

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>

Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski

First Sunday in Lent February 21, 2021

Words of Welcome

Today is the first Sunday of Lent, a time for reflection, for preparing for the coming of Holy Week. There are some pretty important things to ponder in the scripture during this time that can impact the way we live. Join me as we consider what it means that the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near. We begin with a call to worship.

Call to Worship

We begin our journey through Lent.

We will seek awareness of God's presence with us on the way.

We come to find light in the shadows and strength in our weakness.

We will join in praise as we remember God's faithfulness.

We seek God's mercy and truth step by step, day by day.

We will trust in God's steadfast love. So let us worship God with grateful hearts!

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*Hymn

Come, thou almighty King

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| 1. Come, thou almighty King;
help us thy name to sing;
help us to praise.
Father, all glorious,
o'er all victorious,
come and reign over us, Ancient of Days. | 2. Come, thou incarnate Word;
gird on thy mighty sword;
our prayer attend:
come, and thy people bless,
and give thy word success;
Spirit of holiness, on us descend. |
| 3. Come, holy Comforter;
thy sacred witness bear
in this glad hour!
Thou who almighty art,
now rule in every heart,
and ne'er from us depart, Spirit of power. | 4. To the great One-in-Three
eternal praises be
hence evermore!
His sovereign majesty
may we in glory see,
and to eternity love and adore. |

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Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Good and gracious God, Creator of storms and sunshine, of the sun and moon and stars, Maker of rainbows and raindrops, of all that is in the heavens and the earth, we praise you for the beauty of the created world, and for the hope of life with you now and always. We praise you for your faithfulness and loving kindness throughout all generations, for your promise of grace, for your compassion and redemption revealed to us in Christ Jesus.

Receive our prayer and praise this day and teach us how to live by your love.

Source of mercy and wisdom,
We are thankful for your steady presence and steadfast love,
so we make our confession to you, with truth and humility.

O God, you made a covenant with us in faithfulness,
but we confess we are not always so faithful to you.
We grow tired and restless when things don't go our way.
We lose patience with others. We lack compassion for our neighbours in need, and
even forget to express our love for those closest to us.
Forgive us, gracious God. Lead us in the way we should go.

Holy God, send us your Spirit to calm our thoughts and prepare our hearts and
minds to hear your Word. Through your Word, teach us to see you more clearly and
love you more deeply day by day.

Make us prisms of your love, making rainbows of your light,
creating beauty and deepening hope wherever we go,
for the sake of Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

Believe the good news. Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of God has come near.
Trust in his forgiving love for you, and forgive one another in his name.

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Scripture Reading Mark 1:9-15

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." ¹²And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

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

Message Mark 1:9-15 It's time

How about a little Old School Sesame Street? You may recall the little vignette where Grover illustrated the difference between near and far. It is just Grover in the scene

talking to those of us on the other side of the screen as he teaches about the concept of near and far. He begins with near, runs to the back of the shot and yells, “and this is far”. Then he runs forward and says, “this is near.” Poor Grover does this five or six times, each time getting more tired and more exasperated as he tries to make the viewer understand what it means to be near and far. Finally, Grover, being completely exhausted, falls over with a thud.¹

Sometimes it feels a little like that when trying to talk about a phrase like “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near” (Mark 1:15). What does it mean for the kingdom to be near? Does it mean that it is just about here, or is it beside me, just what kind of near is it? Often, I go to a little book called *Crazy Talk* when I want to get my mind around something. It is edited by Rolf Jacobson, a professor at Luther Seminary in Minneapolis. He defines the Kingdom of God as “A time that hasn’t happened yet but already has begun: a place that doesn’t exist yet but where you already live.”²

Okay still not clear, but let’s unpack that a little. First of all, the kingdom of God is another way of saying the Reign of God. In other words, a time when God’s desire for human beings as transformed and healed has arrived and all that has us hurting right now is ended. As Revelation 21:4 says, “he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more” (NRSV). This is a time yet to come – it hasn’t happened yet. Still, that doesn’t mean that we are not seeing glimpses of it already.

We are well aware that pain and sorrow, struggle and hardship, are with us daily. None of us escapes that reality. The hope we have in being Christians is that those challenges we face now do not have the final word about how we are going to live right now and what that means for us in our death or in a time to come when God’s reign on earth comes to pass.

There is an understanding for Christians that when Jesus started his ministry shortly after John the baptizer was arrested and when Jesus went to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, that he ushered in a new time, a time when God was coming near in a different way.

Our understanding of the Christmas story is that Jesus came as a human babe, but also as the Son of God. In his birth, both his humanity and his divine nature came together in the person of Jesus. So when he began to preach “repent, and believe in the good news” it meant that the new time of God in-breaking into the world through Jesus had begun.

¹ <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=sesame+street+near+far>. Accessed February 20, 2021.

² Jacobson, Rolf A., Editor. *Crazy Talk: A Not-So-Stuffy Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Augsburg Books. Minneapolis. 2008.P105.

The good news is not about what we are doing, but rather what God has done for us in and through Jesus Christ, his life, death, and resurrection.

