

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost - July 11, 2021

Words of Welcome

Summer is a wonderful time to celebrate life especially in Canada while the sun brings warmth, rain waters the earth, and plants and animals are more active than in other times of the year. Over the summer we are going to be taking a look and pondering a letter to the church, this one addressed to the church in Ephesus, in a series called Glory, Grace, and Grit. This letter starts with an explosion of praise of cosmic scope that includes all thing in heaven and on earth, which means you, me, and every relationship. Grace to you and peace as we begin with a call to worship.

Call to Worship

God has accomplished all things through Christ,
so that we might live as God's own children.

Let us give thanks to God

and live for the praise of God's glory.

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Hymn

Child of blessing, child of promise

521

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| 1. Child of blessing, child of promise,
baptized with the Spirit's sign,
with this water God has sealed you
unto love and grace divine. | 2. Child of love, our love's expression,
love's creation, loved indeed!
Fresh from God, refresh our spirits,
into joy and laughter lead. |
| 3. Child of joy, our dearest treasure,
God's you are; from God you came.
Back to God we humbly give you;
live as one who bears Christ's name. | 4. Child of God, your loving Parent,
learn to know whose child you are;
grow to laugh and sing and worship,
trust and love God more than all. |

Child of blessing, child of promise" words by Ronald S. Cole-Turner. Music Public domain

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Gracious God, source of life and love in all creation,
in a world marked by bitterness, you are compassion.
In a culture marked by confusion, you are light shining in the darkness.
In a time of conspiracies and suspicion, you are the truth that sets us free.
Your stillness is peace when we are frantic.
Your strength is comfort when we are fearful.
Your wisdom is guidance when we are lost.
For all that you are and all that you give,
God, our Maker,
Christ, our Saviour,
and Spirit who leads us into life,

we offer you all honour, praise and worship, now and always.

Loving God,

in a world marked by self-indulgence, you are generosity for those in need.

In a world marked by injustice, you are a conscience speaking to us.

In a world marked by vengeance, you are mercy and reconciliation.

Forgive our selfishness; our lack of concern for the vulnerable;

and our desire to settle scores rather than work things out.

Renew us with your mercy

and strengthen our resolve to live generously, in action and in attitude.

God of Word and Wisdom, as we hear the scriptures read and interpreted today, enlighten our minds, nurture our souls, embolden our hearts, and stir our minds, so that we may live out your Word in the world you love. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

According to the riches of his grace,

which God has lavished upon us

and sealed for us by the promised Holy Spirit,

hear this good news:

In Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

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Scripture Reading Ephesians 1: 1-14

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹²so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

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

Message Chosen and lavishly loved

Princess stories have always been a part of folklore, I think of Cinderella, who dreams of meeting the handsome prince falling in love and living happily every after. There is Sleeping Beauty, Snow White, and The Little Mermaid, all with that same sort of fantasy life. Thankfully, things have shifted and children now have characters like Mowana, Elsa, and Merinda with strong, independent, and compassionate personalities to aspire to. Superheroes have also been big, from Superman and Batman, to Aquaman, Black Panther, and Wolverine. Some children, and maybe even adults, may not aspire to princesses or superheroes but rather fanaticize about being adopted into a rich family where all the wealth and prestige of the family becomes theirs.

As it turns out as people of God, we have what many long for and it is not fantasy or fiction. We are chosen people. God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before God in love. God destined us, every person who breathes, for adoption as God's children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of God's will.

Many people read self-help books that encourage one to use affirmations of self. This whole first section of the letter continues to burst with words of affirmation of who we are and whose we are! Our adoption is to the praise of God's glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. On top of that we have redemption and forgiveness according to the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.

We have the riches of God's grace lavished on us! If you still see God as a stern old man in the heavens who is judging your every thought and move, read this first part of Ephesians everyday. Our God is generous, forgiving, lavish! We are given insight into what God is up to and what God desires for each of us. It is also important to note that this is the same lavish, generous, and forgiving God who loves the person you hate, sees the person you turn away from, weeps for the one who suffers, grieves with those who grieve.

As Christians, we are the first to set our hope on Christ. We have heard the Gospel of salvation and believed in Christ. We are marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit that is already with us and now we get to share that with others. We get to share the news with others that this is for everyone, the glorious grace freely bestowed on us, redemption, forgiveness, and the riches of God's grace lavished on us. We get wisdom and insight to help us understand God's will according to God's good pleasure set forth in Christ. In Christ we have obtained an inheritance of fullness of life while we live on this earth and fullness of life when we go to be with our Lord.

This first chapter of the Ephesians speaks to an avalanche of gifts from our generous God, through Jesus Christ. And that is the crux for Christians and those who would believe. One must believe in Jesus Christ and what he accomplished for us in his life, death, resurrection and ascension. You may note I did not say understand, I said believe. We see and experience God's glory, we may even attain some wisdom and insight, but

it is mostly mystery. We tend to think of mysteries as something that must be solved, but this is not so with God. To solve the mystery would mean that God is not as awesome and powerful as we know God to be. And we know God through scripture and the work of the Holy Spirit, the promised Holy Spirit, at work in our lives.

