

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

August 1, 2021

Words of Welcome

Science has always asked and answered questions. Sometimes a question cannot be asked until we come into a certain amount of knowledge that allows us to ask different questions. Sometimes the questions get answered and sometime they don't. The same could be said of our faith. We will explore this further, but first let us join in a call to worship.

Call to Worship

God created all things visible and invisible; none other.
God provides food for your stomach and spirit; none other.
God is able to accomplish abundantly
far more than all we can ask or imagine.

Let us worship the Trinity, and none other.

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

Hymn

Lord, whose love

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1. Lord, whose love through humble service
before the weight of human need,
who upon the cross, forsaken,
offered mercy's perfect deed:
we, your servants, bring the worship
not of voice alone, but heart,
consecrating to your purpose every gift that you impart.
2. Still your children wander homeless;
still the hungry cry for bread;
still the captives long for freedom;
still the grief we mourn our dead.
As, O Lord, your deep compassion
healed the sick and freed the soul,
use the love your Spirit kindles
still to save and make us whole.
3. As we worship, grant us vision,
till your love's revealing light
in its height and depth and greatness
draws upon our quickened sight,
making known the needs and burdens
your compassion bid us bear,
stirring us to tireless striving
your abundant life to share.

4. Called by worship to your service,
forth in your dear name we go
to the child, the youth, the aged,
love in the living deeds to show;
hope and health, good will and comfort,
counsel, aid and peace we give,
that your servants, Lord, in freedom
may your mercy know, and live.

"Lord, whose love," words by Albert F Bayly
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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of majesty and mystery,
we gather before you in humble wonder.
Source of all that is, your breadth and depth are beyond our imagining.
Word of hope and healing, your grace defies our explanations.
Spirit of purpose and possibility, you touch us when we least expect it.
Receive our praise and prayer this day,
and prepare us to receive the Bread of Life in this hour of worship.
For we come to you in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord,
as your Holy Spirit prays within us, to stir us to new life.

**God of mystery and mercy,
you know the details of our lives.
You see the sin and the sorrow we bear;
you see the problems and the possibilities we face.
You see how we take advantage of each other,
how we overlook one another.
O God, we confess we do not always see what you see—
in our own lives and in the lives that touch ours.
Open our eyes to the truth of our times
and cleanse our hearts with your grace.**

Source of all wisdom, in the midst of many distractions, focus us on you.
In the midst of competing voices, attune our ears to hear your Word.
In the midst of the many choices we face, show us your will.
In the name of Jesus, who is bread for our journey, we pray. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

The wideness of God's mercy, the range of
God's forgiveness, the infinite love of God,
the Heart of hope which is never empty: all

these gifts are ours, as God restores us to the fullness of life meant for us.

**Grounded in love, rooted in discipleship,
we offer ourselves in service to others,
recognizing the limitless grace which
is ours to share in Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.**

Written by Thom Shuman, and posted on Lectionary Liturgies.

Reposted: https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/07/confession-proper-12-b_15.html.

Scripture Reading Ephesians 3:14-21

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. ¹⁶I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, ¹⁷and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

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

Message Unknown unknowns

“Human intelligence: have we reached the limit of knowledge?” This was the title of an article from the online journal *The Conversation* published October 11, 2019. In the article author Maarten Boudry explores whether or not human beings are reaching the limits of knowledge. It is an interesting and thought provoking read. One paragraph that caught my attention made the following reference,

In one of his infamous memorandum notes on Iraq, former US secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld, makes a distinction between two forms of ignorance: the “known unknowns” and “unknown unknowns”. In the first category belong the things that we know we don’t know. We can frame the right questions, but we haven’t found the answers yet. And then there are the things that “we don’t know we don’t know”. For these unknown unknowns, we can’t even frame the questions yet.¹

¹ Boudry, Maarten. <https://theconversation.com/human-intelligence-have-we-reached-the-limit-of-knowledge-124819>. Accessed July 31, 2021.

Going to the scripture reading from Ephesians there is the line that prays that we would know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. Maybe this is one of those unknown unknowns. It doesn't mean things will not be revealed to us, it just means that there will likely always be the love of Christ that surpasses our knowledge and yet fills us with all the fullness of God.

Let's back up for a moment to the opening line of the reading. "For this reason," Those are the words which begin this scripture reading, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name." It might be good for us to review the "for this reason" part as it refers to things that have already been shared by the writer of the letter.

Though there is evidence that this letter was not written by the Apostle Paul, it uses Paul's name to give credibility to its content. This was not unusual in ancient letter writing and in no way makes it any less important for edification, so I am going to use Paul's name as the writer did.

At least some of the reason Paul bows his knees before the Father is because of what Paul has seen God doing through Jesus and in God's people. The letter began with spiritual blessings we have received through Christ, noting that because of Jesus we live in the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us. This was also a time when there was separation between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Paul called it a dividing wall that Jesus had broken down, destroying barriers making the distinctions valid no longer as we are all, then and now, one body in Christ. He bowed his "knees before the Father in reverence, in awe, in adoration, and submission to God from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name". Paul had witnessed the powerful, amazing, grace-filled love with which God worked in and through people because of Christ and the creative and sustaining power of the Holy Spirit.

From all that Paul has experienced and witnessed he comes before God in prayer for those who read and hear the letter. It is a prayer that I have for the congregations and people I minister to and with, beyond our city and in our city. It is a prayer for our denomination, the Presbyterian Church in Canada, as we set a path for reconciliation in many areas, and it is a prayer for the whole Christian church.

Just reading these words of scripture would be sufficient enough, without need to expound on what is presented, as one savors and ponders phrases like "rooted and grounded in love" and "power to comprehend with the saints what is the breadth, and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." Still, there is value in plumbing the depth of at least some of the richness of the prayer.

