

# St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski

## Third Sunday in Lent - March 7, 2021

### Words of Welcome

We often come into situations with our minds already set with pre-conceived perceptions and priorities. We see things within a certain context. It can take an unexpected turn of events to open our eyes to what is really going on, or to see things differently. There are elements of that in the scripture we take on today. Join me now as we begin with a call to worship.

### Call to Worship

Heaven is declaring God's glory; *Ps. 19:1-4*  
the sky is proclaiming God's handiwork.  
One day gushes the news to the next,  
and one night informs another what needs to be known.  
There is no speech; there are no words;  
their voices cannot be heard by us.  
Yet their sound extends throughout the world;  
their words reach the ends of the earth!

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### Hymn

*If I have been the source of pain*

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1. If I have been the source of pain,  
O God, if to the weak I have refused my strength,  
if in rebellion I have strayed away, for give me, God.
2. If I have spoken words of cruelty,  
if I have left some suffering unrelieved,  
condemn not me insensitivity: forgive me, God.
3. If I've insisted on a peaceful life,  
far from the struggles that the gospel brings,  
when you prefer to guide me to the strife, forgive me, God.
4. Receive, O God, this ardent word of prayer,  
and free me from temptation's subtle snare;  
with tender patience, lead me to your care. Amen, amen.

"If I have been the source of pain O God," words by Janet W. May. Music by Pablo Sosa © 1992  
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## Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Almighty God,  
you have set the whirling cosmos in motion and called all creatures into being. All that exists speaks of your majesty, yet no detail misses your care and attention. You know each of us by name, and make yourself known to those who seek you. Your wisdom delights the human heart and purifies the soul.

We gather to enjoy your presence with us, and to listen for your Word for our times and our lives. God of wisdom, you have spoken in the Law and the prophets to teach us how to live. Move in and among us through your Holy Spirit, to open our minds and hearts to your truth and receive your life-giving Word. God, our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, to you alone all worship, honour and glory are due, this day and every day, now and always.

God of majesty and mercy,  
we are aware that you are present here and everywhere, drawing near to us. Yet we confess we are often distracted from your presence. Many things compete for our attention. We are tempted to seek things that cannot truly satisfy. We envy those who are successful in the world's terms, and so pursue our own desires, without questioning the cost to the earth or those in need.

Forgive us, O God.

Send us the Holy Spirit to awaken us to your purposes and pursue them with renewed commitment, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

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## Assurance of Pardon

Brothers and sisters,  
in Jesus Christ, crucified, risen, and coming again,  
we are forgiven and set free to live in faithfulness  
with God and with one another!  
Thanks be to God!

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## Scripture Reading John 2:13-22

<sup>13</sup>The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. <sup>15</sup>Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup>He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" <sup>17</sup>His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." <sup>18</sup>The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" <sup>19</sup>Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." <sup>20</sup>The Jews then said, "This

temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" <sup>21</sup>But he was speaking of the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup>After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

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

## **Message** Context, Perception and Priorities

April 8, 2007

HE EMERGED FROM THE METRO ... AND POSITIONED HIMSELF AGAINST A WALL BESIDE A TRASH BASKET. By most measures, he was nondescript: a youngish white man in jeans, a long-sleeved T-shirt and a Washington Nationals baseball cap. From a small case, he removed a violin. Placing the open case at his feet, he shrewdly threw in a few dollars and pocket change as seed money, swiveled it to face pedestrian traffic, and began to play.

It was 7:51 a.m. on Friday, January 12, [2007] the middle of the morning rush hour. In the next 43 minutes, as the violinist performed six classical pieces, 1,097 people passed by. Almost all of them were on the way to work, which meant, for almost all of them, a government job...

Each passerby had a quick choice to make, one familiar to commuters in any urban area where the occasional street performer is part of the cityscape: Do you stop and listen? Do you hurry past with a blend of guilt and irritation, aware of your cupidity but annoyed by the unbidden demand on your time and your wallet? Do you throw in a buck, just to be polite? Does your decision change if he's really bad? What if he's really good?

