

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

Second Sunday after Christmas Day January 3, 2021

Words of Welcome

This past year was a dark one in the history of our world, and for many of us individually. Even if we have gotten through the pandemic this far without too many financial or emotional challenges, most people would not proclaim this last year, 2020 as their best year ever. Our relationships, finances, dreams, and plans have been affected and challenged. Grace is a word that seems appropriate to use at this time. If you want to hear a little more about that, stay with me for a time. We begin with a call to worship.

Call to Worship

Long ago, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets;
now God has spoken to us by a Son.

God made the world through the Son, who has been appointed heir of all things and the perfect reflection of God's glory.

**The Son is the exact representation of God's being,
sustaining all things by his powerful Word.**

Praise God for the gift of the Son.

We welcome the light of the world! —based on Hebrews 1:1-3
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Hymn

Now greet the swiftly changing year

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| 1. Now greet the swiftly changing year with joy and penitence sincere; rejoice; rejoice; with thanks embrace another year of grace. | 2. Christ's love abundant far exceeds the volume of a whole year's needs; rejoice; rejoice; with thanks embrace another year of grace. |
| 3. With such a God to lead our way in hazard and prosperity, what need we fear in earth or space in this new year of grace? | 4. "All glory be to God on high and peace on earth," the angels cry; rejoice; rejoice; with thanks embrace another year of grace. |

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Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God of majesty and mystery, we come to you this day in wonder.
As the year opens before us, we wonder what it holds in store.
We wonder where you will lead us, how you will call us to follow in the days ahead.
Your purposes are beyond our comprehension, O God,
but your presence is always with us. So we offer you our trust for the days ahead,

as we seek to follow in the footsteps of Christ, our newborn King.

God of light and life,

you have come to us in Christ Jesus to open a path to new life.

Yet once the New Year has begun,

we long for things to get back to normal, especially this year.

We confess that our resolutions for change often don't last long.

Old habits draw us back to familiar ways.

It is so hard for us to make a new beginning, O God,

even with the best of intentions.

Forgive us, O God, and renew our determination to know you more clearly,

love you more dearly and follow you more nearly, day by day.

God of Word and Wisdom, we celebrate your Word made flesh in Christ Jesus.

Send us your Spirit this day as we listen for your Word speaking in the scriptures.

Inspire us to make that Word flesh once more in the way we live for Christ's sake.

Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

To all who have received him, to those who believe in his name,

he gave the right to become children of God. —from John 1:9, 12, NIV

Beloved, know that you are forgiven and live your life in a way that

shows God's forgiveness and love to others. Amen.

Scripture Reading John 1:1 –18

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵(John testified to him and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me."') ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon

grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

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

Message

If I were to say that 2020 was a dark year, I think pretty much everyone would understand that to mean that it was a year of fear, uncertainty, challenge, and a lack of hope. Many could add to the layers of that as they experienced the death of people they loved and the pain of not being near or present in the moment. Many have struggled with illness. Some have experienced even more physical, emotional, and mental abuse than would have been the case as there was no where to escape. It was particularly challenging when schools, daycares and businesses were closed, along with churches, event and sports centers, libraries, art galleries, dance studios, basically everything we could go to enjoy life or escape life's demands.

In times of trouble, stress, and change, it can be difficult to go easy on ourselves and others. Even the most even tempered of people have gone through moments when they've just had enough. Lack of patience with ourselves and others leads to harsh words, maybe storming out the door, or muttering under one's breath. Lack of patience and choosing to focus on oneself instead of the need of another may find you turning and churning on the inside while, lashing out, or keeping the anger and frustration bottled up. None of it is a healthy way to deal with the struggles we are facing.

We also live in a world where people are busy judging one another. And please understand there is a difference between judgment because you think you know better, and judgment where justice is involved. Justice always has the needs and concerns of the most vulnerable at its heart. Still, we are faced with a barrage of stories both in the news and in our tweeter feeds that make it all too easy to pass judgement on others without knowing much of the back story or not taking the time to do our own research. We judge what others wear, what they say or write, whether or not they are good people just by how they treat us in a particular moment, all without considering if there is something else going on.

When we encounter the unpleasant store clerk, or decide if we like a health care professional in a one-off encounter, when our children sulk or argue back, or the senior says, "No one ever calls me", even though you just called the day before, when the homeless person asks for money, in these moments we rarely take the time to really figure out what is at the heart of the comment, reaction, or experience. In a split second we have already passed judgement. It is only the wise who have learned that the world does not revolve around them, that everyone has a story, and that sometimes people have bad moments that don't portray them in the best light.

There are people who make very unwise decisions, and there are consequences to their actions, still it is always wise to respond with grace remembering that each one of us has made decisions that we regret and knew in the moment or in hindsight that we were in error.

