

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

Third Sunday after Pentecost - June 13, 2021

Words of Welcome

We hear the word "reconciliation" a lot in the news. We have the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a group called Reconciliation Canada. The Presbyterian Church in Canada has a Healing and Reconciliation Sunday in May and all kinds of resources to go along with it. This is important work, but what you may not realize is that reconciliation is a biblical term and something that God calls the whole church to and is also something to be worked out in our individual lives. Come, stay a while, find a welcome, and maybe I can offer you some insights. Come and worship!

Call to Worship

All around us, God is looking for folks
who will join in serving others.

**It is as if God is planting seeds of compassion in us,
watching for them to bloom in our lives.**

In our midst, Jesus is walking among us,
tending our hearts, watering us with grace.

**It is as if Jesus is trusting that our souls
will grow big enough to welcome everyone.**

From morning to evening, the Spirit is at work,
gently tending this garden called life.

**It is as if the Spirit has found the perfect spots
to bring forth crops of justice and peace.**

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As Christians we are called to a certain way of living and being in the world. We do it all knowing that God, Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit travel with us.

Hymn

One more step along the world I go

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1. One more step along the world I go.
One more step along the world I go.
From the old things to the new
keep me traveling along with you.

*And it's from the old I travel to the new.
Keep me traveling along with you.*

2. Round the corners of the world I turn.
More and more about the world I learn.
All the new things that I see
you'll be looking at along with me.

*And it's from the old I travel to the new.
Keep me traveling along with you.*

3. As I travel through the bad and good
keep me traveling the way I should.
Where I see no way to go,
you'll be telling me the way, I know.
*And it's from the old I travel to the new.
Keep me traveling along with you.*

4. Give me courage when the world is rough.
Keep me loving though the world is tough.
Leap and sing in all I do.
Keep me traveling along with you.
*And it's from the old I travel to the new.
Keep me traveling along with you.*

5. You are older than the world can be.
You are younger than the life in me.
Ever old and ever new,
keep me traveling along with you.
*And it's from the old I travel to the new.
Keep me traveling along with you.*

"One more step along the world I go," words by Sydney Carter © Words and Music:
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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Living God,
from you comes vitality, love and joy.
Your peace is our companion, your love is our strength, your Son is our hope.
In even our darkest moments, your presence brings comfort.
Hidden deep in the soil of life,
your Spirit nurtures tiny seeds of purpose and potential
to surprise us with new life.
Like the earth beginning to bloom around us,
so your kingdom unfolds to surprise us with new possibilities.
We bring you our prayers and praise this day,
trusting that your Spirit will bring us the gifts we need
to serve you in faithfulness,
renewed by your love, through Christ our Lord.

Living, loving God,
as we watch growth in our gardens and in the children around us,
we confess we often resist growth and change as we grow older.
We form ideas and opinions about many things—and cling to them.
We think we already know what you desire from us
and fear new insights and new directions.
Forgive us for thinking we already know it all.
Forgive us for blocking out the concerns and commitments
of those who differ with us.
Open our eyes, our ears and our hearts to signs of new life.
Grant us faith like the mustard seed,

so small and insignificant on its own,
yet able to grow with your blessing to become a mighty sign
of your lively kingdom among us.

God of patience and persistence, scripture tells us your people have not always
listened for your leading. So send your Spirit to open our minds and hearts to your
Living Word. Speak through the scriptures, and inspire our growth and gratitude, so
that we may be changed by what we hear. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

We who walk by faith and not by sight believe
the good news—

2 Cor. 5:6–10, 14–17

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation:
everything old has passed away; see, everything
has become new!

Praise be to God for the mercy and grace
that forgives our sins. Alleluia. Amen!

Feasting on the Word Worship Companion: Liturgies for Year B, Volume 2 © 2015 Westminster John Knox Press

Scripture Reading 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

¹¹Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves
are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences.

¹²We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to
boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward
appearance and not in the heart. ¹³For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we
are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are
convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. ¹⁵And he died for all, so
that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was
raised for them.

¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though
we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way.

¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away;
see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself
through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God
was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and
entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ,
since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be
reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in
him we might become the righteousness of God.

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

Message We have this ministry

The unlikely pardoner

Iranian woman Samereh Alinejad had told the *The Associated Press* that “retribution had been her only thought” after her teenage son was murdered. But in a dramatic turn at the gallows, literally moments before the killer was to be executed, Alinejad made a last-minute decision to pardon the man. She is now considered a hero.¹

The unexpected caregiver

In an interview with [Real Simple](#), domestic violence survivor Pascale Kavanagh said that she never thought she would reconnect with her mother—her abuser—during her adult life. However, in 2010, her mother suffered several strokes that left her unable to communicate or take care of herself. With no one else to help, Kavanagh began to sit by her mother’s bedside and read to her. Through this, Kavanagh says the hate she had for her mother dissipated into forgiveness and love.²

Here in Thunder Bay, we are all very aware of the story of the young man Brayden Bushby who has been convicted in the trailer-hitch death of Indigenous mom Barbara Kentner. When I listened to the interview with family on the news after the sentencing, I was struck by the words of one woman. As reported by CBC news,

“Cheryl Kentner described her sister, Barbara, as a light in the darkness. A beautiful light. Someone she could count on. The family missed hearing her voice, they miss her physical presence and the joy she brought to their lives.”

