

# St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

## Sixth Sunday after Pentecost - July 4, 2021

### Words of Welcome

Do you have people or problems that just weigh you down, frustrate you, or take from your quality of life? How does one deal with some of that stuff and yet understand that God is with them even in the challenges? Things to ponder, things to talk about. Let's do that. As we come into this sacred time, we begin with a call to worship.

### Call to Worship

Great is the Lord; **and greatly to be praised.**

Praise God in the cities and towns, **and in all the quiet places.**

Praise God on the mountains and hilltops;

**and in every valley, on every plain and in the deeps.**

We gather to raise our voices in praise with all God's creation;

**let us praise God's holy name together, here and everywhere.**

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### Hymn

*Come, know my joy, the Maker says*

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1. "Come, know my joy," the Maker says and pours out works of power that sear the sense, defy the mind and fill the soul with awe and we with open mouth receive God's gifts with infant need, and, sight unfocussed, scarce perceive Love's presence as we feed.
2. The feast we join is long begun; God bids us welcome here to name and use the sovereign gifts within our human care. With God's own joy some seem to soar, a fierce and holy flame; some gifts are thorns we scarce endure to touch, or face, or name.
3. "Come, seek my face," the Giver says, "with heart and soul and strength; let fear give way to love; come, step upon the waves of faith." Dear Giver, Gift., we seek your face: you share our thorn, our scar. We learn your joy when by your grace we share the gift we are.
4. "Come, learn of me," the Servant says and multiplies a feast of loaves and fish, of bread and wine, transforming every guest. "Come," says the Host, "from west and east bring gifts to share – come, eat! - none lost or wasted when God's feast of joy will be complete."

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Music Irish traditional melody.

## **Prayer of Adoration and Confession**

Great are you, O God,  
and greatly to be praised in all places and at all times.  
You have made all things and called them good.  
You created humans in your image.  
You gave us breath and life, a calling and a purpose.  
Filled with love for all creation,  
you lift up leaders and send out disciples  
to take part in your reconciling work in the world.  
Your love is endless, your mercy without measure,  
your faithfulness without limit.  
And so we praise you with all our strength, mind, heart and soul,  
in the name of Jesus, your Son,  
led by your Spirit who guides us day by day.

**God of overflowing grace,  
we are a people blessed with abundance,  
and yet we take so much for granted.  
We do not recognize that your gift of life is precious,  
and so we waste time on things that do not matter.  
Preoccupied with our own needs and desires,  
we close our eyes to the needs of those around us;  
we close our hearts to those who are not like us.  
We turn away from opportunities to learn and grow.  
In your mercy, forgive us, O God.  
Change our hearts and renew our calling to be bearers of your peace,  
and witnesses to the work of your kingdom.**

All-knowing God, we long to hear you speak a word for our times and our lives.  
By the power of your Spirit, open our ears to hear your Word this day.  
Give us insight into the good news we witness in Christ, your Living Word.  
Fill us with the desire to follow him in faithfulness. Amen.

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## **Assurance of Pardon**

While it is true that we have all sinned,  
it is a greater truth that we are forgiven through God's love in Jesus Christ.  
To all who humbly seek the mercy of God I say,  
In Jesus Christ our sin is forgiven.  
Be at peace with God, with yourself and with one another.

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## Scripture Reading 2 Corinthians 12:2-10

<sup>2</sup>I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. <sup>3</sup>And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows—<sup>4</sup>was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. <sup>5</sup>On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. <sup>6</sup>But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, <sup>7</sup>even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. <sup>8</sup>Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, <sup>9</sup>but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. <sup>10</sup>Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

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

### Message A thorn in my side

There are certain phrases in English that people who are just learning the language have a difficult time understanding. Hit the sack, spill the beans, let the cat out of the bag, back to the old drawing board, barking up the wrong tree, hit the nail on the head, under the weather, and raining cats and dogs, are all examples of phrases that could need some explaining if a person new to the language is going to understand what you are expressing. Even at that, though I know what it means when someone says it is raining cats and dogs, I have no idea why we use that turn of phrase to say that it's raining heavily. Another phrase that must freak people out is when someone says they jumped out of their skin.

When I was a teenager visiting family in the Netherlands, I was traveling with one of my cousins who spoke very good English, as I observed the endless and well laid out bike roads everywhere we went, I said, “I get a kick out of these bike paths.” He looked at me in wonder as he had translated that literally and was trying to figure out how I would get a kick from a bike path.

