

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
September 6, 2020 14th Sunday after Pentecost

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

Words of Welcome

When you think of love, what comes to mind? It is intimate love, passionate love, love for your parents, children, grandchildren? We most often think of love as a feeling, but what if it was that and more? Something worth examining. First let us begin with a call to worship.

Call to Worship

We gather here, where God would teach us:
so we may learn to be more compassionate,
so we may be taught how to be more loving.

We gather here, where Jesus would teach us
the wisdom to choose forgiveness over holding a grudge,
the language of hope so we may speak to all.

We gather here, where the Spirit imparts wisdom,
so we might know how to share grace,
so we would learn to welcome all.

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Hymn

Where charity and love prevail

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| 1. Where charity and love prevail,
there God is ever found;
brought here together by Christ's love,
by love are we thus bound. | 2. With grateful joy and holy fear,
God's charity we learn;
let us with heart and mind and soul
now love God in return. |
| 3. Forgive we now each other's faults
as we our faults confess;
and let us love each other well
in Christian holiness. | 4. Let strife among us be unknown;
let all contentions cease;
be God's the glory that we seek;
be our God's holy peace. |
| 5. Let us recall that in our midst
dwells God's begotten Son;
as members of his body joined,
we are in Christ made one. | 6. No race nor creed can love exclude,
if honoured by God's name;
our family embraces all
whose Father is the same. |

"Where charity and love prevail," Words: translation, Omer Westendorf © 1960 World Library Publications.
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Opening Prayer

Liberating God:
you set us free from our loneliness by the touch of another's hand;
you deliver us from our selfishness, so we may be of service to others;
you break the chains of our pride, so we might walk with you in humility.

Christ of love,
when we would cling to our anger, you send forgiveness to take us by the hand;
when we would snack on our bitterness, you share the Bread of heaven;
when we would drink from sin's fountain, you pour out the Cup of salvation.

Spirit of new life:
you gather us together in God's school to teach us how
to live together, to love together, to serve together,
so that those around us might know that you are in their midst.

All you ask of us is to love one another, God of our lives, and you are more than willing to teach us how. Yet we find this simple request so hard to carry out, this easy lesson so difficult to learn. Someone cuts us off in traffic, and we curse them. Another buys something we want but cannot afford, and we overflow with jealousy. A friend gets the acclaim we wanted, and we whisper about them behind their backs.

Forgive us, Merciful God, and unclasp our hands from our grudges. Thank you that with Christ in our midst, we can become the people you desire: loving, merciful, gentle, and compassionate children of God. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

While it is true that we have sinned,
it is a greater truth that we are forgiven
through God's love in Jesus Christ.
To all who humbly seek the mercy of God I say,
in Jesus Christ your sin is forgiven.
Thanks be to God.

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Scripture Reading Romans 13:8-14

⁸Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

¹¹Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹²the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; ¹³let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

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The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Reflection Love in Action

All you need is love, well that was the sentiments of John Lennon as performed by the Beatles when the song was released in 1967. Flower power was the countercultural theme of the day. I am not going to go into the politics and promises of the time, but it was something to say, “All you need is love” to a world audience in that era. It is actually rather eerie to go back and do a check on what happened in 1967 and see many of the similarities in the stories to what we are experiencing around the globe today. One of the stories of the time that resonates was about 7000 National Guard being brought into Detroit on July 23 of 1967 to restore “law and order” as they say, after nights of rioting and looting. This was just one of many riots happening in the U.S. at the time.

Now that we can access the news on our devices that we carry with us 24/7, I don’t need to make you aware of the challenges the world faces today. Or at least I hope I don’t need to do that. So, a message of love seems pretty important. I read an article this week by a well-known Christian podcaster, Carey Neieuwhof, entitled, *Why are we so angry*.¹ In it the author suggests that it is because we don’t have to face one another as we say hurtful opinionated words. It is a lot harder for most of us to say and do hurtful things to someone we have to face. In wars between nations, wars between friends and families, wars in the church, and wars of words on various social platforms, if you can make others somehow less than, strip them of their lived experience and humanity in your mind, it is easy to forget that they are more than just an adversary. They are people with families, livelihoods, hopes, and aspirations.

Always take a look at who has the power and who is powerless in any situation. Take stock of your own power and how you use it. Do you wield power in a spirit of hate, vengeance, or even smugness, or do you always look to the good of others? By the way, looking to the good of others does not mean that you let people walk over you. It is in your strength that you will be able to serve and lift others up and work for justice. It is important to know where your heart is in everything you do. The Apostle Paul quotes Jesus when he writes, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Love your neighbor as yourself.

It was true in Paul’s time and is even more so now in our global experience that your neighbour is anyone with whom you interact. It is the lawyers, the doctors, teachers, politicians, partner, child, friend, colleague, street person, and yes, your physical neighbour. It is the person at the other end of a phone call, text, or sharing a screen with you during a Zoom meeting, WhatsApp chat or Facetime. It is also the person in another part of the globe who is suffering. The command is to love your neighbor as yourself. Again, the assumption here is that you care about your own well-being. You may not be doing that so well, but our intentions, our hope is that we love and care for ourselves.

¹ <https://careynieuwhof.com/?s=we+are+we+so+angry>. Accessed September 5, 2020.