On that Friday in January, those private questions would be answered in an unusually public way. No one knew it, but the fiddler standing against a bare wall outside the Metro in an indoor arcade at the top of the escalators was one of the finest classical musicians in the world, playing some of the most elegant music ever written on one of the most valuable violins ever made. His performance was arranged by The Washington Post as an experiment in context, perception and priorities...

In the three-quarters of an hour that Joshua Bell played, seven people stopped what they were doing to hang around and take in the performance, at least for a minute. Twenty-seven gave money, most of them on the run -- for a total of

\$32 and change. That leaves the 1,070 people who hurried by, oblivious, many only three feet away, few even turning to look.<sup>1</sup>

As was noted this was a Washington Post experiment and the article was called *Pearls before breakfast: Can Joshua Bell, one of the nation's great musicians, cut through the fog of a D.C. rush hour?*. For many this may not be a new story. It makes its rounds every once in a while, on social media. It is however, an apt illustration for today's scripture reading.

Joshua Bell went pretty much unnoticed by the 1097 people who passed by that day. Only one near the end of his playing recognized him and did stop to listen and then told him that she knew who he was. A few other people, clued in to the beauty of the music, but couldn't stop. One man did take three minutes to stay and listen. It was all the time he had.

Part of the point of the article was that the people just didn't understand what they were hearing, it was out of context. They could not perceive of the calibre of instrument or musician in their busyness and in this place. Their priority was to get to work. Here was a world class musician with an iconic and rare violin from the 1700s, a Stradivarius at that, and save but one person, the other 1096 people had no idea what was right in front of them.

It is that kind of thing that was happening on the day that Jesus went in and cleared the temple of livestock, money changers, doves and merchants. People had no idea who was in front of them. He was just another person, and their priority was to get into the temple. No one, not even his disciples, saw that Jesus was the Word of God made flesh...that when they looked at Jesus, saw what he did, heard what he taught, that he was the embodiment of God.

Most often I have heard this passage preached as Jesus being so angry that the temple was being used in this way, had become a place of commerce, that in a fit of anger he cleared everything out. In my preparations to write, I heard something else that I thought may be worth trying on – that Jesus was calling attention to himself. His point was that the temple was not where God was, but God was in him, that we should look to Jesus to see God.

Now I am still working this out myself, so stick with me to see if we can unpack this a little more. In the temple, Jesus is calling attention to the location of God. Though he does clear the temple it is to make a point of saying people have lost their focus and had

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<sup>1</sup> Gene Weingarten. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/pearls-before-breakfast-can-one-of-the-nations-great-musicians-cut-through-the-fog-of-a-dc-rush-hour-lets-find-out/2014/09/23/8a6d46da-4331-11e4-b47c-f5889e061e5f\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/pearls-before-breakfast-can-one-of-the-nations-great-musicians-cut-through-the-fog-of-a-dc-rush-hour-lets-find-out/2014/09/23/8a6d46da-4331-11e4-b47c-f5889e061e5f_story.html)

Accessed March 6, 2021.

lost meaningful context for a relationship with God. Their perception of what God wanted was off and their priorities were out of whack. The people were preparing for the Passover, a festival commemorating the history of the Hebrew people, when death passed over them and they were released by Pharaoh and allowed to leave Egypt. Now the story is messier than that, this is a very abbreviated version.

In Jesus time, many had traveled and needed money for the temple tax, as well as animals for burnt offerings, in order to participate in the festival. This is where the money changers and merchants come into the story. Much is going on, but the business of the Passover appears to have taken over much of the reason for the Passover.

It makes me think a little of how Christmas, the Christian holiday to celebrate the birth of Jesus, has become a secular holiday for much of the population, with presents under a Christmas tree. Or, how chocolate and candy and the Easter bunny are the focus of Easter, rather than the story of Jesus death and resurrection. We may come to church, worship, try to do a few churchy type things, but the meaning has been lost to many. That may somewhat represent what was happening in Jesus' time with the marking of the Passover.

In this moment in the temple, Jesus is pointing to himself, and saying, look, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). Of course, it makes no sense to those who hear the words. The temple had been under construction for forty-six years, and was still being worked on. There was no way Jesus could raise it up in three days. But as with so many things, we are apt to look on the event and not until later to understand the depth of meaning. In our own lives how often does one look back at their life history and can see more clearly now than at the time, what was actually going on.

