leslie Wagner, Peel, Arkansas*

Jim and the Job

My neighbor, Jim, had trouble deciding if he wanted to retire from the construction field, until he ran into a younger man he’d worked with previously. The young man had a wife and three children and was finding it difficult to make ends meet, since he hadn’t worked in some time. The next morning, Jim went to the union office and submitted his retirement paperwork. As for his replacement, he gave them the name of the young man. That was six years ago, and that young husband and father has been employed ever since. – *Miranda MacLean, Brutus, Michigan.*

These are just a couple of examples of people showing compassion. Anyone can be compassionate. You certainly do not have to be Christian for kindness, compassion, love, hope, patience, and hospitality to be how you live out your life. But you *must have* this and more as part of how you live out your life if you are a Christian.

The Apostle Paul wrote about being living sacrifices a few paragraphs before this. The words read today are the bullet points of how one might live that out. For as much as the words Paul has written to this point in the letter to the Romans benefit from being unpacked and pondered, these rapid-fire statements of how to think and act are not difficult to grasp. Like the following, “Let love be genuine, hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection.”

¹ <https://www.rd.com/article/kindness-strangers> Accessed August 29, 2020.

The next statement is very counter-cultural. In a society that encourages people to climb corporate ladders and achieve personal bests, often with the knowledge that others will be overlooked and stepped on in order for these things to be accomplished, Paul says to “outdo one another in showing honor.” This is in the context of, “Let love be genuine.” It would be easy to make a one-up-man-ship competition of “I can treat you better than you treat me,” but it is about seeing others as created by God and loved by God. We are to honour each other.

“Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.” The words zeal and ardent are about having great energy, enthusiasm, and being passionate. We are to live in this manner, and it is not like you need to act like you have that energy, enthusiasm, and passion, but rather knowing that the Spirit of God living and working in you, knowing that God’s love is present for you and others, allows you to respond with energy, enthusiasm, and passion. For some who are feeling the years of their age, energy may feel like it is waning, still this energy is not necessarily physical, it is a spiritual energy, a desire to serve the Lord and serve others in whatever capacity we are able to do so.

“Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.” Again, we do these things not because we think we are so capable, or righteous, it comes from a place of following the example of Christ. Extending hospitality can be as simple as the story of *The Little Lift*, again from Reader’s Digest,

One evening, I left a restaurant just ahead of a woman assisting her elderly mom. I approached the curb and paused to see if my arthritic knees could climb it. To my right appeared an arm to assist. It was that of the elderly mom. My heart was so touched.
– Donna Moerie, Goldsboro, North Carolina

Or contributing to the needs of the saints, as goes the story of *My Granddaughter’s Dress*

I saw a dress in a consignment shop that I knew my granddaughter would love. But money was tight, so I asked the store owner if she could hold it for me. “May I buy the dress for you?” asked another customer. “Thank you, but I can’t accept such a gracious gift,” I said. Then she told me why it was so important for her to help me. She’d been homeless for three years, she said, and had it not been for the kindness of strangers, she would not have been able to survive. “I’m no longer homeless, and my situation has improved,” she said. “I promised myself that I would repay the kindness so many had shown me.” She paid for the dress, and the only payment she would accept in return was a heartfelt hug. – Stacy Lee, Columbia, Maryland

Hospitality and tending to people’s need, whether they are homeless or just hopeful, can be natural inclinations when practiced with regularity. These things should be hallmarks of the Christian and Christian community.

I appreciate the African idea of Ubuntu, which is described as an ethic of interdependence; meaning that everything I do has an effect on you and your well-being, and everything you do has an effect on me and my well-being. Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu sums it up as “My humanity is bound up in yours.” As children of God we are to understand that our humanity is bound up in the humanity of others. God love every person and our response to God’s love for us is to love others. The challenge of this is expressed in verses 14-21 of this passage as the tone changes and looks at how to live in harmony with others.

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.” This is a tall order for any of us, but think of that in terms of our current global experience, people blaming others for Corona virus, differences in theological and political views particularly volatile in the U.S. at this time, but also palatable in our national, provincial and even local government. Just look at the division that creeps in when talking about a new indoor soccer complex here in Thunder Bay.

Then there are people who are for and against vaccination. How about black lives matter and people hating or supporting professional athletes for their halting games this past week in response to the shooting of Jacob Blake. People can get energized, and passionate about these things. We can find ourselves in strong disagreement with them, but when that happens how often do we forget that these same people have concerns, hopes, lives, families, jobs, just as we have and still we want to curse and condemn them?

