

# St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

**Second Sunday after Epiphany January 17, 2021**

## Words of Welcome

How well are you known by those who would claim to know you?

Is it even possible to be completely known?

And if you were, would that be a threat or comfort to you?

Would it be a threat or comfort to be known by God?

Let's consider it, beginning with a call to worship.

## Call to Worship

Before we were born, God knew us.

**God knit us together in the womb.**

God searches out our paths, and tracks us along our way.

**So we praise God, because we are fearfully and wonderfully made.**

There is nowhere we can go where God is not with us.

**How wonderful are all God's works! Let us worship God together.**

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## Hymn

*God is love: come heaven, adoring*

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1. God is love: come heaven, adoring;  
God is love: come earth, rejoice.  
Come creation, voices soaring,  
sing exulting with one voice.  
God who laid the earth's foundation,  
God who spread the heavens above,  
God who breathes through all creation—  
God is love, eternal love.
2. God is love, whose arms enfolding  
all the world in one embrace,  
with unfailing grasp are holding  
every child of every race,  
and when human hearts are breaking  
under sorrow's iron rod,  
all the sorrow, all the aching  
wrings with pain the heart of God.
3. God is love, and though with blindness  
sin afflicts all human life,  
God's eternal loving kindness  
guides us through all earthly strife.  
Sin and death and hell shall never  
o'er us final triumph gain;  
God is love: so love forever  
o'er the universe must reign.

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## Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God ever creating, ever loving, ever leading,  
You are stillness when we are frantic;  
You are truth when we are confused and perplexed.  
You give us freedom when we are paralyzed by fear;  
You send us light when we stumble in the darkness.  
You are love when we feel lonely and empty.  
For all that you are, all that you have been, and all that you will be for us,  
we praise you, Creator, Christ, Spirit.  
We turn to you in worship,  
to listen for your voice and seek your way for us.

Desiring to be transformed people,  
we bring to you our prayers of confession:

Merciful God, you call us to fullness of life but we have settled for much less.  
We have wandered from your ways and wasted your gifts.  
We ignore the pain of others, and turn our faces from injustice.  
At times we have hidden from the truth,  
especially when it calls us to do what we are afraid to do.  
We have given up in despair when problems around us seem overwhelming.  
Forgive us our small faith. Give us courage to listen and respond when you call.  
Spirit of truth and life, speak to us in the rich and ancient words of the scriptures.  
Let us hear your call so that we may leave behind our old ways,  
and follow in the footsteps of Christ, the Living Word. Amen.

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## Assurance of Pardon

Believe the good news! In Christ, God has offered us forgiveness for all our sins and shortcomings. Trust that this forgiveness is for you, and know that God's steadfast love and grace endure forever.

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## Scripture Reading Psalm 139

<sup>1</sup>O Lord, you have searched me and known me.  
<sup>2</sup>You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.  
<sup>3</sup>You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.  
<sup>4</sup>Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O Lord, you know it completely.  
<sup>5</sup>You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.  
<sup>6</sup>Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;

it is so high that I cannot attain it.

<sup>7</sup>Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence?

<sup>8</sup>If I ascend to heaven, you are there;

if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

<sup>9</sup>If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

<sup>10</sup>even there your hand shall lead me,

and your right hand shall hold me fast.

<sup>11</sup>If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and the light around me become night,"

<sup>12</sup>even the darkness is not dark to you;

the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

<sup>13</sup>For it was you who formed my inward parts;

you knit me together in my mother's womb.

<sup>14</sup>I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

<sup>15</sup>My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

<sup>16</sup>Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.

In your book were written all the days that were formed for me,  
when none of them as yet existed.

<sup>17</sup>How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!

How vast is the sum of them!

<sup>18</sup>I try to count them—they are more than the sand;

I come to the end—I am still with you.

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

## **Message** Complexity of being known

In 1937 Walt Disney released the first full-length animated movie: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Producing an animated movie was gargantuan task. Disney artists drew over one million pictures. Each picture flashed onto the screen for a mere one-twenty-fourth of a second.<sup>1</sup> Disney knew the story from conception to its completion. It was his vision, his dream. The story itself came from the 1812 Grimm Brothers collection of fairy tales, but the film, the way the characters were developed, the sound track, each detail was known to Walt. He knew each character, made all the decisions regarding what

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<sup>1</sup> Larson, Craig Brian. From *Leadership Journal: 750 Engaging Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Writers*. Baker Books. Grand Rapids. 2008. P431.

scenes would be incorporated and what would end up on the cutting room floor. Everything was known to him.

Is this what it means to be known? A person might say that to be known you have to know the name of the other, maybe their occupation, their family. There are different levels of knowing, or different contexts for knowing someone. It would be a rare occasion for anyone to know everything about another person. The closest one might get is in an intimate loving relationship where the bed is shared in marriage or other civil union. Still, it would be hard to say that anyone could know us so intimately that they would know our every thought and emotion.

Psalm 139 is all about God knowing us. This knowing started from the moment our inward parts were being knit together in our mother's womb (v13). The Psalmist writes that God knows each of us so intimately that "Even before a word is on [our] tongue O Lord you know it completely." (v4)

It would be easy to over preach this particular psalm because the words really speak for themselves. The hope here is to allow you to see just how deeply God is in relationship with you, with everyone. Most of us really don't want anyone to know everything about us. Even the most honest and out there people have parts of themselves that they would prefer to hide, to not be known. It would be threatening to have people know ev-er-y-thing about us. It might feel threatening to think that God knows everything, is acquainted with all our ways. Still remembering and trusting that God intimately knows us...knows everything about us and loves us anyway, can also be a word of comfort. It is a word of hope.

