

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

November 1, 2020

22nd Sunday after Pentecost/All Saints Day

Words of Welcome

I often wonder not just what shapes us, but who influences and shapes our thinking, decisions, and actions. Which voices and examples do we follow and why? Join me as we take a look at what Jesus had to say about that and our responsibility in discerning who and what guides us.

Call to Worship

When we stand at the edge of fear and worry,
God invites us to step into the waters of faith and trust.

When we stand at the edge of the world's pain and need,
Jesus invites us to step into the land of humble service.

When we stand at the edge of our hunger and thirst:
the Spirit invites us to sit at the Table of grace.

©Thom M. Shuman. <http://lectionarylurgies.blogspot.com>

Hymn

Holy, holy, holy

299

1. Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty!
early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!
2. Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea
cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
who wert and art and evermore shalt be.
3. Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
though our eyes in sinfulness thy glory may not see
only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,
perfect in power, in love and purity.
4. Holy, holy, holy. Lord God almighty!
all thy works shall praise thy name in earth and sky and sea.
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

Words and music: public domain

Opening Prayer

Creator, Christ, and Spirit:
God of life and blessing, you created all that exists.
In Christ, you offer your redeeming love to every soul in every situation.

So it is our greatest joy to be united by your Spirit
in the community of your people,
stretching throughout the generations, all around the world you love.
We join our thanks and praise to the voices of all your saints,
both in heaven and on earth,
who worship and adore you, saying:

**All blessing and glory;
all wisdom and thanksgiving;
all honour and power belong to you, O God,
this day and forever and ever!**

God of many generations, your Word comes to us as the witness of your saints over the years. Open our hearts as the scriptures are read and proclaimed this day, so that we too may hear your wisdom and come to know Christ more deeply as your Living Word.

As we open our hearts to your words, we become more aware of your presence and work, but also to how we fall short of all we are meant to be. It is not because we fear you, O God, but because we love you and trust in your loving kindness, that we confess our sins together:

**God of courage and commitment,
We confess that we have not followed the path you set before us.
Discomfort and fear hold us back from fully embracing your gift of new life.
Our anxieties prevent us from bearing witness to your love.
Forgive us, O God. Give us courage that we may be your saints in our own
time, faithfully following Jesus, no matter the cost.**

Adapted from ©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 22nd Sunday after Pentecost, Nov 1, 2020 Year A

Assurance of Pardon

Hear now words from Ephesians as the assurance of pardon...

You are no longer strangers and aliens,
but you are citizens with the saints
and also members of the household of God,
built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,
with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.
In him the whole structure is joined together
and grows into a holy temple in the Lord;
in whom you also are built together spiritually
into a dwelling place for God. —Ephesians 2:19-22, NRSV

Scripture Reading Matthew 23:1-12

¹Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ²"The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; ³therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it;

but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. ⁴They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. ⁵They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. ⁶They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, ⁷and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. ⁸But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. ⁹And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. ¹⁰Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. ¹¹The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹²All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. <http://nrsvbibles.org>

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

Reflection – Integrity

We give people titles in life and will often speak the title before the person's actual name, Mr. Potts, Mrs. Smith, Professor Coates, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Premier Doug Ford, Father James, Reverend Johnston, Queen Elizabeth, Sir Sean Connery (and yes that is a shout out the actor who died on Saturday). Titles are used for a few reasons. It may be to designate a position, or to bestow honour, often both. Many titles are meant to elevate one's position over others. It is especially common in the aristocracy, or in certain Christian traditions, such as in the Catholic and Anglican Church, to use various titles to elevate one position over another.

The use of titles happens in business. We have shareholders, owners, operators, employees, and bosses. In governments there are presidents and prime ministers, back benchers, and The Right Honourable, and His or Her Excellency. This does not mean that there is something wrong with systems that use titles for designations, the challenge becomes when one person sees themselves as more valuable, more prestigious, more important than another because of the title given them. It can become very abusive when people use their titles to gain favour and favors, manipulate laws, or abuse their power in order to abuse others. Sadly, we have more than enough examples of that in the news each and everyday.

For myself, when I first became a minister, another clergy person suggested that when I wanted to buy a car or get a good deal on something, I should wear my clergy collar as it would very likely help move things in a positive way in my direction. That was enough of a manipulation threat for me to rarely wear my collar away from a work situation. When I introduce myself, I will say my name is Reverend Joyce, and quickly follow with, "but just call me Joyce" as I so fear people seeing me as above them, or with power over them.

There was a time when the Bible was processed into the church with the minister following in procession. My theology is that the minister is called out from the congregation as I am one of you, and so prior to Covid, I would sit in a pew and come forward to the pulpit from there. My hope is that I lead from a place of humble service to others. Now I share this knowing that the old saying goes that as soon as you see yourself as being humble you have lost your humility.

All of this is to lead us into what the conversation was about between Jesus, the leaders and authorities of the temple, and the others who listened to the conversation and teaching. We are told that Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses's seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach." Remember Moses was the most venerated teacher and leader of the Hebrew people, to seat on his seat meant something in terms of authority and authoritative teaching. Jesus is saying pay attention to what they say, but as the conversation goes on, he cautions the listeners against doing as the scribes and Pharisees do.

Jesus makes it clear that the teachers are saying one thing, but not living that out in their own lives with integrity and authenticity. One decides whether people have integrity by observing whether or not their words and actions match. Integrity does not mean that a person is void of making mistakes in their lives. Every one messes up, but it is the person who acknowledges they have messed up and changes their behaviour or action that shows integrity. Now sometimes we don't know a person well enough to figure out whether their words and actions match. I caution you not to judge someone on a one-time encounter with them, as you don't know what happened to them in that day before your paths crossed. That is a moment for grace not judgement.

