

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

Seventh Sunday of Easter/Ascension Sunday - May 16, 2021

Words of Welcome

The world is complex. One could separate it and look at its form and substance as earth and creation or as its inhabitants in all our diversity. Most often, all of it is combined unless we are talking about something specific. The world is creation, of which we are a part. Human beings add an extra layer of complexity, joys and concerns to all that is the world. John's gospel often refers to "the world" and today we explore some of those themes.

Call to Worship

Jesus promised to be with us always

We are thankful for that promise.

In all times, this promise gives us hope.

We rejoice in the hope Jesus give us.

Come and celebrate the eternal promises of Christ.

We are so grateful that Jesus has given to us so much

and that we are promised God's presence with us always.

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As we come into this time of worship we ask that God may open our eyes, our ears, and consequently our minds to praise, promise, and teaching.

Hymn

Open our eyes Lord

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1. Open our eyes, Lord,
we want to see Jesus,
to reach out and touch him,
and say that we love him.

2. Open our ears, Lord,
and help us to listen.
Open our eyes, Lord,
we want to see Jesus

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of promise and purpose,
we greet you this day with thankful hearts.
As flowers open and buds unfurl around us,
the beauty of your world lifts our hearts in praise.
As children grow and students prepare to graduate,
their energy and enthusiasm encourages us toward your future.
You lifted up Jesus to be by your side,
and so we know he is always by our side as the future opens before us.

Draw close to us in this time of worship
and show us the promise and purpose in our own lives—
how we can unfurl with new life
and move into the future with the energy of your Holy Spirit
and the abiding love of Christ our Lord.

**Lord Jesus Christ, you have called all your followers
to carry the Good News of God's love and forgiveness to the ends of the earth.
Yet we confess we cannot always find the words to tell others of our faith.
We are often silent when others criticize the church that bears your name.
We try to act out your love
but it's hard to tell others why we do what we do for you.
Forgive our hesitation to share the gift you have given us,
and renew our courage to speak of our commitment to you.**

By the power of your Holy Spirit, open our minds and hearts to receive your Word,
O God, so that we may recognize your call to serve in the name of Jesus Christ,
the Living Word. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

“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.

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world,
but in order that the world might be saved through him.” —John 3:16-17, NRSV

You are a beloved and forgiven child of God.
Live in that forgiveness and love one another.

Scripture holds words to help guide us in living out our lives.
We turn now to a reading from the Gospel of John.

Scripture Reading John 17:6-19

⁶“I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may

be one, as we are one. ¹²While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. ¹⁴I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

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

Message I have sent them

One of the things that many who have the means have missed in this past fourteen or so months is being able to escape the day-to-day realities and head off on a trip, whether it be to the woods, to the big city, camp, or another country. Even small moments that take us away from our “world” in other words the daily grind, the challenges, and struggles, like going out for coffee with a friend, well those activities have been halted. There have been moments of reprieve, but nothing lasting. Thankfully it looks like, with time and vaccinations, things will allow us at least some of those opportunities.

The point is that we like to get away from it all. I say this knowing that many people who are marginalized never get a reprieve, never get to experience getting away from it all. That takes time and money, and there are many who, for various reasons, just never get that kind of security.

The scripture reading today talks about being part of the world and being sent into the world. The reading is actually the middle section of a prayer that Jesus was recorded as saying when he and his disciples shared in a final time together before Jesus headed out and was betrayed by Judas in a garden. This is a prayer for Jesus’ disciples. The first part of the prayer verses 1-5 are Jesus addressing God as the Son, this section verses 6-19 is for the disciples, and the last section verses 20-26 is a prayer for those who are yet to believe. It is a significant that Jesus had prayed for us even before we yet existed.

Still this part of the prayer that is our focus today is that of Jesus praying for those who had believed and followed. By extension as those who believe and follow today, we too can take away much from this part of Jesus prayer.

One of the last things Jesus says here is, “As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” (v18) Now unlike us heading off to enjoy a sunrise or sunset in another part of the world and getting away from it all, Jesus is actually sending us into the thick of things. Which is interesting especially considering that in this section of John “the world” might be seen as the least likely place for someone who believes in Jesus and has faith in God, especially a world that has “hated them because they do not belong to the world.” (v14).

The world in this part of the gospel is a place of brokenness and pain, of structures and systems that want power and control. This is not to be confused with creation. God created the world, and God so loved the world that he sent his only Son, Jesus (Jn 3:16), and remembering this is key when you read this part of John. God has always, will always, love the creation. God will always love us and every human being that walks the face of the earth. There are no caveats here - “for God so loved the world.”

But there is the recognition and understanding, really the knowledge, that the world is a place where harm, illness, and suffering exists. It is a place where God and those who live as people of faith will not be welcomed. We don’t see it as much in Canada and places where the church has a long history of Christian community that has been accepted, but even here we are no longer mainstream and many find it difficult to openly say, “I am a Christian” for the fear of eye rolling or conversations that we often don’t feel equipped to address. In other parts of the world to be a Christian is down right dangerous and life threatening.

For the followers of Jesus in his time, things were dangerous. The New Testament is filled with stories of persecution and peril. These stories can also be found in ancient histories and letters by politicians. So, when Jesus asks for God to protect those who God had given Jesus, so that they may be one, it was in the full knowledge that when they were sent to teach others about Jesus they were headed for dangerous territory. Things were so hazardous that Jesus was the target of those in power who worried about his influence and incredible ability to lead others.

