

# St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

## October 11, 2020 Thanksgiving Sunday

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

### Words of Welcome

Going to a dinner party, a wedding banquet, or just over to friends for a movie? Most often we consider what we are wearing and make choices about what is appropriate or not. Jesus talked about a wedding banquet where a guy gets thrown out because he did not have a wedding robe on. What is up with that? Listen in to the conversation and we will learn together.

### Call to Worship

As God is our shepherd, we need nothing else.  
We rest in green pastures and walk by still waters,  
which renews and refreshes our spirits.

God guides us along paths of righteousness  
And walks with us through shadowed valleys so we are not afraid.  
The shepherd's staff comforts us.

God set the banquet table for us in the presence of our enemies.  
There we're anointed with oil and our cup overflows.  
Goodness and mercy shall never depart from us  
as long as we dwell in the house of God.

— from *The Whole World our Neighborhood: Service Prayers for the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost* by the Rev. Quentin Chin Posted on the **United Church of Christ Worship Ways** website. <http://www.ucc.org/worship/worship-ways/>

As we give our silent thanks and praise, we listen to...

### Hymn

All creatures of our God and King

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1. All creatures of our God and King  
lift up your voice and with us sing:  
sing praises, hallelujah!  
O brother sun with golden beam,  
O sister moon with silver gleam,  
sing praises, sing praises, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!
2. Wild rushing wind, unbounded, strong,  
high clouds that sail in heaven along:  
sing praises, hallelujah!  
New rising dawn in praise rejoice,  
kind lights of evening, find a voice:  
sing praises, sing praises, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!

3. Deep flowing water, pure and clear,  
make music for your God to hear:  
sing praises, hallelujah!  
Fierce fire, so masterful and bright,  
pierce now the dark with heat and light:  
sing praises, sing praises, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!
4. Dear mother earth, who day by day  
brings forth your blessings on our way:  
sing praises, hallelujah!  
All flowers and fruit that in you grow,  
let them God's glory also show:  
sing praises, sing praises, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!
5. Let everyone of tender heart,  
forgiving others, take their part:  
sing praises, hallelujah!  
All who long pain and sorrow bear,  
give God your burdens and your care:  
sing praises, sing praises, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!
6. Let all things their Creator bless,  
and worship God in humbleness:  
sing praises, hallelujah!  
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,  
and praise the spirit, Three-in-One:  
sing praises, sing praises, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!

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## Opening Prayer

Generous and forgiving God,  
you are the first and the last, the giver of all good things.  
Your glory is endless; your power, incomparable.  
Your love stretches wider than the universe,  
your mercy reaches beyond the heights of heaven.  
We gather with hearts thankful for the abundance of your creation  
to worship and adore you.  
God of prophets and parables, as we gather to listen to the scriptures read and  
proclaimed, may we hear your voice, and in hearing, may our lives be transformed  
by your grace.  
Inspired by this time of worship,  
may our hearts overflow with praise each and every day,  
and may our lives reflect our gratitude to you  
in the ways we share your abundant love  
Called to confess our sin, trusting in the grace of God together we pray...

Generous and loving God,  
we confess that in a world where many do not have enough, we enjoy more than we need. In a world where many live in fear, we take peace for granted. In a world where many have lost hope, we become indifferent to despair and grumble about small things. Forgive us, merciful God, and transform our lives to shine with the generosity, peace and hope you offer us in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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## Assurance of Pardon

God, who has never strayed from you, is with you.  
God will heal your hearts and direct your steps.  
Place your life in God's loving care,  
Know that you are forgiven as you forgive others. Amen.

—Nancy Townley, on the [Ministry Matters](#) website

As we seek to understand and know God more we turn now to words of scripture and the parable of the Wedding Banquet.

## Scripture Reading Matthew 22:1-14

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: <sup>2</sup>“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. <sup>3</sup>He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. <sup>4</sup>Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ <sup>5</sup>But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, <sup>6</sup>while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. <sup>7</sup>The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. <sup>8</sup>Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. <sup>9</sup>Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ <sup>10</sup>Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

<sup>11</sup>“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, <sup>12</sup>and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. <sup>13</sup>Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ <sup>14</sup>For many are called, but few are chosen.”

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The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## Message What will we wear?

Wonderful! It is Thanksgiving! A time for family gatherings, a big turkey, stuffing, sitting on the sofa ready for a nap after the big meal. Not! Not this year. There is much to be

thankful for, but the way in which many of us celebrate will be different than what has been or norm. So, this idea of a wedding banquet in our scripture today is very much at odds with our expectations for this year. But let's go back in history to even last year or look ahead to sometime down the road when larger gatherings for a feast or a wedding banquet will again be the part of our celebrations.

