

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church**  
**September 13, 2020 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

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

**Words of Welcome**

It can be very easy to think we know better, do better, have the right answer and have a responsibility to educate everyone that thinks, believes, and understands differently than we do. The Apostle Paul cautions us against such ways. As we check out what that may mean for us, we come first to the call to worship.

**Call to Worship**

Disciples and doubters, faithful and feckless,  
we are God's, who welcomes us all.

Followers and those who lag behind, open-hearted and close-minded,  
we are the Lord's, who is always patient with us.

Reconcilers and rabble-rousers, foolish and fearless,  
we are the Spirit's, who encourages us in every moment.

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**Hymn**

*When we are living*

**630**

1. When we are living, it is in Christ Jesus,  
and when we're dying, it is in the Lord.  
Both in our living and in our dying,  
we belong to God; we belong to God.
2. Through all our living, we our fruits must give.  
Good works of service are for offering.  
When we are giving, or when receiving,  
we belong to God; we belong to God.
3. 'Mid time of sorrow and in times of pain,  
when sensing beauty or in love's embrace,  
whether we suffer, or sing rejoicing,  
we belong to God; we belong to God.
4. Across this wide world, we shall always find  
those who are crying with no peace of mind,  
but when we help them, or when we feed them,  
we belong to God; we belong to God.

"When we are living," Words: Romans 14:8; paraphrase, v.1., anonymous; translation, EliseS. Eslinger, v.2-4, Roberto Escamilla; translation, George Lockwood. Music Hispanic folk song. © The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989. All rights reserved. Reprinted under OneLicense.net A-723877

We come before God in prayer. Let us pray.

## Opening Prayer

Holy and loving One, God of might and mercy,  
The heavens and the earth are full of your glory.

Your love transforms our lives.

You take darkness and give light.

You take grief and give healing.

You take fatigue and give strength.

You take fear and give courage.

You take death and give new life.

So we come before you in worship,  
handing over to you all that weighs us down,  
waiting for your refreshing gifts.

Renew us in this time of worship,

O God, we confess

that our lives do not always reflect your transforming power.

You are gracious, but we cling to judgment.

You are kind, but we can be cruel.

You are forgiving, but we nurse grudges and old wounds.

You are filled with joy,

but too often we are filled with dissatisfaction and complaints.

Forgive us.

God of all knowledge, prepare our hearts and minds to receive your wisdom. Quiet in us all distracting thoughts so that we may hear your Word, and be strengthened to follow your way. Fill us with your Holy Spirit this day, and make us new through Christ, your Son and our Saviour. Amen.

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## Assurance of Pardon

People of God, our sins are forgiven.

*Rom. 14:7-9;*

God is merciful and gracious and is

*Matt. 18:27, 33*

Lord of us all.

Reconciled to the God who loves us,

let us live and love through Christ our Lord.

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

I have spent the last few months working through the Letter to the Romans as we worshipped online. Today marks the end of that journey through Romans with a final reading from...

## Scripture Reading Romans 14:1-12 Judy Persian

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. <sup>2</sup>Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. <sup>3</sup>Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. <sup>4</sup>Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand. <sup>5</sup>Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. <sup>6</sup>Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God. <sup>7</sup>We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. <sup>8</sup>If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. <sup>9</sup>For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. <sup>10</sup>Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. <sup>11</sup>For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." <sup>12</sup>So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

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The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

## Message Take a Breath

What this sermon aims to say is our relationship with God is to be an act of praise.

What this sermon aims to do is engage people to be in a relationship with God that is an act of praise.

Oh, my goodness, the places my mind went as I read and pondered this scripture. It is really difficult to be living today and not have an opinion on what others believe, say, think, and do. I have a lot of family with whom I disagree on everything from human sexuality, US and Canadian politics, vaccinations, wearing masks, to building pipelines.

My first thoughts went to someone I love very much who doesn't think a woman should be a minister, then to colleagues who may leave the Presbyterian Church in Canada if the church chooses to ordain people in non-heterosexual relationships and to marry people of varying sexual orientations. When I went to the General Assembly of the PCC two years ago, the level of anger and angst over that conversation closed in upon all of us no matter which position one took.