There is another turn of phrase that we use that comes directly out of the Bible, it is “a thorn in my side”. You need look no farther than Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Corinthians to figure out where that saying comes from. You can also find a reference to it in the Old Testament book of Numbers 33:55. To have a thorn in one's side is to have a constant

annoyance or experience someone or something that is of continual trouble. Some of you may already have that someone or something in mind!

Though for us a thorn in one's side can leave us frustrated or even looking to hand out some retribution, for example when someone allows their dog to daily poop on your lawn without cleaning up after them, or the neighbourhood cat uses your garden as their personal kitty litter box, there are often bigger and more challenging things that can become a thorn in one's side. It may be the family member that always seems to be in need of your money, the person who gossips and can't be trusted, or the person down the hall in your building that always leaves a mess or turns the volume up to loud.

We don't actually know what the thorn in Paul's side was, whether it was physical, emotional, or mental, but we do know that he believed it to be a messenger of Satan to torment him. In other words, he did not blame God or think that God was messing with him as a test of faith. What he did come to believe was that the thorn kept him humble.

The humble part is where we need to focus for a moment. You may recall that the context of the letter is Paul writing to defend himself because some so-called super apostles (Chapter 11) were in Corinth undermining the work that Paul had accomplished with the believers in that city. This group were boasting of all that they could do, were eloquent speakers – read smooth talkers – and charged or asked for support for their ministry to the Corinthians. Paul had paid his own way, taught them, and loved them. Paul starts his defence in chapter 10 and it continues to the end of the letter. In chapter 11 he begins with, “I hope you will put up with a little of my foolishness” and then spends all of chapter 11 and 12 boasting just as those who were trying to win over the Corinthian church had done, though it loathes him to do it, as it seems to Paul the Corinthians were impressed by boasting.

Yet when Paul boasts about his accomplishments, he diminishes anything that would make him look like he was super, actually saying that to boast of that would mean that this ministry was about him rather than God. Instead, Paul chooses to boast in his weakness. He boasts about the hardships and sufferings he and those with him have experienced because they knew that their coming through all of that came from the power and grace of God. He knew that in any “self-confident boasting” he was not talking as the Lord would but as a fool. (11:17)

So we come to the opening of chapter 12 and our reading today to hear about visions and revelations of a man that Paul knows. Well, the reason he knows the man is because it is Paul himself that had these revelations, yet Paul feels no need to share exactly how it happened or much else about the experience because it would not be helpful to the church. It was a personal experience and boasting as others did would sound impressive

but would do little to build up the body of Christ. Instead, he spends more time on this thorn in his side, in his flesh, and that may be for a few reasons.

As mentioned earlier, the thorn keeps Paul humble. It is not from God, but God has also not taken it from Paul. He has to keep dealing with it. One would be well advised to note that Paul pleaded with God three times to take this trouble away yet the answer was no. Often we hear the words from the gospel of Matthew, "Where two or three are gathered in my name and agree about anything asked for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven." (Matt 18:19) and we determine that God will answer our prayers as we hoped, but that is just not the case. Once again, there is more to the context around that Matthew verse than we care to remember and second, we forget that God has said "no" more than once in the Bible, most notably when Jesus asked that the cup be taken from him when he was in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39).

Once again, the answer is "no" to the Paul's prayer. God did not put the thorn in Paul's side, but neither does God work to remove it, whatever that "it" is. Paul says. "a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated." Somewhere, somehow, whether through a deep understanding, another person that God brought into Paul's life, or through divine revelation, Paul understood God to be saying "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." (v9)

Now please don't take this to mean that you should suffer if there is some relief to be found. If God has provided relief through medication, surgery, counseling, or provides the opportunity to get you out of an abusive relationship or bad situation then take it and respond with gratitude. Embrace any healing, wholeness, or corrective that comes your way. For many though there seems to be no relief. The struggle may be temporary, or it may be ongoing, like no end to the chronic pain, no hope that mental illness will be lifted, no cure, or no change in relationships or hardships. It is in these experiences that Paul's understanding may be helpful to you as you look to God and hear the words, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.'

Remember God did not inflict the suffering on Paul anymore than God has inflicted suffering on you or another, but we live in a world where brokenness is an ongoing reality. So, what does it mean for God's grace to be sufficient for power is made perfect in weakness? Well, this power is of Christ and if we have Christ in us, with us, and working through us, then we have the power of Christ dwelling in us. This is why Paul ends with the words that, regardless of what the trouble, if he lives in it for the sake of Christ and with Christ, then whenever he is weak, then he's strong.

