

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>

Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski

Second Sunday in Lent

February 28, 2021

Words of Welcome

In a time where we are following people on social media and people are looking to see how many followers they can get and we can have the life sucked out of us by the negativity, politics, and opinions that are prevalent, it may be time to really look at who we should be following. A conversation for today as we begin with a call to worship.

Call to Worship

Lent calls us to journey, this and every day, following Jesus wherever he leads us.

**Lent calls us to journey: to the place where God covenants with us,
to receive the new names we are given.**

Lent calls us to worship together, to tell future generations the good news.

Lent calls us to practice justice, to bring God's hope to all people.

Lent calls us to faithful living, to trust the One who gives us life.

**Lent calls each of us to take up our cross,
to trust the One who bears it with us.**

Lent calls us to journey with God.

Let us worship God, who walks with us, this and every day.

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*Hymn

Take up your cross

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1. Take up your cross, the Saviour said,
if my disciple you would be;
deny yourself, the world forsake,
and humbly follow after me.
2. Take up your cross; let not its weight
fill frightened spirit with alarm;
his strength shall bear your spirit up,
and brace your heart, and nerve your arm.
3. Take up your cross, nor heed the shame,
nor let your foolish pride rebel:
for you the Saviour bore the cross,
to save your soul from death and hell.
4. Take up your cross, then, in Christ's strength
and every danger calmly brave;
'twill guide you to a heavenly home,
and lead to victory o'er the grave.

5. Take up your cross and follow Christ,
nor think till death to lay it down,
for only those who bear the cross
may hope to wear the glorious crown.

Words: public domain

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Loving and holy God,
Our Creator, Christ, and Guide,
you speak the words of life to us.
In you we find our hearts' desire;
by your grace we are saved.
When the way forward is unclear, you shed light.
When we are troubled, you give peace.
When times are difficult, you stir courage and hope.
Our deepest longing is to know you,
and to be known by you.
In these difficult days, we praise you for your faithfulness to us.
Draw near to us in our time of worship, O God,
and open the way before us,
so that we may follow Jesus without wavering,
trusting him to lead us.

Although following you brings joy, O God,
we confess the way is sometimes hard for us.
There are times we get tired and would eagerly settle for an easier road.
Some days we find the task of loving others hard.
Sometimes we choose anger over forgiveness,
or ignore the needs of our neighbours.
Forgive us when our commitment to you wavers.
Forgive us when we take that easier path.

Gracious God, send your Holy Spirit to move in us and among us, so that we may hear your voice speaking in the scriptures. Open our minds and hearts to encounter your Living Word, and give us the courage to follow, no matter the cost. Stir the embers of our devotion and kindle a brighter flame. Strengthen our determination to follow where you lead and renew our energy to serve in Jesus' name. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

This is the good news: God does not go back on the promises made so long ago. God does not reject us, God redeems us. God does not withhold love, God pours it into our barren lives.

Forgiven of our sins, filled with hope, living in relationship with God and one another - we are a new people. Thanks be to God.

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Scripture Reading Mark 8:31-38

³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

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

Message

A favorite childhood game is *Follow the Leader*. You may know the game, but for anyone who may not have played, basically one person gets to lead and everyone else follows what you are doing, literally following behind the one doing the leading. I remember times when I couldn't see what was coming up in front of me and getting caught off guard by an obstacle in my path, whether it be a thing or a person. One hoped for a good leader who could make things interesting but not so challenging or dangerous that it took the fun out of the game. Many wanted to be the leader because then you could decide how silly or challenging the game would be. Leaders had control.

There is a moment in the scripture reading today in which Jesus says to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things" (Mark 8:33). Now a little background might be helpful here. Just a short time before what you heard read today from the Gospel of Mark, Jesus asked his disciples a few questions such as, "Who do people say that I am?" to which they responded, John

the Baptist, Elijah, or a prophet. Then he asked "...who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8:29). It was Peter who, like the eager kid in class with hand up waving in the air barely able to contain his or her self because they are so excited that they have the answer, responds by saying, "you are the Messiah."

Peter got the right answer. He knew that Jesus was the one that had been spoken about in the Hebrew scriptures. Peter understood that Jesus was the one who was going to right the wrongs, bring about a new order, make things great again! But rather than be able to shout it from the roof tops, Jesus "sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him." Though the time was right for Peter and he was ready to storm the capitol, Jesus was saying no, not the time or the place.

You see Jesus understood that Peter, the other disciples, even the crowds that were seeking him out, wanted to overthrow the powers of the day. They wanted to have power for themselves and Jesus had to be their answer. They could not yet understand what Jesus was saying to them, what Jesus was teaching them.

Our reading today started with the words, "Then he began to teach them." Them, being the disciples and the crowds. Jesus had to teach them what it really meant that he was the Messiah, that he was the Son of Man." They had recognized his power. They saw it in the way crowds were drawn to Jesus and in the healing miracles, but when Jesus spoke saying "the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." Well Peter couldn't resist the urge to correct Jesus and his understanding of how thing should go down.

Peter takes Jesus aside. I see it like a movie scene where the good friend takes the central character off to the side and basically says, "No, you got it all wrong. You can't suffer, be rejected, and die, that is not how you take over a government." Writer Paul Shupe says it this way, "Peter was blinded by his own preconception. His cherished convictions about what the Messiah's agenda should be would not allow him to see what the Messiah's agenda must be!"¹

Jesus doesn't hold in his frustration. This is where he gives it back to Peter full throttle saying, "Get behind me, Satan? For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." (Mk 8:33) Jesus then follows up by getting the attention of not just the disciples but the whole crowd and says to them, "If any want to become my follower, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Mk 8:24)

¹ Shupe, Paul C. *Feasting on the Word: Year B Volume 2 Lent through Eastertide*. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2008. P71.