Say someone is planning a wedding banquet, there would be a wonderful meal planned, a guest list, and a need for proper attire. Invitations are sent and people would respond. There would be those who can't make it, but most have seized the opportunity for a good meal and a celebration. There may be some who want to know who else is on the guest list and what the seating plan looks like as you may want to know what table you have been assigned to – are you sitting next to your favorite uncle or did you get seated next to the minister?

But what if, when the time for the festivities came - the food was all prepared, and the table set - everyone suddenly decided, "Nope, not going," making light of the obligation to attend, even though they had initially accepted the invitation. Twice notice is given that everything is ready but excuses are made, one was busy doing yard work and harvesting the garden, the other was in the middle of a move, another was watching the playoffs of three different sports, another was cleaning the house, while yet another was volunteering with the food bank. The cost, the effort, and the sacrifice the host put into making this happen and making sure that all knew they were important guests, all of this disregarded.

When it comes to this parable...the story Jesus was telling as recorded by Matthew...there are a few things worth noting. First of all, this is another one of those really difficult parables. Especially in the case of this parable, it can be easy for us to close our ears to the mistreatment, murder, and judgement apparent in the story when our best recollection of this scripture comes from singing the upbeat and catchy hymn the *Wedding Banquet* or *I cannot come* that so many of us know. At the summer kids camp, this song gets sung every evening during song time. The kids request it, but if they really understood, if we really understood the challenge of this parable, we might not find so much joy in our singing.

Matthew is writing these words about 50-70 years after Jesus' death, and his audience was a group of Jewish Christians whose ties with the Temple had been severed. So, Matthew is reflecting on the stories and experiences of Jesus and how that now applies to the context he is in. This is important when you see just how angry the text seems to be. Matthew's community of faith was hurting and angry.

Though there are different ways that scholars have tried to work with this text, a helpful way may be to see it as similar to the parable of the Wicked Tenants. The king is God, the Son, Jesus, and those sent out are the prophets. The people who made light of the invitation to the banquet are those to whom God first brought the good news of grace, forgiveness, and love. The ones invited instead of those on the original guest list are all

the ones who have received and accepted the invitation to be in relationship with God through the birth, baptism, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We know from history that many people of the Jewish faith did not understand or accept Christ as their Messiah. It seems that especially those with power were so busy being in authority and doing things the way they thought they should be done, that when Christ comes on the scene they don't have time to bother with him. He is a royal pain in the behind as it were. So instead of receiving the one that God sent, they reject Jesus. The gospel message is then given to others. Matthew says that, "Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad, so the wedding hall was filled with guests." (v10)

In looking for the good news in this story, this may be one of the pieces...both good and bad were invited and gathered into the hall. There is no explanation as to who makes up the good and the bad, just that all were invited. Some thoughts...we are apt to judge others according to our own standards not seeing that we may also be judged. God sees people very differently from how we view people. We judge their clothes, their cleanliness, their net worth, their prestige, even how they move, speak, or engage with others. We judge on whether or not people behave like us, believe like us, and how they make us feel.

Thankfully, God's banquet has room for a lot of diversity, which includes you and I, or we might not measure up either. God reaches out and extends to all people the invitation to be a part of the banquet. Many people accept the invitation, but they don't realize that with the invitation there is also an obligation. God reaches out to us with forgiveness, love, and grace. God wants a people for himself, but the flip side is when we accept the invitation, we are to respond by living in a way that takes our obligation seriously. Our response, our responsibility, is to love God back, to love people, and live transformed lives of gratitude.

It often appears that people want Jesus as long as they experience blessing and not much is asked of them, but that is just not how it works. We are asked to love those we think are unlovable. We are to give to the work of the kingdom in time, money, energy, and talent, so that others can experience the same love, forgiveness, and grace that we ourselves have come to know.

Professor Scott Hoezee, writes the following,

...what is at stake is the Gospel, the free invitation of grace to sit at the king's table of grace. What's at stake is of infinite, precious value. Yes, you can receive these glorious riches by grace alone but if you cannot be moved by that same grace—if you look at what is proffered and find it less interesting than other things that are occupying your heart and mind and life—then the result cannot be a simple shrug of the divine shoulders. Offer a person a chocolate chip cookie and have him turn it down and it's no big deal. Offer to donate a kidney

that he needs to have his life saved only to have him spurn also that and your eyes widen at such a thing.<sup>1</sup>

What is at stake is life...an abundant and transformed life.

There is one piece yet in this parable that is still somewhat confounding. After the banquet hall is filled, the king comes in to see the guests, and notices a man who was not wearing a wedding robe. The man is dealt with harshly for this, bound and thrown out. Then this final statement, "For many are called, but few are chosen."