Speaking after the sentence was imposed, Debbie Kakagamic, Kentner's cousin, said she was happy with the eight-year sentence. "I'm a little shook up. We're all shook up," she said. "I'm glad it's over. It's been a really long haul.

"I think it's going to help everybody move on. Even though it's been four years, it's still something on our minds all the time because we're waiting, waiting for justice."

She said that, at the beginning, she was angry with Bushby, but now feels sorry he "ruined his life," and feels bad for his family.

"I'm sure he's had a lot of time to think and regrets what he's done," she said, but also questioned the sincerity of Bushby's apology. "I don't believe he really

¹ <https://www.rd.com/list/inspiring-forgiveness-stories> Accessed June 12, 2021.

² Ibid.

wrote those words that he read. I think he's coached and didn't feel it came from his own heart."³

I was taken aback that even though they did not believe the apology was authentic, and more so they had lost a beloved family member in a tragic death, one of the things said was that they feel sorry he ruined his life and they feel bad for his family.

All of these stories speak to forgiveness and reconciliation, at least to the beginnings of it...of how a change of how one views another can lead to a change of heart and relationship.

There was a line in our scripture reading today that really caught my attention. It was in verse 16, "regard no one from a human point of view".

Regard no one from a human point of view.

All of these stories point to people choosing to think differently about another human being than what the circumstances in our experience seems to call for in order for what we might deem as justice or fairness having been achieved. Some people even go so far as to want to exact revenge rather than reconciliation on those who have harmed them.

The passage of scripture read today is rich with wisdom based in the Christian perspective of reconciliation, one that sadly as Christians we have seen disregarded over and over and over again. Likely we have done harm rather than sought to redeem or reconcile with someone that we have felt did a great injustice to us, a friend or family member.

From families estranged by decisions made over the death of a parent, to words spoken in anger or defence, we are not good at reconciliation. It is not just personal though, from the Crusades of the 12 and 13th centuries, to the "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland from 1969 through the 1990's and so many examples in between and since, Christians have only seen others from a human point of view, but have not sought the reconciliation that is called for as believers in Christ.

We are faced with stories like remains of 215 Indigenous children at a Kamloops Residential school, to a Muslim family recklessly and purposefully run over as they went as a family for a walk on the streets of London ON. We have Black Lives Matter and #Me too movements. We judge, we wonder how much is truth. Some tire of hearing about it again. And yet...as Christians whether or not we believe the experience of another, or we tire of it, we are called to see people as in Christ, to not regard someone from our human point of view. In all things we are to see people, creation, situations from the view that Christ died for all, was raised for all.

³ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/brayden-bushby-barbara-kentner-sentencing-1.6056010>. Accessed June 12, 2021.

And there is something about Jesus' dying that call us all to die to ourselves, to our own wants, desire, ideologies, convictions, and beliefs. Though we don't like to think about dying to ourselves, in a culture that is so determined to give us everything we want, money, power, cupboards full of food or clothes, sewing rooms full of materials, garages full of tools and toys, camps on the lake, loving God means dying to what stops us from growing spiritually, whether it be stuff or our inner life.

And guess what? It is painful. In can be really painful. It is not fun. At times it means giving up a dream. Yet, in that dying to self, promise of spiritual growth starts to build. In that pain of giving up those things, whether tangible items, our attitudes, or our deeply held convictions, the Holy Spirit gets to work.

Our need to be right, to disregard the lived experience of another, to downplay the harm and hurt of a woman who has lost a child, the pain of divorce regardless of the reason, the pain of not being able to come out as lesbian, gay, queer, and more, is to forget the call to see everyone, every circumstance through the lens of the risen Christ, through the lens of being one who loves God, loves Jesus and therefore is striving to be reconciled to God through Christ who "has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself!"

If we are to call ourselves the church, we don't get to ignore the cries of our Indigenous brothers and sisters as they grieve their losses. We don't get to allow Asian hate, Muslim hate, Jewish hate. It is our work to be part of the healing of the world, to this work of reconciliation. We don't get to be tired of it. "We are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us"

This work starts in our homes and in our churches. It expands to neighbours, communities, country, and the world. It encompasses relationships, between loved ones, races, gender, nations, and creation. It is a lot of work, but we don't do it alone. God is with us through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In August 1995 a scene occurred in Burma, now called Myanmar, that fifty years earlier no one could ever have imagined. It happened at the bridge over the Kwai River. During World War II the Japanese army had forced Allied prisoners of war from Britain, Australia, and the Netherlands to build a railroad. The Japanese soldiers committed many atrocities, and some sixteen thousand Allied POWs died building what has been called Death Railway.