There are meanings in those statements about “get behind me” and being a follower. In most basic terms, if you are going to oppose Jesus’ agenda you might as well get behind Jesus because he is not going to put up with B.S. Get behind and be gone. If you plan on following Jesus that also means getting behind Jesus but in this scenario, you stay close, it is more like an imitation game, a game of follow the leader. The thing is you are not imitating or following to be a type of patsy or puppet, but rather you follow to learn, to be taught, to be given a depth of understanding about human suffering, struggle, and challenge. Following Jesus in this manner means going where Jesus goes.

And to be clear, Jesus is not headed to the glam of palaces, Jesus is headed for a cross. “If any want to become my follower, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Mk 8:24)

Throughout history people and churches have spoken about taking up one’s cross as a justification of suffering. Speaking of bearing one’s cross is often used when times are difficult and hardship seems to be a constant friend. It can feel like a cross to bear, but might it be that to take up one’s cross means to do what Jesus is doing. Jesus was speaking to power, politics, and prestige and saying this was not God’s will. The suffering of the most vulnerable, this was not God’s kingdom.

In God’s kingdom all would have what they need to thrive emotionally, physically, mentally, and socially. Jesus was heading straight into the thick of things and was going to be killed for it. Jesus was a threat to those who liked the status quo that kept people in their place. Jesus was an advocate for the poor, the sick, and those in prison. He was not afraid to call out empire. And yes, if you want to think Star Wars go ahead. There are threads there to grasp onto.

Though Jesus is headed to his death and he knows it, this passage is really about saving lives. He says, “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel will save it.” (Mk8:38).

Ira Driggers writes, “When this passage is taken out of context, it seems to suggest that the mission of Jesus and his disciples is to suffer and die. However, when we read it within its narrative context, we come to see that the mission of Jesus and his disciples is to give life—knowing that earthly powers will violently oppose them.”²

Jesus was all about living life abundantly. This did not mean, nor does it ever mean having an abundant bank account, an abundance of food, or lots of friends, or whatever abundance is to you that has ties to human greed and ego. Having abundant life is about

² Driggers, Ira Brent. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/second-sunday-in-lent-2/commentary-on-mark-831-38-5>. Accessed February 27, 2021.

peace, hope, joy, grace, forgiveness, and love. It is about ending suffering. It is about hope for those who have none, love for those who feel lost and forgotten. It is about food for the hungry, justice for those who have no voice, and grace enough to see the humanity in every body.

Jesus is going to die, but “after three days rise again.” This is about resurrected life for all. Not that we will come back to life after being physical dead, but that we will have life while we are living.

Jesus is no longer physically present with us, but we are still called to be followers, those who go where Jesus goes, to follow Jesus into places where power forgets that there are those who need to be lifted up. In a world where instant gratification is the expectation, Jesus calls us to be in it for the long game. Following Jesus is not for the faint of heart, it will make you question and wonder, cry and at times suffer, but it is the most amazing game of follower the leader you will ever play where everyone who plays wins. Everyone who follows will have life and life abundant.

In Christ, with Christ, and through Christ.

Prayers of the People

Loving God, we thank you for the vision you have for our lives,
the promises you have made to us,
and the journey you open before us.
Today we remember with gratitude:

The ways our lives are held secure in uncertain times by our trust in you; *(Hold a silence)*
Moments in these months of pandemic that made us laugh or smile; *(Hold a silence)*
Moments when we felt your gifts of courage and patience; *(Hold a silence)*
Times when you helped us overcome temptation; *(Hold a silence)*
The people who love us and give us encouragement; *(Hold a silence)*

Gracious God, we are grateful for all these signs of your love in our lives.
Thank you for the hope they bring us. Show us how to share this hope and love with others who are struggling in these difficult days.

Faithful God, we pray for healing and restoration in the world that is our home.
Hear us as we name in silence the needs and concerns we carry today:
We pray for people, places and situations deeply in need of your grace,
especially as they face the fears and frustrations of coping with COVID-19;

We pray for those who struggle to feed, clothe or house themselves and their families, and all those who worry about their economic future; *(Hold a silence)*

We pray for those who are weak or vulnerable for any reason, and for all who lack dignity and respect in our community; *(Hold a silence)*

We pray for the earth and its well-being, that areas and species under threat will be cared for; *(Hold a silence)*

We pray for peace with justice in regions of the world facing turmoil *(Here, you may name relevant places in recent news)*; *(Hold a silence)*

And we pray for all those offering leadership and service in these times of hope and anxiety, for those planning how to offer vaccines in our community, and for those uncertain about vaccination; *(Hold a silence)*

By the power of your Spirit, O God, work in us and through us. May we bring the light and love of your kingdom into our relationships and our community in all we do and say.

Receive our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord who taught us to pray in these words: ©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 2nd Sunday in Lent, February 28, 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

Jesus challenged his followers to deny themselves in order to follow him. Our offerings express to God our willingness to give not just a little something, but to commit resources we could have used in other ways for God's purposes instead. We are blessed to be able to give.

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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.

1. Will you come and follow me
if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown;
will you let me name be known:
will you let my life be grown
in you and you in me?
2. Will you leave yourself behind
if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer
in you and you in me?
3. Will you let the blinded see
if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free
and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean,
and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean
in you and you in me?
4. Will you love the "you" you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and
sound
in you and you in me?
5. Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.

"Will you come and follow me," Words by Iona Community (Scotland)
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Benediction

The step of discipleship requires commitment and faith.
Go now in peace, bringing the good news of Jesus' love to all people.
Do not be afraid. God is with you.

Nancy C. Townley. <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/2398/worship-connection-february-28-2021>