I mentioned responding with grace...but what does that really mean. Grace is one of those intangibles in life. Grace encompasses humility, forgiveness, love, kindness. Often it seems to be something that we need to work at and comes with a generous amount of wisdom, which sadly is most easily learned when one has gone through their own struggles and times of adversity. Wisdom comes from learning to offer grace to oneself and through that experience being able to extend grace to others. There are examples of grace but quite likely the one that is by far the most read about and love filled example of grace was the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

One of the most beautiful and poetic passages in scripture comes from the first verses of the Gospel of John in which Jesus is spoken about as being the Word of God, with God, and God. The images of light and dark, of Jesus being light in a dark world, have given people words of hope and promise for centuries, but this day the words that speak of grace have my attention. Verses 14-17 read, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth...From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (NRSV)

God’s grace that came through Jesus is much deeper and broader than the grace that we can extend to one another. Professor and minister Rolf Jacobson, defines grace as, “The free gift in which God gives all – eternal life, forgiveness, purpose, [and] meaning – to human beings.”¹

Jesus was the living example of God’s grace. When we read the stories of how Jesus came into the world as one of flesh and blood, who experienced life as we do, as people who are in relationship with others, whose purpose was to bring hope, light, truth, love, and forgiveness to the world, we see God’s gift of grace lived. Jesus came full of grace and truth and from his grace we have received grace upon grace. Take a moment to drink that in. We have received grace upon grace. We have received in that grace, eternal life, forgiveness, purpose, and meaning. We have received grace upon grace.

In the ordinary, difficult, day to day grind, it can be tough to remember or even believe that God loves us so much that God’s desire was, is, and always will be, that we know God’s love for us, God’s gift of eternal life, that begins right now, not just for when we die, but now and then. We have been forgiven all that we have messed up, all that we are messing up, and all that we will mess up, because we are imperfect people living imperfect lives. Each of us has purpose even when we find we our minds and bodies, or life in general, limiting what we think we should be able or want to do. And our lives have

¹ Jacobson, Rolf A. Editor. *Crazy Talk – A Not-So-Stuffy Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Augsburg Books. Minneapolis. 2008. P78.

meaning. Just be being created you have value. You don't have to prove your worth; you are valuable and loved by God – always.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life and the life was the light of all people.” (John 1:1-4 NRSV).

Jesus was, is, and will always be the Word and because all things have come into being through him...the one full of grace and truth...you can trust that you are created out of love, to live knowing that you have received grace upon grace. You and every person you encounter is given the same gift of grace upon grace. It may be that you have to remind yourself of that truth. It may be that you can help remind or teach another about that truth, but live into it. Trust it. Believe it.

Now and everyday may you remember that God's gift at Christmas and everyday is grace – eternal life, forgiveness, purpose, and meaning. Live your life in the spirit and truth of Jesus grace and offering it to others. To God be the glory today and everyday. Amen.

Closing Prayer

God of all time and space, as we gather in prayer, we recognize that our lives are but small details in the vast expanse of your universe. So we thank you for attending to the details of our lives. We thank you for the year just past, for walking through the hard days and uncertainties with us, and for the gifts of encouragement and friendship that cheered us.

We give thanks for accomplishments in ministry and mission, for generosity offered to those in need, and for new possibilities explored in online worship, education and outreach. As your spirit guides us into the future, our hearts kneel before you, O God. The year just ending has held so many sorrows and challenges for so many. We remember dear ones who have died and pray for those who look ahead in loneliness or sadness...

We pray for those who have faced challenges in health, in their families or at work... Support each one who needs you close by.

God of light and love, as we face the year ahead, we are aware that much around us is still uncertain. We seek your strength and guidance in each challenge we will face. Draw near to each one who must confront illness, loss or changing circumstances.

Guide those for whom new opportunities appear and choices must be made...

God of community and commitment, we pray for wisdom and courage in the year ahead. Strengthen us as your people to be a committed witness to your love. Help us reach out to our community in creative ways, and make us effective citizens in these challenging times.

Guide leaders in our nation and in nations around the world so that justice and peace may prevail, resources to meet health and hunger needs be shared, and understanding and respect grow among divided peoples.

Receive our humble prayers and encourage us onward
in the name of Jesus our Christ who taught us 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

God has sent Light into the world in Christ, and no darkness can overcome it. We offer you our gifts, trusting that God can use them to accomplish more than we can ask or imagine and we ask God to bless our gifts and us, so that in the year ahead, we can shine your light into places of need and on people seeking to find a new purpose, for the sake of Christ who is Light for the World. Amen.

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Hymn

Arise, your light is come

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| 1. Arise, your light us come! The Spirit's call obey; show forth the glory of your God which shines on you today. | 2. Arise, your light is come! Fling wide the prison door; proclaim the captive's liberty, good tidings to the poor. |
| 3. Arise, your light is come! All you in sorrow born, bind up the broken-hearted ones and comfort those who mourn. | 4. Arise, your light is come! The mountains burst in song! Rise up like the eagles on the wing; God's power will make us strong. |

"Arise, your light is come," Words: Ruth Duck. Words © 1992 GIA Publications, Inc. Music: public domain
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Benediction

Go forth into the world. Proclaim the good news of Christ.
Receive the inheritance of God's promise. Live in the light of the gospel.

God, ruler of heaven and earth, dismiss you in peace;
Jesus Christ, light of the world, uphold you in love;
the Holy Spirit, revealer of God's mystery, lead you in truth.

Feasting on the Word Worship Companion: Liturgies for Year B, Volume 1 © 2014 Westminster John Knox Press. P44.