But after the war, a former Japanese army officer named Nagase Takashi went on a personal campaign to urge his government to admit the atrocities committed.

After many years of effort, the result of his crusade was a brief ceremony in 1995 at the infamous bridge. On one side of the bridge were fifty Japanese, including five war veterans, and Mr. Takashi. Eighteen schoolteachers from Japan carried

two hundred letters written by children expressing sadness for what had happened during the war.

At the other side of the bridge were representatives of Allied soldiers; Two old soldiers from Britain who declared the business of fifty years ago finished at last. A young woman from Australia who came to deliver, posthumously, her father's forgiveness. A son of a POW who came to do the same. And there was 73-year-old Australian David Barrett, who said he made the pilgrimage because he felt that to continue hating would destroy him.

The two groups began to walk the narrow planks of the black iron bridge toward one another. When they met in the center, they shook hands, embraced, shed tears. Yuko Ikebuchi, a school teacher, handed the letters from the Japanese children to the veterans, and in tears turned and ran without a word.

Forgiveness can transform the very place where atrocities have occurred into something beautiful – a display of God's mercy.⁴

Forgiveness is a part of reconciliation, a big part, but so too is moving beyond forgiveness to seeing another, seeing creation through the lens of Christ who died and rose again, and sits at the right hand of God. Not because God wants to judge us, but because God loves us. God created the person you love and the person you dislike or maybe even hate. God sees the pain in your heart, but also see the pain in the heart of the one you disagree with. God sees all that is and loves, so much so, that through Christ we are reconciled.

So from words of scripture, I say again, "Christ died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. Regard no one from a human point of view...if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." And I add to one another. Amen.

Prayers of the People

God of all nations,
we thank you for your great power and might, for you are moving all history toward your good purposes and plans. Though nations wield economic, political, and military power that seems to rule the day, we trust that you are stronger still. We thank you that our systems of oppression and injustice are ultimately doomed to failure. We pray, then, for oppression to come to an end and for injustice to cease, so that people

⁴ Larson, Craig Brian. *Leadership Journal. 750 Engaging Illustrations for Preacher, Teachers, and Writers*. Baker Books. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1993, 1996, 1998. 2002. Page 184-185.

everywhere may live in peace and dignity. We pray for all those who sit in the seats of power to learn your ways of mercy and kindness. In our community, teach us to work together for the common good, caring for our neighbors and growing in understanding across every divide.

Gracious God,
we know that you are at work among the least, the lost, and the last, in the things that are unseen, and that your heavenly reign does not swagger, but is subtle—coming among us in uncommon and often unnoticed ways. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear how and where you are moving and changing all things. Help us to look for your kingdom in the ways of children and others who are vulnerable among us, to seek you at the margins among those overlooked or ostracized. Humble us so that we can learn from those who are meek in all the earth.

Life-giving God,
when our lives are dry and brittle, we trust that you can restore us to life, making us green again and fruitful. For anyone living with depression, chronic pain, or long-term illness, we ask for your healing and tender care. For those who have lost employment or the opportunity to be engaged with others in meaningful service, we pray for new opportunities to spring up. For anyone who has come to an ending, whether sought or undesired we pray that a new beginning will open that promotes new growth and flourishing.

Finally, dear God,
no matter how small our faith is, we pray that you will give us good growth in our discipleship to you so that we may be faithful ambassadors of Christ, sharing his love and working for the reconciliation of the world.

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Praying together the words Jesus spoke to his disciples...

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

We give thanks in word and song to God, who makes us glad and gives us joy because of all that God has done. We enact our thanksgiving through the tithes and offerings you present to your church community. May God put to good use what we give today or in coming days.

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.

The ministry of reconciliation we are called to is only possible through God's divine love. As we leave this time together may God's love dwell in you richly.

Hymn

Love divine, all loves excelling

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1. Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven, to earth come down;
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation;
enter every trembling heart.
2. Breathe, oh breathe thy loving Spirit
into every troubled breast!
Let us all in thee inherit,
let us find the promised rest;
take away our love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
end of faith as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.
3. Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy grace receive;
suddenly return and never,
never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray and praise thee, without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.
4. Finish then thy new creation;
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee,
changed from glory into glory
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love and praise.

Words: public domain

Benediction

Be reconciled to God through Christ
and join in the ministry of reconciliation,
for the sake of the world.

2 Cor. 5:18–20

May God bless you with new life,
Christ tend you in grace,
and the Holy Spirit guide your steps,
as you walk by faith now and forever.

2 Cor. 5:7

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