Paul writes, “I pray that, according to the riches of God’s glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.”

I am not sure how one comprehends the riches of God’s glory; it may well fit into the unknown unknowns category. It is not that we haven’t glimpsed God’s glory in creation or in science, but we don’t even know what we don’t know about God’s glory, so to comprehend the expanse of that glory is beyond us. What can be known is that we get to experience some of God’s glory and that the rest is far greater than our imaginations.

The part about being strengthened in our inner being with the power through his Spirit, that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith, that too leads to some interesting places. In reading a commentary by Karen Chakoian she offered the following picture of what it might look like and mean to have Christ dwell in one’s heart. She writes,

The issue is letting Christ in to change us. Having Christ dwell in our hearts is akin to having a new person move into your household. If they’re just visiting, it is all rather easy; you simply offer hospitality and try to practice good manners. But if someone moves into stay, everything changes. At first you might try to hold on to your familiar patterns and routines, and the new member may work hard to accommodate you and stay out of the way. But eventually they make their mark. Conversations change. Relationships realign. Household tasks increase and responsibilities shift. So it is when Christ moves in to the hearts of Christians. This isn’t merely tweaking old patterns; everything changes.²

Everything changes when Christ moves into the hearts of Christians. If you are not changing, then this may be an opportunity to reflect on whether or not Jesus is a guest in your heart or has been invited fully into your heart. Being a Christian means that change will happen, it will be inevitable, it will also be life-giving and an adventure. It will not take away hardship or pain, but it will give you a new lens of faith with which to live into what every you face and accept or take the steps toward change that is rooted and grounded in the love of God for you and all people.

Paul continues, “I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

As in science, it is not that we stop asking questions and be satisfied with not knowing the unknowns. In fact, the prayer is that we may have the power to comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth of love, knowledge, and fullness of God.

² Chakoian, Karen. *Feasting on the Word: Year B Volume 3 Pentecost and Season after Pentecost*. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2010. P280.

We can ask questions, we can study, we can wonder, ponder, and reflect, and in that we will come to know God more fully. But it is also true that there are mysteries and questions of faith that will allude us just as there are questions known and unknown that science is asking or yet to ask.

The prayer ends with a doxology, an expression of praise to God, "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generation, for ever and ever."

What if we actually started to believe that there is a power at work within us, not just as individuals, but as the church, that is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine? How would that affect the way we worship and work? Come October this congregation of St. Andrew's is going to be asking those questions. We are headed into a year long work and celebration of discernment as we consider how God's power is at work in our congregation. Seeking to learn what God may be able to accomplish in us. Trusting that it is abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine. It is a conversation for every church to have. It is a conversation for you to have with God.

What I do know is that when Christ dwells in our hearts, and we let that power work within us, amazing adventures start. Life changes and you have to be open to that. Letting Christ have full reign over the house, not just an invite to couch surf, allows the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge and the power at work within us that is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine not only in our generation but for generations to come, it allows that power to get to work and blow our minds while filling our hearts and lives. Thanks be to God!

Prayers of the People

God in whom we live and move and have our being:
As we gather in your presence today,
we are aware of many challenges in our own lives,
in the lives of those we care about and in the world around us.
Thank you for your faithfulness to each of us and to your whole creation,
given all that we share and all the different situations we face.
Show us how our care and concern for the world and for each other
can respond to the needs we name before you today:

In faithful silence, we lay before you the concerns on our hearts this day:
We pray for those who have been in the headlines lately,
for those situations in the world and in our country that concern us deeply,
and for all whose lives cry out to you and to us for help...

We pray for those who are suffering in our community
and for those struggling to overcome the effects of the pandemic:
those who are ill and those who are bereaved;
those struggling to make ends meet or find the right job;
those who are lonely
and those who are moving and in need of new friends...

We pray for those looking forward to a new beginning this fall:
those hoping for a school year with fewer pandemic interruptions;
those starting at a new school or in a new college or university program;
those beginning new jobs or new activities;
those welcoming new members into the family through birth or marriage:

We pray for our congregation in a time of reorganizing
after months of pandemic restrictions.

Gather us in to new and renewed friendships.

Help us see where you call us to reach out with your love and generosity.

Equip us to meet every challenge we face with hearts full of faith and commitment
for we dare to pray in the way Christ taught us as his followers:

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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

God's love overflows with power and possibility and blesses the gifts we offer along with all our efforts to serve God and our neighbours in Jesus' name. We ask that God would use what we have and what we do, to build up the ministry of Christ's body, the church, in our congregation, our community and throughout the world.

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As we 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

O love, how deep, how broad, how high

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1. O love, how deep, how broad, how high,
how passing thought and fantasy,
that God, the Son of God, should take
our mortal form for mortals' sake.
2. For us baptized, for us he bore
his holy fast and hungered sore;
for us temptations sharp he knew,
for us the tempter overthrew.
3. For us he prayed; for us he taught;
for us his daily works he wrought:
by words and signs and actions, thus
still seeking not himself, but us.
4. For us to wicked hands betrayed,
scourged, mocked, in purple robe arrayed,
he bore the shameful cross and death,
for us gave up his dying breath.
5. For us he rose from death again;
for us he went on high to reign;
for us he sent his Spirit here
to guide, to strengthen and to cheer.
6. All glory to our Lord and God
for love so deep, so high, so broad,
the Trinity whom we adore
forever and forevermore.

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Benediction

²⁰ Now to God who by the power at work within us
is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine,
²¹ to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations,
for ever and ever. Amen.