

# St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>

Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski

**Fourth Sunday after Epiphany January 31, 2021**

## Words of Welcome

Each day we are bombarded with news that the world is in chaos. The Corona virus is getting stronger, we are becoming even more limited in what we can do. Governments and countries are challenged politically and socially. This is on top of the fears, hardships, struggles, illness, and demons that we may face in our personal lives. Still the word of God from the Gospel of Mark brings hope for healing and the real possibility for transformation. As we prepare for that conversation, let's begin with a call to worship.

## Call to Worship

We gather in this sacred space,  
to offer our thanks to God with all our hearts.  
We gather as this community of faith,  
to follow Jesus, who longs to lead us into life.  
We gather in these moments,  
to learn all we can of grace from the Holy Spirit.

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Hear now a hymn that sounds almost like a call to battle, or a Christian national anthem. It is a call to know that God got this, whatever we may face, God's kingdom is present, awesome, filled with love and light.

## Hymn

*We've a story to tell to the nations*

765

1. We've a story to tell to the nations  
that shall turn their hearts to the right,  
a story of truth and mercy,  
a story of peace and light,  
a story of peace and light,
2. We've a song to be sung to the nations  
that shall lift their hearts to the Lord,  
a song that shall conquer evil  
and shatter the spear and sword,  
and shatter the spear and sword,

*Refrain*

*Refrain:*

for the darkness shall turn to dawning,  
and the dawning to noonday bright,  
and Christ's great kingdom  
shall come on earth,  
the kingdom of love and light.

3. We've a message to give to the nations,  
that the Lord who reigneth above  
hath sent us his Son to save us,  
and show us that God is love,  
and show us that God is love,

*Refrain*

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## Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Loving God, you are the wisdom behind all mystery,

the glory hidden in all that makes us wonder,  
the strength in all that nourishes.

When our eyes are open and our spirits alert, we experience your glory around us.  
Scattered throughout the earth, smouldering deep inside us,  
radiating in acts of love, sparks of your glory reside.

Deep is our joy each time we encounter you.

So we gather in worship to express our reverence and praise.

Together we celebrate the good we have experienced,  
knowing it all comes from your hand, Gracious God.

And yet, we are strangely resistant to your grace.

There are so many times we turn from you, O God.

We forget that food for body and soul comes from your goodness.

We focus on what troubles us and ignore the help and healing you offer.

We seek wisdom and meaning in the wrong places.

We confess we can be cruel, harming the earth, other living beings, and one another. Forgive us. Open our eyes to your wonder and wisdom.

Source of Wisdom, still our minds in these moments of listening, so that we may be fully present and attuned to your life-giving Word this day.

Give us the courage to live lives that overflow with your love  
for the sake of Christ who loves us. Amen.

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## **Assurance of Pardon**

We know who God is – the One who comes to love us, to forgive us, and to save us.  
Thanks be to God. We will spread this good news, and share this grace and hope,  
with everyone we meet. Amen.

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## **Scripture Reading Mark 1:21-28**

<sup>21</sup>They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. <sup>22</sup>They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup>Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, <sup>24</sup>and he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” <sup>25</sup>But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” <sup>26</sup>And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. <sup>27</sup>They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” <sup>28</sup>At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

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

## **Message** What is this?

Our world is filled with people who speak with authority. In democratic societies Presidents and Prime Ministers are given authority by the vote of the people. In this time of pandemic, the chief medical officer of health has a voice that most of us have never paid much attention to before. Teachers have authority over students, administration over workers, police, lawyers, and judges have authority in terms of the law, bosses have authority over staff, and parents have authority over young children and teens. It really doesn't matter how you live your life; you will find that someone somewhere has the power and means to speak to you as one with authority.

And so, when we hear the words, "What is this? A new teaching - with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him," (1:27) we can at very least get that Jesus had some kind of power over the moment and it was evident in his words and actions.

Let's get into the moment a little by using our imaginations. It is a regular day of Sabbath, a day of rest and worship. It is like those of us who get to church regularly. We get up, get ready for the day and head off. Sometimes we go and we are grumpy or upset, some of us do it out of routine, a handful really do come in anticipation of how the Holy Spirit will move in the worship service, but few come with high expectations for something extraordinary to happen.

That was the kind of day it would have been for those showing up on at this particular worship service, expecting the prayers, praise, and teaching. Most of us preachers are not that spectacular, we are just doing our best to bring a useful message to those who listen. There is a hope that the message and the whole of worship will aid in transforming lives. However, it is only occasionally that one actually gets to witness that transformation in a big way. Most of us are changing, but it is incrementally.

To bring us back to the story...it is an ordinary sabbath, but this man Jesus, comes into this synagogue on this day and immediately begins to teach. I have said this before it is important to note just how many times Mark uses the word immediately as he retells the stories of Jesus. There is movement, action, something to notice in everything that Jesus is doing, saying, and being. Something about Jesus makes people pay attention and what he does brings healing. In this first act of ministry recorded by Mark, Jesus is teaching and healing. It will be the story throughout this gospel. This moment in this place of worship is just the first of many that will be witnessed by those who follow Jesus and by those of us who now read the scriptures.

In a reading such as this one, of Jesus teaching and healing the man with an unclean spirit, we can get caught up in trying to define what was wrong with the man, and with all our Hollywood movies that show demons being exorcized we can conjure up quite an imaginative picture. Yet our focus might better be set upon the action of Jesus. Jesus

healed the man. Jesus rid him of all that was keeping him in bondage. By Jesus' word and power, the unclean spirit came out of the man and he was freed of that which had prevailed in his body, mind, and spirit.