What is being taught here is about those who lead us and who are we listening to, not only in the church, but in our families, our places of work and recreation, our community, country, and world. Do people we choose to follow lead with integrity and authenticity? Are they hypocrites saying one thing while doing another and why?

I watch a BBC show called Inspector Morse. Morse is always asking, "Why? Why did someone act as they did? Why did someone make the decision they made?" He said to a young police officer as they researched an old case, "Always ask why?" Maybe two-year olds are on to something when they start out by asking, "Why is the sky blue and the grass green?"

It is always important to ask why? This does not mean you have to over analyse things, but if your find your mind questioning, or the hair on the back of your neck standing up, ask, "Why?" Is it because what you are seeing and what you are hearing do not match? Remember that we should also turn those questions onto ourselves, both as a church and as individuals. Do our words and actions match? Do we live with integrity and authenticity?

Sometimes it is hard for us to be good judges of whether or not we are living out our faith and our lives in the way we think we are. Having a conversation with a trusted friend and being willing to hear what they observe about us can be very helpful. Warning, what they say may sting, not because they are being cruel, but because it is difficult to be called out.

This is a simplified example but it may be helpful. During a particular time in my learning about being a spiritual care provider, my group had gathered for a time of examination of one another's experiences. This day the conversation ended up focused on me. I was sharing about being sexually molested and one of the men in the group looked at me and said, "Joyce, we are confused, you are telling us about one of the most difficult experiences of your life and you are smiling." I learned in that moment that my face can betray what I may be feeling and experiencing. It also works another way, and everyone who I work with here is given the heads up that if I look angry and frustrated, please check in with me. More than likely I am not, as it is rare for me to feel that way. Rather, it is that I have gone inside myself to work out a solution or figure out next steps. Again, my face betrays me.

These are simple examples about living authentically, and paying attention to what is going on inside us and not judging others too quickly, but it gets much more complicated. It is an important life task to be sure that your words and actions match, but it is also important to pay attention to who influences you and whether or not their words and actions match. It is not enough for the media to sway you one way or another, you have to pay attention to the leaders in your life.

How many of us hear a recorded message in our heads from our parents that has positively or negatively affected how we feel about ourselves. How much of that recording is a truth about us or more a reflection of their expectations and needs? Has a difficult boss or abusive relationship skewed how we view ourselves, our potential, and our value?

This scripture is particularly focused on religious leaders, and so as difficult as it is for me to say, it is important that those who know me well to observe whether or not my living and my preaching match. How do our political leaders make their decisions? Who in the church, in governments, in work places, in our homes and within our social relationships are we listening to? Pay attention to who is being harmed? Who is being lifted up? Who is being celebrated, for their goodness or for other reasons?

The answers to these questions will help each of us discern who to listen to, whether or not their words and actions match or matter. Don't let titles be the only factor in determining who is the greatest among you. In other words, be discerning, pay attention to words and actions for Jesus says, "The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled and all who humble themselves will be exalted." (Matt 23:11-12).

May our lives and those who influence us be examples of integrity and authenticity in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen.

Closing Prayer

God of all people, all places and all situations,
we come seeking your strength, your peace, and your direction,
to know the comfort of your presence and the energy of your Spirit.
You have called us to work towards reconciliation in the world.
Help us to live out the ways of your kingdom in your church and in our lives.

We pray for those who find themselves on the margins of the economy, suffering the anxiety and restriction of low income and the insecurity it brings. Challenge us in our stewardship so that this world will more and more reflect your kingdom, where there is enough for all, and everyone can enjoy the blessings of your creation.

We pray for people and communities facing famine and drought, as well as the pandemic. Give strength to people and agencies dedicated to alleviating misery. Move us to share what we have with those who have so much less.

We pray for those who work for peace and reconciliation in a divided world. Protect those who face violence, persecution and chaos in their homes, workplaces or communities. Transform the day-to-day struggles of those living in danger or discord. Move us to serve as mediators and models of forgiveness in our relationships.

We pray for those around the world and in our community who are dying, and for those who weep for their loved ones who have died. We name in silence those on our hearts this day, including those saints who have blessed us in days and years gone by.

Keep us united in love with all who rest from life in this world but live with you. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Jesus, with your followers in every generation, we pray the words you taught us:

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

The gifts of God that we enjoy come to us through the work of many hands and the commitment of many lives over many centuries. We give our gifts to honour God and all God's saints, praying that we, too, may be a blessing to those who come after us.

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 *I danced in the morning/Lord of the dance* 250

1. I danced in the morning when the world was begun,
and I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun,
and I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth;
at Bethlehem I had my birth.

Refrain

*Dance, then, wherever you may be;
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he,
and I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.*

2. I danced for the scribe and the Pharisee,
but they would not dance and they wouldn't follow me;
I danced for the fishermen, for James and John;
they came with me and the dance went on.

Refrain

3. I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame:
the holy people said it was a shame.
They whipped and they stripped and they hung me high,
and they left me there on a cross to die:

Refrain

4. I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black;
it's hard to dance with the devil on your back.
They buried my body and they thought I'd gone;
but I am the dance, and I still go on:

Refrain

5. They cut me down and I leap up high;
I am the life that'll never, never die;
I'll live in you if you'll live in me:
I am the Lord of the dance, said he.

Refrain

"I danced in the morning," words by Sydney Carter, Music: 19th century, Shaker tune; adaptation by Sydney Carter © 1963 Stainer & Bell
Admin Hope Publishing Company All rights reserved. Annual License with podcasting OneLicense.net A-723877

We end today with a benediction written and sung by Jamie Gerow.
Peace be with you today and every day.

Sung Benediction

Blessings

Jamie Gerow