This is so with the story of Jesus in the temple. In fact, it states right in the scriptures, "But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and [then] they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken" (2:21-22).

Similar to Joshua Bell in the subway station, people in the story of Jesus in the temple did not have the context, could not perceive, had different priorities in their day, which did not allow them to understand who they were seeing and what they were hearing. It was not until later that the disciples understood and appreciated the context, the person, the experience.

The point being for us is, do we recognize Jesus in our own lives or are we too busy and have misplaced our priorities? Are we preparing for Easter by taking time to get to know Jesus as God in the flesh, and then as the one who went to the cross, was raised up after three days and then ascended, meaning that Jesus is at God's right hand, fully

present with God? Or, are we making sure that there will be enough candy to hide, hot cross buns to eat, or other traditions carried out?

It is not that we can't do both. I am not here to take the fun out of the holiday, but neither can we ignore the ugly truth about what happened Good Friday? We are to pay attention to stories such as this one of Jesus clearing the temple. We are called to see Christ, to see the context, then and now of Christ among us, to adjust our priorities, our pre-conceived notion of where God can be found. Jesus is already clearing the way and saying, "Look, it's me! I'm right in front of you!"

## **Prayers of the People**

Loving God,  
we thank you for the world you created  
and the opportunities we have to enjoy its beauty and its life sustaining promise.  
When we find occasions to breathe in fresh air and exercise outdoors this winter,  
remind us of our partnership with you to care for creation.  
As spring comes closer and the sun shines longer each day,  
reawaken our hope in your promise of new life  
to sustain us as the weeks of the pandemic stretch on.

Ever present God,  
we thank you for walking with us through days of uncertainty  
as well as times of pleasure and satisfaction.  
In times of risk and stress, you provide a still point of calm.  
In times of challenge, you are the source of courage and confidence for us.

Thank you for hearing us when we pray,  
and for the wisdom and encouragement we receive from you.

This day we pray for those who are struggling with the isolation and frustration the pandemic means for so many. Bring them peace and patience with your love.

We pray for churches whose common life has been changed so much by months of distancing. Keep us strong in faith and fellowship, so that we may serve as agents of healing and hope in our communities.

We pray for our nation and the nations of this world. May leaders confront the challenges of this time with courage, wisdom and compassion. Guide citizens to discern the difference between conspiracy theories and truth telling.

We pray for innocent victims of violence around the world. Work through advocates for peace with justice to bring change where it is needed, and daily bread to those whose lives and livelihoods have been disrupted.

And we pray for all those who are enduring pain and illness, those who are facing grief and loss, and those who work on the front lines in our community, in health care, education, retail, emergency and public service. So many are exhausted by these months of pandemic. Be their comfort and encouragement day by day.

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Hear us now, as we pray together using the words Jesus 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

When Jesus grew angry at the money changers in the temple, he reminded God's people that our offerings are intended to express our commitment to God's ways. They are not just a financial transaction. There are people from different churches and places following this service. As you present your offering to God this day to your church community, consider what commitment to God's purposes your gift expresses.

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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

*At the name of Jesus*

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1. At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,  
every tongue confess him King of glory now;  
'tis our God's good pleasure we should call him Lord,  
who from the beginning was the mighty Word.
2. Humbled for a season to receive a name  
from the lips of sinners unto whom he came.  
Faithful, Jesus bore it spotless to the last,  
brought it back victorious when from death he passed.
3. Name him, Christians, name him,  
with love strong as death, name with awe and wonder,  
and with bated breath; this is God the Saviour;  
this is Christ the Lord, ever to be worshipped, trusted and adored.

4. In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue  
all that is not holy, all that is not true.  
Crown him as your captain in temptation's hour;  
let his will enfold you in its light and power.
5. Christians, this Lord Jesus shall return again,  
with his Father's glory and an angel train,  
for all wreaths of empire meet up on his brow,  
and our hearts confess him King of glory now.

*"At the name of Jesus,"* Words: Public Domain. Tune: KING'S WESTON 6 5 6 5 D; Ralph Vaughn Williams,  
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## **Benediction**

May God shine upon you,  
Christ fill you with true wisdom and strength,  
and the Holy Spirit guide you into all faithfulness,  
now and forever.

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