So in that context think about the directive to bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse them. Not so easy, but still as Christians it is the response we are asked to live.

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another, do not be haughty, [in others words do not be arrogantly superior and disdainful], but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” Wow! Can you imagine a world where this is true for all?

If Christians and the Christian community were the living example of this kind of response to others and to God’s love, the acts of kindness, compassion and mercy would begin to dismantle the systems that oppress. There would be no need for Black lives Matter, because truly all would matter, they would be no need for a MeToo movement because all women would be respected and treated with dignity, there would not be a need for reconciliation between indigenous and settler because treaties would be honoured and understood as between nations, homelessness would be a thing of the past as all would be valued.

We may not get there in our lifetime, but if we don't live into it in our lifetime then future generations will continue to suffer. Let us live out our response to God's faithfulness, love, compassion, and mercy each and everyday, in each thought and action that we take. May we daily have the great energy, enthusiasm, and passion, through the power of the Holy Spirit within us, maturing, teaching, and guiding us to live into this. In Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen.

Closing Prayer

O God in whom we live and move and have our being
We come to you in prayer as the summer season draws nearer to its close
And we prepare for an autumn filled with many changes:

We give you thanks for the occasions we have enjoyed this summer.
savouring the beauty of your creation right outside our doors,
Thank you for the chances we've had catch up with family and friends,
and whatever opportunities for travel, recreation & restoration have been possible.
We recognize how blessed we are to live in Canada and so we are grateful for each moment in which we found rest and relaxation in the summer season.

Today we remember those for whom this summer has been difficult:
Those still isolated by the restrictions because of COVID-19;
Those who go hungry or face violence in forgotten corners of our own community and around the world;
Those whose businesses are struggling, who have to figure out how to be inviting and safe at the same time;
And those who are uncertain how to engage with friends and neighbours and still be wise and careful in this strange time of pandemic
(Keep silence for 10 seconds)

May each one find courage to face tomorrow in your company

O God, Jesus walked the road of suffering with so many in pain and grief
We remember those whose lives have faced crises this summer—
Through tragic death and unexpected loss,
Through critical illness or injury,
Through pain or problems that seem to have no end...
(Keep silence for 10 seconds)

Surround them with your comfort and compassion

O God, Jesus often faced many demands and the pressure from his critics,
So we pray for all those who have not found rest this summer:
For leaders trying to figure out ways forward to care for their communities when there are no examples to follow;

For those whose jobs and responsibilities have changed, and every day presents a new challenge;

And we also remember those who seek work in these uncertain economic times
(Keep silence for 10 seconds)

May they know your strength and assurance day by day

O God, we need the embrace of your presence, each in our own way.

Bring healing and peace to our lives and to this world you love.

Open our eyes and our hearts so that we may offer healing and peace

to those we encounter, in the name of Christ Jesus who taught us to pray together...

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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

As Jesus' followers, we have the privilege of taking part in the redeeming work God has begun in the world. We offer our gifts in anticipation that God will use them—and us—in that work! ©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 13th Sunday after Pentecost, August 30, 2020 Year A

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

We are one in the Spirit

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1. We are One in The Spirit, we are One in the Lord,
we are One in The Spirit, we are One in the Lord,
and we pray that all unity will one day be restored,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our Love,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love.
2. We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,
we will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,
and together we'll spread the news that God is in our land,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our Love,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love.

3. We will work with each other, we will work side by side,
we will work with each other, we will work side by side,
and we'll guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our Love,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love.
4. All praise to the Father, from whom all things come,
and all praise to Christ Jesus, who is God's only Son,
and all praise to the Spirit, who makes us one,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our Love,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love.

We are one in the Spirit" words by Peter Scholtes © 1950
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Benediction

Whether gathered in a sanctuary
or scattered wherever we live,
take the love of God into the world.

In these uncertain times, share the steadfast love of our God.
Whether from familiar places we call home,
or from sacred places we have not visited in a long time,
take the grace of Jesus into our neighborhoods.

For all the lonely, the forgotten, the scared,
share the justice and compassion of Jesus.
Whether on our own, or joining with friends,
whether serving those we know, and especially those we don't,
be the people of the Holy Spirit.

Open your arms wide,
even from a safe distance,
to welcome all of sisters and brothers.

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