It is important to note that it was not just the man and the unclean spirit that responded to Jesus in that moment. Jesus had an effect on those who witnessed the event as well. This was an inaugural moment of the inbreaking of the kingdom of God into the regular everydayness of life and things change. It was not like everything in the world changed in that moment, but one person's life was changed dramatically and others were witness to that change, that transformation.

And that is really what is it like for us still; as Christians we believe in the power of the Holy Spirit and that it is the Spirit that flows from God and from Jesus that is still bringing the kingdom of God to us in our time, as has happened since Jesus arrived on the scene. That Spirit continues to change – transform – lives each and everyday. As I noted earlier, it tends to happen incrementally in people's lives, but for those who choose to pay attention, we witness God doing God's work in the lives of those God created in God's own image.

We see people healed in body, mind, and spirit. We see transformation and reconciliation in people, between people, and in creation. As I write I feel like I am speaking in generalities, but each of us faces our own uncleanliness. It may be addiction, it may be broken relationships, it may be illness, stress, anger, or whatever you experience to add to the list. We see the uncleanliness of power and politics, of groups of people who wish to do harm to others and to the environment.

In all of it we have the opportunity to hear Jesus speak to us through the scriptures and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We hear his voice as one that speaks a new teaching, a voice of authority, but also a voice of compassion, justice, healing, and love, as the words of the New Testament witness and attest to us.

When you read the Bible, be astounded at Jesus' teaching for he teaches as one having authority. That authority comes as the kingdom of God reaches us through word written and spoken, in actions and decisions, in nature and in relationships, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Whatever has you tied up and struggling know that Christ is with you and has the power to release you and heal. What that healing will look like is not for me to say, but it will bring peace to your being, and hope to your heart. You will know that God has not left you abandoned or hopeless, but loved and valued, even if the world feels like it has turned its back on you.

Jesus did not come to destroy but to heal. Jesus came that we may have life and have it abundantly. Jesus came with authority, power, and love outpoured for us. Live your life knowing that Jesus came into the world for you and every human being. As we wait for

the fullness of the kingdom of God, we know that God has already begun the work of transformation in you and me and everyone we may or may not meet. Thanks be to God for the amazing gift of transforming compassion, love, and life, and for his teaching with authority that has power to heal. In Jesus name, Amen.

## **Prayers of the People**

Holy God, Lord of heaven and earth,  
in you we live and move and have our being.  
Your energy fills the cosmos and enlivens every cell of our bodies.  
You are around us, within us and beyond us.

Thank you for the simple pleasures of each day,  
and for the strength to meet the challenges that arise.  
When it feels like we have come to the end of our own resources,  
replenish us with the energy of your Spirit  
so that we know you are there for us and with us.

In these strange times of isolation and distancing,  
we are grateful for prayer in its many forms,  
for the intimate ways we can find communion with you:  
in word and in silence, in music and movement,  
in the Spirit's breath within us.

Draw close to us when we are feeling frustration or fear in the days ahead,  
and renew our spirits to continue serving you as best we can.

Hear us now as we pray for the earth,  
this precious and fragile home to all living things:

For declining species of plant and animal life *(Hold a silence)*

For the earth's climate *(Hold a silence)*

For the oceans and the rainforests. *(Hold a silence)*

Teach us how to be more faithful stewards of your earth  
and live more respectfully in your creation.

Hear us as we pray for the economy:

For those whose decisions shape it *(Hold a silence)*

For employers and business owners *(Hold a silence)*

For workers and those who cannot find work *(Hold a silence)*

For those who have lost their jobs and those whose businesses are at risk  
*(Hold a silence)*

For all who seek economic justice, fairness and the common good,  
And for those who struggle to discern what this means in a complex world.  
*(Hold a silence)*

Teach us how to care for our neighbours in these days of economic uncertainty.

We pray for our own circle of family and friends.  
Heal, bless, lead and encourage them.  
Grant to each one the particular gifts needed this day  
and lead them to a healthy, productive future. *(Hold a silence)*

We pray for neighbours and strangers in our community  
who face struggles and sorrows as the pandemic stretches on. *(Hold a silence)*

Remind us that we belong to each other and to you  
and help us respond to one another with compassion and kindness.

Finally, in silence, we bring to you the cares and hopes on our minds today.  
*(Hold a silence)*

Thank you for hearing the prayers of every heart.

We join our prayers with all who follow Jesus as we pray the words he taught;

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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

Jesus' ministry was often filled with challenge and choice. We face challenge and choice as we follow him in a new day and age. The invitation to give an offering week by week is a challenge. The gifts we choose to offer continue his ministry of healing and hope. Take the challenge and give as God has blessed you.

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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.

There is a wonderful healing hymn that refers to a balm in Gilead. Gilead is the central part of the territory east of the Jordan. This area was famous for its balm (Jeremiah 8:22). The theme of the hymn is Jesus as the balm that heals us.

## Hymn

*There is a balm in Gilead*

747

*Refrain:*

There is a balm in Gilead

1. Sometimes I feel discouraged,  
and think my work's in vain,

to make the wounded whole.  
There is a balm in Gilead  
to heal the sinsick soul.

2. Don't ever feel discouraged,  
for Jesus is your friend,  
who, if you ask for knowledge,  
will never fail to lend.

*Refrain*

but then the Holy Spirit  
revives my soul again.

*Refrain*

3. If you cannot preach like Peter,  
if you cannot pray like Paul,  
you can tell the love of Jesus,  
who died to save us all.

*Refrain*

## **Benediction**

Jesus comes to us, offering healing and hope,  
speaking and acting with authority.

Listen to him.

Go into this world,

confident in God's love and healing power.

Go in peace and may God's love and peace always be with you.

<https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/2279/worship-connection-january-31-2021>