

# St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

207 South Brodie St.

<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>

**November 22, 2020 Reign of Christ**

## Words of Welcome

Today, is called Reign of Christ Sunday. It is a time to reflect on how we have been God's people in the world and look forward to how we can be part of the work of bringing God's kingdom to the world. This empire, this kingdom is one in which the poor are valued, the naked person clothed, and the hungry fed. It is a very different kingdom or empire than the world is used to seeing and experiencing. May our worship today help us to celebrate and understand more fully what it means when we pray "thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

We begin with the call to worship

## Call to Worship

The Lord is the first and the last,  
our beginning and our end.

**Holy, holy, holy is the Lord our God,  
who was and is, and is to come.**

**Blessing and honour, glory and majesty  
be to our God, now and evermore.**

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Our first hymn celebrates the theme for the service.

## Hymn

*Jesus shall reign where'er the sun*

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| 1. Jesus shall reign where'er the sun<br>does its successive journeys run;<br>his kingdom stretch from shore to shore,<br>till moons shall wax and wane no more. | 2. For him shall endless prayer be made,<br>and praises throng to crown his head;<br>his name like fragrance sweet shall rise<br>with every morning sacrifice. |
| 3. People and realms of every tongue<br>dwell on his love with sweetest song;<br>And infant voices shall proclaim<br>their early blessings on his name.          | 4. Blessings abound where'er he reigns:<br>the prisoners leap to lose their chains;<br>The weary find eternal rest,<br>and all who suffer want are blest.      |
| 5. Let every creature rise and bring<br>the honours due our glorious King;<br>angels descend with songs again,<br>and earth repeat the long Amen.                |  |

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God is present in our worship and our prayer places us in a position of openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit. So we pray.

## **Opening Prayer**

God most holy,  
You are known to us as the Almighty, Powerful, Eternal, Ruler and Lord.  
We call you our Shepherd and Guide.  
We praise you with many names,  
but you are beyond our imagination, so much greater than our words.  
We know you in the stories of Jesus  
and in him, we see your love in action, reaching out to the world.  
You move in us and through us by your Spirit,  
drawing us to you, sending us to live out your Word.  
God most holy, Three in One and One in Three,  
we praise you with our lips and with our lives  
to offer you honour and love.  
Mighty and merciful God,  
we come with a sincere desire to walk in your ways and live under your reign.  
Hear us as we confess to you our sins.  
We confess that we have failed to love fully, forgive wholly,  
and to share the joy of your presence day by day.  
You offer us freedom, but we settle for the familiar.  
You offer risky love, but we opt for safer choices.  
You offer us hope but we prefer knowing what will happen next.  
Teach us to abandon our selfish ways and cautious service,  
so that we can risk offering you our whole lives,  
committed to following Jesus and building your kingdom here on earth.  
God of mystery and majesty, your thoughts are not our thoughts; your ways are not  
our ways. So guide us by your Holy Spirit as we listen for your Word speaking in the  
scriptures, that we may encounter your Living Word and find our thoughts and ways  
transformed by your love. Amen.

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## **Assurance of Pardon**

Hear the good news. God's compassion never fails.  
God's grace is new every morning.  
God's loving kindness is steadfast.  
Know that you are forgiven by the grace of Jesus Christ.  
Forgive each other and live in peace and harmony.

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## Scripture Reading Matthew 25.31-46 (Jamie Gerow)

<sup>31</sup>“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. <sup>32</sup>All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, <sup>33</sup>and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. <sup>34</sup>Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup>I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ <sup>37</sup>Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? <sup>38</sup>And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup>And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ <sup>40</sup>And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ <sup>41</sup>Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; <sup>42</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup>I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ <sup>44</sup>Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ <sup>45</sup>Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ <sup>46</sup>And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

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The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

## Message Loving kindness

In Thornton Wilder’s Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Our Town*. The play’s central character, Emily, is given a chance, following her death, to view a scene from her past. She is told that it cannot be some obviously important day but should be a fairly ordinary time from her bygone life—indeed, she is told that re-visiting even the *least important* day of her life would suffice to teach Emily something very important.

Emily chooses to re-visit her 12<sup>th</sup> birthday, only to discover a vast array of things about that day she had completely forgotten. More than that, however, she is stunned to see how fast life moves and how little she or anyone paid attention to what was happening when it was happening. In the end, Emily cannot bear to watch. “I can’t. I can’t go on,” she cries. “We don’t have time to look at one another. I didn’t realize. So all that was

going on and we never noticed . . . Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it—every, every minute?” she asks. The answer is no. Instead, Emily is told, for the vast majority of people, what it means to be alive is “To move about in a cloud of ignorance.”<sup>1</sup>

It is very difficult for us to realize life while we live it – every, every minute. It takes practice to begin to notice each moment as it happens and even more difficult to see Jesus in every moment, every experience, and particularly every person we encounter. Yet...yet it may be that it is something to strive for based on our reading from Matthew.