This strength comes from the place inside us where Christ resides. Where Christ is, there is power, power to make choices about how to respond to our circumstances. Any

weakness becomes a strength, but it is strength because of Christ in us. It is not strength that comes of our own will power or muscle power, though God will use that too.

Our getting through the challenges as we rely on Christ and the sufficiency of God grace becomes our witness, not because we boast about how God is making us great, but we witness by how in our weakness, in our struggle, or circumstances, God is present, giving strength and power to live out our lives regardless and maybe in spite of our personal thorn in the flesh.

Thinking about weakness as power and strength goes against everything we are taught is truth and of value. We clamour for power, we admire those with health and strength, we long for comfort and ease in our living. Weakness has no place in our lives and we berate ourselves as we age and our bodies no longer have the strength and agility we covet. Our minds and memories grow dim and we become frustrated. We are tender hearted and cry easily and apologize for being emotional. Some struggle from the moment they are born and we wonder “why?” and yet, if we are to believe Paul then we have the power of Christ dwelling in us. We have the grace of God. Our weakness become our witness when we trust God’s grace and Christ indwelling presence.

We are humbled not because we are weak but because we are in awe of God’s presence with us. When times are tough, when the thorn in your side just doesn’t go away, take a look and ask, “Where is God in this?” May your answer witness to others of God’s grace and Christ’s power in us, with us, and working through us. Amen.

## **Prayers of the People**

Lord Jesus,  
You reached out to so many different people,  
with so many different needs, in so many different situations.  
We thank you for the ways you have reached out to us,  
in the embrace of prayer,  
in the energy of a song,  
in thought sparked by a sermon,  
and in the wisdom of a word from scripture or the words of a friend.  
Sometimes your healing has brought comfort;  
sometimes it has brought challenge and the call to respond.  
Hear us as we seek your comfort and your challenge  
for the world, for the church and for our lives.

Bring comfort to those whose lives have been overturned by the pandemic:  
to those whose work or study has become so much more difficult;  
to those who cannot find work and don’t know where to turn;  
to those who still struggle with COVID-19 or another lingering illness,

and those who have lost hope that things will ever improve.

Bring wisdom to those who lead recovery efforts over the next months:  
to those whose decisions affect the well-being of the vulnerable,  
to those who guide economic and educational planning,  
and those who are rebuilding community life:  
May your wisdom and compassion guide them.

Lord Jesus, bring comfort to those who are lonely or shut in,  
and to all who have lost beloved family members or friends during the pandemic;  
bring comfort to those who feel pain without relief  
and those who wait for diagnosis or life-restoring treatment.  
Offer peace to those who know there is no treatment  
and wait in hope for your eternal welcome.

Bring knowledge to those who want to make the world a better place,  
and to all who work within science, medicine, and the law  
to improve the quality of life for all people.  
Give them a vision of their work that is both just and courageous,  
so that no part of society is neglected or mistreated.  
Challenge those who stir up violence and unrest  
with a sense of shame for the cost to innocent lives,  
and with a deeper understanding of what justice means.

Lord Jesus, comfort your church  
in places where ministries struggle, whatever the reason.  
And challenge your church to renew our vision for ministry  
so that our witness is faithful to your all-embracing love,  
expressed not only in words but also in the actions we take  
to embrace those who differ from us  
and yet have a place in your heart and your eternal care.

Hear us now as we pray in the words you taught us, Lord Jesus, saying:

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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**

We bring our gifts with trusting hearts, seeking God's blessing on the ministries these gifts support. We pray that God will work through our gifts and our lives, to touch the world with God's healing grace through Christ.

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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.

## Hymn

### *Lord of all power*

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1. Lord of all power, I give you my will,  
in joyful obedience your tasks to fulfil.  
Your bondage is freedom, your service is song,  
and, held in your keeping, my weakness is strong.
2. Lord of all wisdom, I give you my mind,  
rich truth that surpasses our knowledge to find.  
What eye has not seen and what ear has not heard  
is taught by your Spirit and shines from your word.
3. Lord of all bounty, I give you my heart;  
I praise and adore you for all you impart:  
your love to inspire me, your counsel to guide,  
your presence to cheer me, whatever betide.
4. Lord of all being, I give you my all.  
If e'er I disown you, I stumble and fall;  
but, sworn in glad service your word to obey  
I walk in your freedom to the end of the way.

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## Benediction

Fear not, for God's power is perfected in our weakness. *2 Cor. 12:10*  
Go in God's strength to love and serve.

May the love of God,  
the power of Christ,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
dwell richly in you forever.

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