It is pretty easy for us to pass judgment on others. We think we are right and we want others to think we are right as well. But sometimes we just need to take a breath.

Anti-abortionists and right to life advocates always seem to be at one another. We had a taste of that of last year when a film was shown in the city that was anti-abortion and there was much protest outside as the film was being shown. We pass judgement on police and protestors alike in city after city around the world. And of course, all of us are good at judging politicians and political parties.

How many times as Christians have we heard, or spoken ourselves the line, “hate the sin – love the sinner.” Problematic in itself, it has in many cases turned out to be hate the sin, hate the sinner, and people have become energized by that hate all in the name of being Christian and fighting for what is right or what we have determined is the true gospel of Christ.

We seem programmed to judge. Just the other day a female journalist in B.C. challenged a hate tweet where someone deemed that her cleavage revealed too much. Social media has become the breeding ground for judgement and hate and it is all too easy to fall prey to being a part of it. Before posting, take a breath.

We judge the homeless, the addicted, the one who is always in pain, the one who seems to have too much money or time on their hands. We judge those who don't keep their yards as lovely as we would like them too. We judge refugees, and people by the colour of their skin. We even judge people based on their jobs. Somehow, we can always find someone to judge, as if our standards are the only ones that matter. And though this statement might also lead some to make a judgement, white privilege is often the benchmark by which we select our standards and feel it is our right to judge others.

This was some of what was going on in the part of the Letter to the Romans that we read from today. People were judging others based on what they ate, some believing that they were better than others based solely on that criteria. It was based in concerns around Jewish dietary requirements and Gentile believers' choices. It seems a petty discussion in the overall scheme of things, based on our current culture, but at that time it brought out the worst in people. Paul takes it on because in that conversation he is able to point out what our focus should be, and judging others is not it.

Paul has spent his time in the letter to the Romans talking about God who loves, who is the only one who has the power and the right to judge all. Remember in that, God loves. Back in chapter two of this letter Paul says, “Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things.” (2:1).

Also remember this letter is written to Christians about Christians. This is not about everyone. This is about all of us who are trying to live out our faith in the best way we know how and understand. I have said over and over that none of us has a corner on

how to do this faith thing right. Catholics, Baptists, Lutherans, Anglicans, Evangelicals, Presbyterians, and others, are all trying to be faithful followers of Christ.

Within our own denominations there are challenges. As I said, for Presbyterians right now it is between whether we will affirm those with different sexual orientations through ordination and marriage or not. Sadly, this question could split our denomination because there does not seem to be room for us to say we are all welcome. All positions seem to say that some are weak in their faith and others strong, and in strength regardless of the position taken we develop arrogant attitudes that spring from what we deem as our strength.

Let me say that again, we develop arrogant attitudes that spring from what we deem as our strength.

Yet Paul writes, “Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.” You see God is God of all Christians. There are certain things that cannot be disputed. If you are a Christian you believe that Jesus was the Son of God and that he came to earth in the flesh to redeem us all, and now sits at the right hand of God. We believe that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine. We believe in the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Those points are not negotiable no matter what other position you take as a Christian on any other topic, but many of the things that we think are sink or swim positions are not as clear cut as we like to argue.

Now, this does not mean that you and I cannot fight for what we believe is right, both in the church and in the world, but it does mean that I cannot judge another for taking a position that I disagree with. I cannot judge. We cannot judge. No matter what, we are first of all Christians and the well being of the other rates above any point we may wish to make or side we want to take. If what we are doing harms another emotionally, physical, mentally, socially, or spiritually, we really need to take a good look at how we are positioning ourselves. “For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.”

Another way to look at this may come from the last couple of verses of the passage, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God. So then, each of us will be accountable to God.” Rather than looking at how others are living out their faith, could it be that examining our own faith, knowing that each of us will be and are accountable to God, is the proper lens through which we should be living. As written in the Gospel of Matthew, “first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour’s eye.” (7:5)

This is a ‘take a breath’ kind of passage. Take a breath and check yourself. Sure, you can share your opinion, you can even fight for what you believe is right, but know that you don’t necessary hold the candle to the only right way. Jesus is the way, the truth,

and the light. Before going on the offensive, check to see that in all you do, say, and think, you are living from a position of a bowed knee and your tongue gives praise to God.