The opening of the letter sets a firm footing for those who would believe as the coming chapters will have difficult passages that demonstrate that though we experience this lavish grace, we still live in the world and have to deal with the struggles of relationships, health, and well-being in ourselves, with those closest to us, and as broadly as how the world is in relationship with itself. For now, the letter is focused on God's glory and how that is shared and experienced through Christ.

How about a basketball analogy to help us get just a little of what God is promising us, desiring for us?

During his championship years with the Chicago Bulls, Michael Jordan was motivated by many things. One motivation most people did not hear about was his desire to win for the sake of the new players and coaches who had never been on a championship team.

So it was in 1997 when the bulls pursued their fifth championship. Assistant coach Frank Hamblen was new to the team that season. Before coming to the Bulls he had been an assistant coach on various teams for twenty-five years, but did not own a championship ring. He was now fifty years old.

Jordan told writer Melissa Isaacson of the *Chicago Tribune*, "He's been around the league for so long, on a lot of teams and made some great contributions...and then not to be on a championship team...That will be my gift to Hamblen. That's part of my motivation."

Hamblen said, "Michael came to me early in the season and told me it was a big motivation for him to win so that I can get a ring. When the best basketball player in the world tells you that, well, it certainly made me feel special."

The bulls did win it all in 1997, and Frank Hamblen got his ring.

Jesus Christ has a similar desire for us. He is determined to carry us to victory. He wants to see us glorified with him. He wants us to share the glory of his triumphant kingdom. When the Lord of heaven and earth tells us that, well, it certainly makes us feel special.¹

God's story started before the foundation of the world, has always been, and will continue to be in a time when all things on earth and in heaven are gathered up to in the fullness of time. We are invited into relationship with the God who created us and through us

¹ Larson, Craig Brian. *Leadership Journal. 750 Engaging Illustrations for Preacher, Teachers, and Writers*. Baker Books. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1993, 1996, 1998. 2002. Page 197-198.

others, who may not even know that this is possible, can be invited into this same lavish and amazing grace.

There is so much hope, so much grace, so much out pouring of the gifts of God that there is no doubt that you are loved, are of much value, and belong to God. It is true of us as individuals and it is true of the church world wide and especially in Canada, that is right now in much pain and grief over so much wrong-doing.

May these opening words of Ephesians inspire us to see all, regardless of colour, gender, age, size, culture, or however else we may categorize people, may we see and treat all as children of God worthy of love, hope, and abundant life. In Christ, with Christ and through Christ. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Blessed are you, O God, for all your glorious grace freely bestowed on us.

In Christ, we meet your love and wisdom, face to face.

Through the Holy Spirit, we recognize the abilities and opportunities you create in us and for us, to reach out to the world you love.

We thank you for all the ways friends and families, neighbours and strangers, reach out to us and to others, offering support and kindness, speaking up when we must confront wrongdoing, celebrating when achievements bless us all with healing and happiness.

Today we pray for courageous leaders in cities, countries and congregations who strive to serve with integrity and honesty in a world prone to self-interest.

We pray for those who struggle to create justice where it has been compromised, and to build reconciliation and understanding in divided communities.

We remember before you quiet and reliable leaders who keep their word and meet their deadlines so that we can depend on them in these unsettling times.

We pray for patient church members and community volunteers, who work diligently towards long-term goals that will improve our life together.

And we pray for the creative, impatient change makers, who keep challenging us, to be bolder and more determined in righting wrongs and trying new strategies.

We pray for the troubled in mind or spirit, for the angry and unhappy, and for those who feel that every day is a struggle. Soothe their concerns and open their hearts to claim the hope and help you offer.

We remember before you the sick and the dying, and the bereaved who must try to put their lives back together again.

We pray for those who are recovering from the pandemic, looking for better health, a fresh start, more stability or a glimpse of hope.

We pray for the community of Lytton as they find their way through the grief and frustration of losing their community to an all-encompassing fire. We think of those around the world dealing with the fury of nature through hurricanes, flooding, and

forest fires, as well as those who are hungry because they are displaced or their countries are in conflict.

Draw close to all these who suffer,
offering your comfort and courage to face whatever comes next.

Receive our prayers, both spoken and unspoken,
and embrace us all in your love.

Give us hearts to understand not only what you do on our behalf,
but also what you call us to do on your behalf,
for we are friends and followers of Jesus, who taught us to pray:

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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 Book of Ephesians tells us that we have received an inheritance in Christ. God's gifts to us in Christ and in creation allow us to be generous in response to the needs in God's world. What we give to God speaks to the world of God's generosity, as well as OUR OWN. ©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. Seventh Sunday after Pentecost - July 11, 2021. Year B

As you 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

When peace like a river

1. When peace like a river attendeth my way,
when sorrows like sea billows roll;
whatever my lot thou hast taught me to say,
"It is well, it is well with my soul!"

Refrain: It is well with my soul!
It is well, it is well with my soul!

2. Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
let this blest assurance control,
that Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
and hath shed His own blood for my soul.

3. My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought—
my sin, not in part, but the whole,
is nailed to His Cross, and I bear it no more;
praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!
4. And, Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
the clouds be rolled back as a scroll,
the trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend:
“Even so” - it is well with my soul.

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Benediction

Go forth in joy and peace, for you are God's beloved.

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has blessed us in Christ,

fill you with every blessing through the power of the Holy Spirit.

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