Again, there is much discussion on the meaning of this part of the parable, but it seems that one way to look at this is to understand the wedding robe as a metaphor for how we are to respond to God's invitation to relationship. Paul writes in Colossians 3:12, "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience... Above all, clothe yourselves with love."

God's reaches out to invite everyone to be in relationship with God's self, the one who loves and forgives them. If we take this seriously and recognize the enormity of the gift, we also then desire to respond in a way that respects and honours the relationship. It recognizes that who God calls to the banquet is very different from who we might have invited or even wanted to share a table with.

Today more than ever it is easy to disagree with people, see them as wrong, or not worthy, and judge them as not fit for the kingdom of God, but if that is the case we are in trouble, because there are people who see us the same way. Faith has to be inclusive of diversity and difference because if we can write out and write off certain people based on who we think they are, the same can be done to us.

It is not for us to determine the guest list for the banquet or the table seating chart, it is only our responsibility to say yes to the invitation, show up, and clothe ourselves appropriately. To help you know how to dress for the occasion, let me again share the words of Paul from Colossians,

<sup>12</sup>As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. <sup>13</sup>Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup>Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup>And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and

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<sup>1</sup> Hoezee, Scott. [https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-23a-2/?type=the\\_lectionary\\_gospel](https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-23a-2/?type=the_lectionary_gospel)  
Accessed October 10, 2020

spiritual songs to God. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.<sup>2</sup>

This is how we respond to the invitation to the wedding banquet, the kingdom banquet. If you live in this way, you need not worry about who is called and who is chosen, you need only trust that God sees and knows your heart and responds accordingly. Amen.

## **Closing Prayer**

We give you thanks, O God, for all things that make life good, and pray that all people will share in the blessings we know.

For the world,  
for the wonders of earth, sea and sky;  
for beauty in nature and wildlife;  
for the rhythm of the days and seasons;

For waters that refresh and sustain life;  
for soil that is fertile and rich;  
for those who tend crops and care for harvests;  
for those who produce, deliver and market our food  
and especially for those working tirelessly during the pandemic;

For days to work and strength to do it;  
for the many different gifts and talents you have given us;  
for challenges met, especially during months of pandemic relief;  
and for moments of leisure and rest when you restore us;

For human life;  
for talking and thinking together, working on problems and plans;  
for burdens and joys shared;  
for relationships that give life meaning,  
whether enjoyed face to face or at a distance;

For our circle of family and friends;  
for children and their curiosity and joy;  
for the insight that comes with patience and experience;  
and for events shared and memories cherished;

For your care and grace in times of anxiety, doubt and grief;  
for healing in times of illness, confusion, and distress;  
for rejuvenating strength and vision in times of renewal;  
for scientific knowledge and discovery to confront disease and improve health;

For the trust we have that you hear each prayer and know every need;  
that you love and care for each soul and body;

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and that you walk with us through all our days and seasons;  
We give you thanks, O God, and ask that all people share such blessings.

Now we turn to you, O God,  
with the words Jesus taught all his followers to 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

This Thanksgiving came during a complicated time. We celebrate the gifts of God's good earth which sustain us, as well as the labour of those who have kept us supplied with these gifts throughout many difficult months. Some in our community have lost so much through the pandemic; others are grateful for sustaining gifts like friendship more than ever now. Today we bring what we can share, offered so that the ministry and mission of Christ's church can thrive in the challenging days ahead, grateful that God goes with us, whatever we face.

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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

O Jesus, I have promised

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1. O Jesus, I have promised  
to serve thee to the end;  
be thou forever near me,  
my Saviour and my friend:  
I shall not fear the struggle  
if thou art by my side,  
nor wander from the pathway  
if thou wilt be my guide

2. Oh let me feel thee near me:  
the world is ever near;  
I see the sights that dazzle,  
the tempting sounds I hear.  
My foes are ever near me,  
around me and within,  
but, Jesus, draw thou nearer,  
and shield my soul from sin.



3. Oh let me hear thee speaking  
in accents clear and still,  
above the storms of passion,  
the murmurs of selfwill;  
oh speak to reassure me,  
to hasten or control;  
oh speak, and make me listen,  
thou guardian of my soul.

4. O Jesus, thou hast promised  
to all who follow thee,  
that where thou art in glory  
there shall thy servant be,  
and, Jesus, I have promised  
to serve thee to the end;  
oh give me grace to follow  
my Saviour and my friend.

## **Benediction**

Go forth, strengthened to do the work of Christ,  
standing in the gap,  
extending the invitation to the eternal banquet,  
rejoicing in God,  
let your gentleness be known to everyone  
and don't worry about anything.

The God who created you,  
the Christ who redeems you  
and the Spirit who empowers you  
is with you today and ever more. Amen.

[https://www.ucc.org/pentecost\\_19\\_october\\_1](https://www.ucc.org/pentecost_19_october_1)