I want to go back for a moment to the first part of this reading to point out how much giving is happening here. Jesus says to God in prayer, “I have made your name known to those whom you *gave* me from the world. They were yours, and you *gave* them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have *given* me is from you for the words that you *gave* to me I have *given* to them.” (v6-8)

There are many, who when they envision who God is, see an old bearded man seated in judgement of people. Yet passages such as this point to the generous nature of God as a giver of life, of protection, of relationship. Even if we go back to the key passage in the Gospel of John 3:16 we hear the words, “God so loved the world that he *gave* his

only Son, so that everyone who believes in Jesus may not perish but may have eternal life.”

God is loving and generous. Yes, there are many stories of judgement, particularly in the Old Testament, as people turned from God, but this is as much a reality of the consequences of people walking away from the relationship God desires as it is about God’s judgement. When we turn away from God, we turn our backs on recognizing God’s love and compassion. We turn away from God’s protection and joy.

Please note, this does not mean that we are spared struggle and grief, brokenness and harm. If that were the case Jesus would not have had to pray for our protection. Once we choose to be followers of Jesus our struggle begins simply because we start to see the world through a lens of compassion, relationship, and reconciliation.

Now, the context of John’s writing may also be helpful to us. Remember the gospels were written a number of years after Jesus’ death. We tend to read them in real time, but that is not the context from which the gospels came. In the case of the Gospel of John, there is strong evidence that the people who were gathering as a community of faith still considered themselves part of the Jewish faith, but their belief in Jesus found them being cast out of that community. We also forget that followers were not looking to leave their synagogues, they simply believed that in Jesus the long-awaited Messiah of the Jewish people had shown up. For that they suffered persecution among their own people along with the threat of political scapegoating.

The writer of the Gospel chose this prayer of Jesus to give much needed courage, strength, and hope to those who were still living in the world and being sent into the world. As pastor and teacher David Lose writes, “... nothing in or of the world can ultimately withstand the grace and mercy of God’s gift of love.”

And this is where we land. We are not of this world in the sense that we are in relationship with God and believe in the one that was sent in God’s name, Jesus. The world still needs people who will show in word and deed that ultimately nothing in or of the world can withstand the grace and mercy of God’s gift of love. We are the image bearers of God. Saint and sinner rolled into one because we are not perfect. Set apart, sanctified if you will, as people who have been given words from Jesus, received them and know in truth that Jesus came from God and believe that God sent Jesus for the sake of the world.

In any case, people will experience God through us. Will it be a version of a God who judges that so many already think is the God of our faith, or will they experience the generous, loving God, who gives and gives and gives because God so loved the world?

As Jesus was sent into the world, Jesus has sent us into the world. Go and be image bearers of God that embodies the love of God for the world this day and every day that you are given breath.

Through our prayers we are given the opportunity to care for the world. Let us pray.

Prayers of the People

O God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of all life,
You have begun the work of creating a new world,
a world where justice is known,
where freedom and healing are available to all people.
We pray for the places in the world that are caught up in violence,
where people are held captive or struggle under oppressive powers,
and where sickness prevails, and medical resources are scarce.

(Silence for a count of ten)

Grant those affected courage and perseverance through your Spirit.
May people everywhere find the fullness of life you intend for us all.

You have begun the work of creating a new community,
a community where love is shared, and all find a sense of belonging.
We pray for groups who are made to feel like they don't belong,
for families that are caught up in tension or strife,
and for those who feel isolated or desperate because no one seems to care.

(Silence for a count of ten)

Grant them all courage and comfort through your Spirit.
May people everywhere find the fullness of life you intend for us all.

You have begun the work of making a new creation,
a creation where all that has been broken is being restored,
where all that has been distorted is made right,
and what has been polluted or damaged is renewed.
We pray for the earth, the places where its natural balances are threatened
and species put at risk by human exploitation. *(Silence for a count of ten)*

Send your healing Spirit to renew the earth and make us wiser stewards.
May creatures everywhere know the fullness of life you intend for us all.

As you work towards making all things new,
we pray for renewal in our churches and ministries,
for leaders tired out by the responsibilities of coping with pandemic demands,
and for church members who have drifted away in the months of distancing.

(Silence for a count of ten)

Send your energizing Spirit to gather the church in ways both familiar and new. May your servants in every church know the fullness of life you intend for us all and be empowered to bear witness to Jesus in refreshing ways.

For together we offer the prayer he taught us:

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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

The season of Easter comes to a close with this Ascension Sunday. Yet we will continue to receive the blessings God pours out for us in Christ and in creation, for God is so good to us. Our gifts to God tell of our gratitude for these blessings and our commitment to share them with the whole world.

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There are people from different churches and places following this service. I encourage each of you to present your offering to God this day to your church community.

If you consider St. Andrew's your church, regardless of where you live, 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.

One thing that is for sure and is attested to through every page of our scriptures is that God is faithful. As we hear the hymn may you become aware of God's faithfulness to the world and to you.

Hymn

Great is thy faithfulness

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1. Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not; thy compassions, they fail not;
as thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.

Refrain

*Great is thy faithfulness;
great is thy faithfulness;
morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided;
great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.*

2. Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in eloquent witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Refrain

3. Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow:
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Refrain

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Benediction

Go forth in hope. Go forth with the knowledge of God's presence with you.
Go to serve God by taking care of each other and God's world.
Go now in peace!

<https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/8169/worship-connection-ascension-sunday-2021-option-3>