Did you happen to notice the same question being asked twice in the passage? It is phrased a little differently, but the content is basically the same. Both the righteous and the accursed asked in some way, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” (Matt 25:44)

The ones who had responded in loving kindness to those in the afore mentioned situations, had not realized that they were tending to Jesus when they cared for people in places and positions of vulnerability and powerlessness. Just as those who had *not* responded did not realize that they had disregarded Jesus in each of the people when they did not respond to the need. It makes one wonder how they may have responded if they had known.

Let’s switch it up. If you had known that your class mate or family member would become wealthy, or a celebrity, or the prime minister, marry a Prince of England, or in any other way had become someone of prominence, would you have treated them differently? If you saw a classmate or family member who was down and out, how would you treat them?

In Ephesians 2:8-9, the Apostle Paul tells us “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” It is a cornerstone understanding of the Christian faith. Our works don’t save us, all we need is faith that the God of grace extends love and forgiveness to us and accept that for ourselves. Yet here Jesus is judging people for what they have or have not done.

It is easy to make this a narrative about being good people and that if you want to get to heaven you have to care for others, but it is about much more than that. There is a deeper concern here. If we know we are saved through faith, then what should it matter whether or not we have cared for others as long as we have believed in and had faith in God?

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<sup>1</sup> Hoezee, Scott.

[https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-29a-2/?type=the\\_lectionary\\_gospel](https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-29a-2/?type=the_lectionary_gospel)

Accessed November 21, 2020.

The thing about being saved by faith is that knowing God is love and loves... that each of us is made in the image of God...our gratitude alone should elicit a response to show love and concern, loving kindness if you will, to others. No one is more important to God than another. In God's eyes, the Prime Minister and the homeless person are both worthy of love, both needing a home, and food, and warmth, and affection.

Still, in this passage, Jesus' specific concern is for the hungry and the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned, which indicates there is something important to pay attention to. Remember neither group had realized that in their care, or lack of care for those in need, they were tending to Jesus himself, but somehow it was natural for the one group to care while the other did not.

Can it be that the mark of a true Christian is someone who assumes that everyone is in need and so pays attention to those in front of them in the moment with little regard for the social, political, or economic standing of the other?

Mother Teresa is revered because of her treatment of the poor in India. This narrative of the sheep and the goats drove her life. The simple gospel message in her example was that an encounter with the beggar, the naked person, the hungry person, the imprisoned, was an encounter with Jesus Christ. In her living she was already considered a saint by many because of her actions, but should it be that only people like Mother Teresa do the work of caring for those who have the least? This story in Matthew tells us that it is something we are all able to do. Caring for others is a response of gratitude to God's saving grace in our own lives.

I have been thinking about a question I have heard asked when it comes to Black Lives Matter. It is a simple one. "Do you have black friends?" It is difficult to pass judgement on people when we know nothing about their struggle. It is the same for the poor, the homeless, or someone in prison. If we know them, then their struggle has a face and a name. Even in this message I have been referring to people in groups...the poor, the homeless, the hungry, those in prison...but how would it change if I could give names, like Molly or LaVonn and show you their faces, share with you their fears and tears.

This passage rang through my head every day that one of our own found himself in prison for a time and I did not get there to visit. For a time, we had teams of people cooking at Shelter House. Those who served had names and faces to go with the hungry and thirsty. When someone comes to our worship that we have not had with us before, I give thanks for those who take a moment to find out the stranger's name and make them feel welcome.

Today is Reign of Christ Sunday, it is the last Sunday in the Christian year. Next Sunday is Advent and a new beginning. For today we have an opportunity to weigh in on how we have brought the kingdom of God to earth by being the visible church in the world.

What things did we do in the last year as a church and as individuals to further the kingdom of God?

When I speak of God's kingdom, remember this is not the same as human empire. The Kingdom of God is marked by those who care for least of these, care for those who are hurting, with love outpoured, not just to friends and family that we are close to, but a genuine love for people because we understand them to be made in the image of God. That each time we look into their face we can see Christ.

So, what have we done as individuals to further that kingdom of love? Only you can answer that. Together we can ask, "What has our church done?" I am thankful to say that we have reached out with money and goods to bring food and clothing to those in need. We have taken both donated and raised money and given it to other organizations to aid in their work to alleviate the challenges that people face day to day. But we cannot sit back and say that we are done.