As we are into the first few days of the forty days of Lent it can be valuable to stop and think, pause and reflect, on why this could be important - why it is important. The Good News is that, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Perishing is about death, but not just physical death, it can also mean suffering complete ruin or destruction. Some people do this in a big way, others do it in little ways, but all of us are perishing. We're all gonna die, that is a given and having some reassurance that our death brings about life is pretty wonderful to think about. But also, we die in other ways. Each time we say yes, when we should have said no because we will suffer, our family will suffer, or our relationship with God will suffer, is a time when we die just a little bit.

When we are addicted to alcohol, drugs, food, sex, Netflix, technology, or the love of money, we die a little bit or a lot inside. Anything that is not life giving is something that brings about death. That is why Jesus' first sermon in Mark is "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near: repent, and believe in the good news."

Repent. To repent means to change your mind or turn around from sinful behavior. To sin means that one is missing the mark. When one is talking about sin and God, it is about missing the mark in terms of behaving in a way that is Christlike. Now I get it, no one is capable of being perfect which is why one comes to the end of the day, or maybe long before the end of a day and asks forgiveness from God for how we have fallen short of the mark. But this is why knowing that God loves us show much that he sent his Son Jesus makes the difference. That kind of love is full of grace – full of forgiveness.

But there is more, the Good News is more. In 2 Corinthians 5:19 one finds this verse, "In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us."

Remember the definition I shared? The kingdom of God is "A time that hasn't happened yet but already has begun: a place that doesn't exist yet but where you already live."³ This reconciling message is all about a place that doesn't exist yet, but where we already live. In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself. It started with Christ; it is where we live. We have been given a mission to be the hands and feet that work to bring about God's reconciling love to others in our time. It was the work of generations before us and will be the work of those who come after us, but right now it is our responsibility.

³ Ibid.

This doesn't mean ramming a gospel message down people's throats. This is about being salt that brings flavour to our lives and that of others, and light that shines the love of God on others. It is about being in relationship with people, loving them, showing grace, speaking out for justice for those who have no voice or cannot thrive in the conditions that they find themselves in.

In Jesus the fulfilment of time came to be, a time when the kingdom of God had come near in Christ, and continues to be near through our living and loving. Daily we repent of the times we fall short of the mark, but filled with grace, hope, and love, we continue to believe in the good news – the Kingdom of God has come near.

In Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen.

Prayers of the People

As we enter into this holy season, Lord God, we give you thanks for your promise of new life that sustains us, especially as these months of pandemic stretch on.

We thank you:

For tiny signs of hope, even in a bleak landscape or on challenging day;

For glimpses of beauty in a smile or a ray of sunshine;

For scientific achievements that ease suffering in this time of pandemic;

For the people who support and serve others in times of weakness or loss;

For the chance to recover from mistakes, to begin again.

Lord of life, sustain us with your presence

and give us patience and perseverance as we await the future with you.

Trusting your promise of new life, it is with hope that we pray:

For anyone we have hurt by harsh words or careless deeds; *(Hold a silence)*

For those known to us who are carrying heavy burdens; *(Hold a silence)*

For those we work with; *(Hold a silence)*

For all who are seeking employment or worry about their businesses; *(Hold a silence)*

For teachers, students and school administrators managing so many challenges this year; *(Hold a silence)*

For troubled places in our world and those who work for reconciliation and understanding; *(Hold a silence)*

For our congregation and all churches seeking new ways to minister in these months of distancing from each other; *(Hold a silence)*

For ourselves and those lives closely connected to ours; *(Hold a silence)*

Renew our health and hope for the future you will bring us

through the courage and compassion of Christ our Lord,

as we pray together the words he 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 season of Lent takes us on a journey with Jesus to prepare us for the day he gave his life for our sake on the Cross. To God of both courage and compassion, we bring our gifts in Jesus' name. This year we need both Jesus' courage and compassion for ourselves asking God to receive our thanks through the gifts we offer, blessing them so that they may bring hope to others in these challenging times.

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If you would like to learn more about St. Andrew's, get involved in our ministry and work, or 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 or to connect with me.

Hymn

O love, how deep, how broad, how high

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1. O love, how deep, how broad, how high,
how passing thought and fantasy,
that God, the Son of God, should take
our mortal form for mortals' sake.
2. For us baptized, for us he bore
his holy fast and hungered sore;
for us temptations sharp he knew,
for us the tempter overthrew.
3. For us he prayed; for us he taught;
for us his daily works he wrought:
by words and signs and actions, thus
still seeking not himself, but us.
4. For us to wicked hands betrayed,
scourged, mocked, in purple robe arrayed,
he bore the shameful cross and death,
for us gave up his dying breath.
5. For us he rose from death again;
for us he went on high to reign;
for us he sent his Spirit here
to guide, to strengthen and to cheer.
6. All glory to our Lord and God
for love so deep, so high, so broad,
the Trinity whom we adore
forever and forevermore.

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Benediction

We have received the Spirit.

We are blessed by God.

Believe the gospel.

Proclaim the good news.

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