When it comes to our neighbour, good intentions and hopes are not enough, you must follow through in your words and actions, even if you are not good at doing that for yourself. The letter to the Romans also assumes that because you are a new creation in Christ you are going to continue to mature and be transformed. Of course, you don't need to be Christian to love and care for others, but the kind of love that Paul is talking about, and for that matter Jesus talked about, was love that was inextricable from the love of God. Scholar Eleazar Fernandez writes, "This love, as the Christian mystics put it, has two feet: love of God and love of neighbor. It is not that one must love God first in order to love the neighbor, but that the love of God is simultaneously inseparable from the love of neighbor, because God has become the neighbor."²

So, if everyone is your neighbour, and I get it, we are not thrilled about everyone, in fact we may have some pretty strong feelings of dislike mixed in, how do we love our neighbour? Well, the love we are called to is more an action than it is a feeling. Though it may become difficult to continue to hate or dislike someone you treat with loving kindness. The love Paul is talking about is where we strive to consider others with dignity, respect, and honour. It is in part why he talks about the commandments, what we know as the Ten Commandments. He states, that all the commandments "are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law."

Love as experienced in this way, love for God woven with love for neighbour tends to and most often ensures the well-being of the neighbour. It is love in action, where a smile can make a difference for a store clerk, a phone call can brighten the day of a senior who has been distanced from family and friends, a hot coffee brought to the person living on the street as you get your own Timmy's or Starbucks, all this makes a difference, it is love in action.

Love in action is the politician who stands against the tide of capitalism and power to make sure that housing is a priority, social services are funded, and police have all the training they need, and all these things are done in order to care for those who are so often living in fear of their safety and whose basic needs are rarely met. Love in action is a doctor, nurse, or other health care professional, who takes time to be compassionate with patients and other staff when they themselves are overwhelmed with the demands on their times and energy.

Love in action is business looking out for the best possible solutions and wages for those who work for them. Seeing each person, from the high school drop out to the university graduate, as valuable in the workplace. Love in action is administrators and planners considering not just what investors or stakeholders want in order to achieve their goals,

² Fernandez, Eleazar s., *Feasting on the Word: Year A Volume 4 Season After Pentecost 2*. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2010. P38.

but how that will affect the people who have to implement the plans, how that affects the community and the environment. Love in actions is always about the well-being of others.

Let me state again, your well-being is important too. The assumption is that you love and care for yourself, but it is not without consideration of how what you do ripples through your home, family, organization, church, community, and beyond. Love in action is the mark of Christian community. Another song comes to mind, this time an old hymn whose chorus states, "And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love, and they'll know we are Christians, by our love."

Love in action. It is born out of a love for God who is the God of love, who created us out of and for love. If I am made because of and for love, then you are too, and you are my neighbour. God is in you, just as God is in me.

Love for God and love for neighbour, inseparable, hopeful, transforming, and grace filled. Maybe this is a part of what Paul means when he says, "For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day...put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Just maybe, if we are able to put our love into action, our love for one another worked out as individuals and as Christian community will give us and the world a glimpse of the saving or salvation God wants for us. With Christ and through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Creator of heaven and earth, lover of each and every soul,
we are filled with gratitude for the blessings of this life.

For making us in your image to love and care for one another, we give you thanks.

For the gift of Christ, who redeems and guides us,
and who gives us a pattern for everyday living, we praise you.

Hear us now as we pray for situations where your love and grace are sorely needed
in the world you love.

We pray for the church in this place and around the world, facing so many new
challenges to respond to so many enduring needs...

We pray for this beautiful planet, the fragile home we share with all living things...

For those who rule in this city/town/area and the nations of the world, that they may
find the wisdom and courage to do justice in the decisions they make...

For those who serve as teachers, healers and caregivers facing new situations this
fall, and for all students who return to school in very different circumstances...

For the homeless and the hungry, for the unemployed and the anxious, and for all
who have become more vulnerable through the pandemic...

For those who mourn and those who are alone or feeling isolated...

For the powerless and oppressed, and those caught up in destructive relationships or unjust political systems...

And for the concerns we bear on our hearts this day...

Eternal God, we thank you for those who have gone ahead of us and showed us some measure of your eternal love. Keep us always in communion with you, and with your people from every time and place.

So we join our voices to theirs in the words Jesus 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

God has provided what we need to enjoy God's creation, and serve God and neighbour in loving kindness. Our offering helps us to share that message in word and action.

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

To show by touch and word

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1. To show by touch and word devotion to the earth,
to hold in full regard all life that comes to birth
we need, O God, the will to find the good you had of old in mind.
2. Renew our minds to choose the things that matter most,
our hearts to long for truth till pride-of-self is lost.
For every challenge that we face, we need your guidance and your grace.
3. Let love from day to day be yardstick, rule and norm,
and let our lives portray your word in human form.
Now come with us that we may have your wits about us where we live.

"To Show by Touch and Word" Words: Fred Kaan © 1975 Hope Publishing Company
Music: 1974 LODWICK Used By Permission. CCLI License #1127650

Benediction

As you go from here, remember to love.

For love is what God asks of us; it is the very heart and soul
of what it means to follow Jesus Christ.

So go from here to love and serve God by loving and serving those you meet.

And may God—who loved us first, and who showed us what real love looks like—
be with you and among you wherever you find yourself in the coming week. Amen.

<https://re-worship.blogspot.com>