We have a homeless population that sits around this building everyday. I know it is a struggle and there is fear, but to treat each one as an individual with their own story to go with their name and their face is important. To not just see them as the group of people who get drunk and leave a mess behind, but as individuals who have been beaten down by a system that didn't care. They are a part of families that are in crisis with layers of trauma that have brought them to this moment. It is our work and a blessing to acknowledge their humanity and it would further God's kingdom.

That is just one piece. There is need everywhere you look, but don't let that stop you from doing what you can. Don't let that stop our church from being able to do what we can. God is paying attention to whether or not we have been generous with our love in response to God's overflowing love. We are surrounded by people who have not yet experienced the love of God, and the only way they will is if you and I together help them to know it.

Don't let life move fast. Pay attention. Take time to pay attention to what is happening when it is happening. Let us not move about in a cloud of ignorance, rather practice taking every - every minute to realize our living. See Jesus in every moment, every experience, and particularly every person you encounter.

The words from Micah 6:8 ring out loud and clear in this moment, "And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." May that be our way forward in the coming year and may God bless us as we work to bless others.

In Christ, with Christ and through Christ. Amen.

We take this moment to gather our thoughts and remember the people we love and the world in prayer.

### **Closing Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ, you proclaimed God's kingdom among us and within us.  
In the power of the Spirit, your love is always at work,  
bringing good out of evil and life out of death.

We thank you that your love never lets us go,  
for you have known the good times and the hard times of this life before us.

You came as one who was hungry and thirsty.

Where people live on the streets today, suffer from hunger, or beg for a meal:

Your kingdom come.

**Your will be done.**

You came as a stranger in need of welcome.

Where people live lonely lives or feel like strangers in a strange land; where love is lacking and people face rejection for the colour of their skin or the language they speak:

Your kingdom come.

**Your will be done.**

You came as one who was naked.

Where people lack enough clothing, shelter or life's basic resources; where people live without dignity, exposed to every kind of pain and hardship:

Your kingdom come.

**Your will be done.**

You came as one who was broken.

Where people feel pain in body, mind or spirit;  
where someone grieves the loss of a beloved or the future they planned; in places where the pandemic has done its worst and desperation has moved in:

Your kingdom come.

**Your will be done.**

You came as a Shepherd.

Where people are led astray or nations are ruled by corrupt or greedy leaders and there is no peace in the land:

Your kingdom come.

**Your will be done.**

You came as one who was in prison.

Where people are treated unfairly, targeted or tortured;

where justice has failed and people are punished with cruelty:

Your kingdom come.

**Your will be done.**

You came as one proclaiming the kingdom of God.

And so we lift up these prayers in your name, Lord Jesus,

knowing that your kingdom is drawing near

and that we meet you in the face of those who cry out to us.

Hasten the day when God will wipe away our tears

and death will be no more as we pray the words you 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

God has blessed us in Christ and in creation with all that we need to thrive. Yet Jesus' story reminds us there are so many in this world who do not have what they need. What we offer to God today helps the Church reach out to touch lives in need and share the love of God in so many ways.

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## Hymn

*Christ's is the world*

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1. Christ's is the world in which we move;  
Christ's are the folk we're summoned to love;  
Christ's is the voice which calls us to care,  
and Christ is the one who meets us here.

## Refrain

*To the lost Christ shows his face,  
to the unloved he gives his embrace,  
to those who cry in pain or disgrace  
Christ makes, with his friends, a touching place.*

2. Feel for the people we must avoid –  
strange or bereaved or never employed.



Feel for the women and feel for the men  
who fear that their living is all in vain.

*Refrain*

3. Feel for the parents who've lost their child,  
feel for the women whom men have defiled,  
feel for the baby for whom there's no breast,  
and feel for the weary who find no rest.
4. Feel for the lives by life confused,  
riddled with doubt, in loving abused;  
feel for the lonely heart, conscious of sin,  
which longs to be pure but fears to begin.

*Refrain*

"A touching place," words and music by John Bell © 1989, WGRG, Iona Community, GIA Publications, Inc., agent  
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**Benediction**

It is not enough to acclaim Jesus Christ as our Lord and King.  
Our mission in life is to make his kingdom a reality among us  
and to bring it to those around us by our words and deeds.  
The way to do this is to live as he lived:  
for others, in love and service.  
May almighty God bless you for this task:  
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord  
and to give shape to his kingdom. Thanks be to God!

~ from Liturgies Alive, Models of Celebration.