All of this is about relationship. Is our relationship with God and act of praise? Is our concern for the well being of each person we encounter in any place or on any platform? Is what we are saying or doing, whether in a text, tweet, email, over coffee or in a public forum, lifting up others even when we disagree with them? Paul is writing to caution all of us that we are imperfect people trying to find a way to living faithfully as Christians in unity with one another, even if we are not always on the same page.

Take a breath. Whatever you do, may it honour the Lord. We live both within the community of other believers in Christ and we live in a world in need of Christ. "We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's." We are first of all Christians and believe in the God of love. Know that God goes with you and is in you... in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Once again, we come before God in a time of prayer for the world. Let us pray.

### **Closing Prayer**

God of light and hope,  
we pray for those who face lives filled with darkness:  
those who suffer in body, mind, and spirit;  
those bent under burdens of sorrow;  
those who cannot see the way ahead.

We pray for those who accompany others in dark times and places;  
For those who comfort the grieving, and work for healing and new possibilities.  
May all these find their darkness transformed by your presence.

God of liberation and justice,  
we pray for those who suffer abuse, violence, or injustice  
at the hands of powerful people or forces in their lives,  
and for those who have been betrayed by people entrusted with their care.  
Stir in all people a deep respect for life.  
Encourage those who struggle for freedom,  
and work for truth to be heard and reconciliation achieved.

God of peace and promise,  
we pray for those who work for peace in the world,  
for leaders and decision makers,

for those who hold power and can make a difference in their communities,  
and for those who make, interpret, and enforce laws.  
Awaken a respect for the needs of the most vulnerable,  
including the earth and its fragile balances.

God of wisdom and understanding,  
we pray for those who misunderstand the words and actions of others,  
and for those who are misunderstood.

We pray for those who teach, and those who learn,  
especially those who struggle and are afraid to ask for help.

In this challenging school year,  
guide teachers and students in new patterns of learning  
and keep each one safe and healthy.

God of forgiveness and reconciliation;  
we pray for those we have hurt or offended  
and for those to whom we have been unkind.

We pray for those who have hurt us, or been careless with our feelings.

Work in our lives to redeem broken relationships.

Shape us into gracious and forgiving people.

We also remember that Covid 19 has not gone away and continues to affect lives,  
and that lives are being forever changed due to raging wild fires, civil unrest, climate  
change, and war.

In silence we name before you other concerns on our minds today...

And now we pray as Jesus taught us...

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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

From generation to generation, God calls us to participate in healing the world by sharing God's redeeming love. We offer our gifts to God this day as tokens of that love.

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Whether in thought, word, or deed, each of us is accountable to God in whom we put our trust. As we close our time of worship, we consider the words of the hymn

## Hymn

Help us accept each other

632

1. Help us accept each other  
as Christ accepted us;  
teach us as sister, brother,  
each person to embrace.  
Be present, Lord, among us  
and bring us to believe  
we are ourselves accepted  
and meant to love and live.
2. Teach us, O Lord, your lessons,  
as in our daily life  
we struggle to be human  
and search for hope and faith.  
Teach us to care for people,  
for all—not just for some,  
to love them as we find them  
or as they may become.
3. Let your acceptance change us,  
so that we may be moved  
in living situations  
to do the truth in love;  
to practice your acceptance  
until we know by heart  
the table of forgiveness  
and laughter's healing art.
4. Lord, for today's encounters  
with all who are in need,  
who hunger for acceptance,  
for righteousness and bread,  
we need new eyes for seeing,  
new hands for holding on:  
renew us with your Spirit;  
Lord, free us, make us one!

"Help us accept each other," words by Fred Kaan n© Words:  
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## Benediction

Go in peace, practice forgiveness,  
live the gospel, in the name of Jesus, our Lord.

And the blessing of God be with you,  
the love of Jesus fill you,  
and the power of the Holy Spirit sustain you,  
now and forevermore.