The first and third stanzas of this psalm talk about just how God knows every detail about us, the second stanza talks about how God is present everywhere. There is nowhere we can hide from God's presence, "even the darkness is not dark to God; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to God. It also means that darkness is nothing to fear because God is there. In the darkness of our most challenging moments God is with us.

Even in the darkness, even when we feel far away from God and others, physically or metaphorically, we can trust that God is present. This presence, this knowing God, is not a threat. Psalm 139 assures us that we are created by God and that means we are valuable. God is present because God loves us, love you. God loves your next door neighbour, your challenging teenager, your mentally ill son our daughter, your mother, your father, the person without a home and food in their belly. God loves each person regardless of faith tradition, sexual orientation, social standing, financial security or insecurity, or ability to move around.

You are known to God. Not only that, you are accompanied by God. God is not there just as some omnipresent being that watches everything you do, but rather is an active presence in our lives. God goes with us, accompanies us in every moment of our lives because God desires to be in relationship with us. God created human beings to be in relationship with each one and everyone.

Because of this love, God will guide those who desire to be in relationship with God. God will sustain those who look to be in relationship with God. It does not mean that life will be easy or filled with good things. It does mean that whatever you face you are conscious of the fact that God goes with you, is guiding you, and sustaining you. Sometimes God does it through prayer, reading, nature, or most often through another person as a wise guide and counselor. The thing is to trust that you are not alone, that God knows you so deeply, so intimately, that you cannot hide your fear, your desires, your hope.

When Walt Disney made *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, he knew every intimate detail of the movie, still he could not be involved in every stroke of the pencil or filming of each frame, he could not play every note in the music, or mix every ounce of paint used.

However, as the psalmist writes, God does know every stitch, every weave, every thought and action or reaction. Be in awe of that, not afraid. Know that this is a sign of hope for every person. God loves you so much that you are never alone, you are awesomely and wonderfully made. Though we don't understand or know God's thoughts, in the end, you are with God and God is with you. You are created, sustained, and loved. Thanks be to God. Amen.

### **Closing Prayer**

God of all life and each life,  
Each week our prayers combine with those of people in many different places.  
We face many different challenges and also a common challenge,  
responding to the pandemic, though in so many different contexts.  
We thank you for honouring all our prayers with the gift of your Spirit,  
so that we can find strength and wisdom we need in you.

We remember before you today people living face to face with war and violence,  
in those places where hatred has been stirred up and fear stalks people on their own  
streets; And we pray for all those displaced by violence, seeking refuge among us or  
in camps and communities around the world:

God, speak to us a word of peace:

**Embrace us with your love.**

We remember before you today people living face to face with so much economic uncertainty, for those who have lost their jobs or worry what may happen as this year unfolds:

God, speak to us a word of reassurance:

**Embrace us with your love.**

We remember before you today people living face to face with discrimination and social prejudice, for those who are bullied at school, at work or at home, for those who are made ashamed of who they are:

God, speak to us a word of dignity:

**Embrace us with your love.**

We remember before you today people living face to face with illness and suffering, for those struggling with disability, made more complex these days, and for those who know grief or anxiety, especially those cut off from comfort or support by months of pandemic isolation:

God, speak to us a word of healing:

**Embrace us with your love.**

We remember before you today people divided by differences of race or creed, of culture, gender or generation: and we pray for all those who seek to build bridges of understanding and co-operation across differences:

God, speak to us a word of reconciliation:

**Embrace us with your love.**

We remember before you today your whole creation and its many vulnerable facets and faces. Teach us how to care for the rips and tears in the fabric of the world you love so we may live together wisely:

God, speak to us a word of wisdom:

**Embrace us with your love.**

And so, joining our voices to Jesus' followers around the world, we pray the words he taught us: ©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany, January 15, 2021, Year B.

## **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

A gift from God is new possibilities. In Christ, God creates a future for each of us, giving us strength and opportunities to flourish in our faith. We can allow God to use us to create new possibilities in the world for those who are uncertain about what the future holds. Our gifts, our offerings, are a token of our trust that God holds the future for us all. Adapted from ©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany, January 15, 2021, Year B.

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## Hymn

*Come, let us sing to the Lord our song*

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1. Come, let us sing to the Lord our song:  
we have stood silently too long;  
surely the Lord deserves our praise,  
so joyfully thank God for our days.
2. O thirsty soul, come drink at the well;  
God's living waters will never fail.  
Surely the Lord will help you to stand,  
strengthened and comforted by God's hand.
3. You dwell among us and cause us to pray,  
and walk with each other following your way;  
our precious brothers and sisters will grow  
in the fulfilling love they know.
4. Deserts shall bloom and mountains shall sing  
to the desire of all living things.  
Come, all you creatures, high and low;  
let your praises endlessly flow.

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## Benediction (1 Samuel 3, Psalm 139)

And now, sisters and brothers,  
go from this place knowing that the God who made you  
also sustains you.

The God who calls you also goes with you.

The God who loved you before you were born  
still loves you today, and into all the tomorrows. Amen.

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