

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost - July 18, 2021

Words of Welcome

The Book of Ephesians has some of the most beautiful prayers to be found in scripture, it also has plenty of language that might seem presumptuous to some and inherently challenging for others with its talk of Christ's greatness and power. Hopefully we can come to a place that is helpful in our understanding when prayer and words of authority meld. As we begin this time of worship, please join me in a call to worship.

Call to Worship

Neighbors and newcomers, families and strangers,
we gather in this time trusting God's steadfast love.

Strugglers and stragglers, pilgrims almost at the end of the journey,
each of us seeks to follow Jesus, the compassionate One.

People in need of wisdom and revelation as we come to know Jesus,
the Spirit of faithfulness calls us to live as one people – God's people!

Adapted from ©2021 Thom M. Shuman. <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com> July 18

Hymn

Lord, the light of your love is shining

376

1. Lord, the light of your love is shining
in the midst of the darkness, shining;
Jesus, Light of the World, shine upon us.
Set us free by the truth you now bring us.
Shine on me; shine on me.
Refrain
Shine, Jesus, shine;
fill this land with the Father's glory;
blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow;
flood the nations with grace and mercy;
send forth your word, Lord, and let there be light!
2. Lord, I come to your awesome presence,
from the shadows into your radiance;
by your blood I may enter your brightness.
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness.
Shine on me; shine on me.

Refrain

3. As we gaze on your kingly brightness,
so our faces display your likeness,
ever changing from glory to glory;
mirrored here may our lives tell your story.
Shine on me; shine on me.

Refrain

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God our Maker,
in summer we easily marvel at the world you have made,
the colours of sunrise and sunset filling the horizon,
the intricate beauty of flower gardens and natural parks,
the quiet dignity of a river in its course,
and the steadfast presence of a rock face carved over time.
You show us how each small piece of your creation
depends in many ways on all the others.
Summer growth depends on spring rains;
health for each creature depends on the wise balance
you have set between each species;
the quality of life on the respect we show one another.
Wise and patient God, we marvel at the world you love.
Our worship joins the songs of all creation to bring you praise,
honouring you and the relationships you have set between us all,
through Christ, firstborn of all creation.

**God our Maker,
as we marvel at your creation, we confess we often take it for granted.
We don't know what to make of reports about the damage human life causes.
We prefer to live as if our lifestyles make no impact on the earth.
We confess we don't really want to change.
Yet we wonder if the way we live is pleasing to you.
For all the ways we put your creation at risk and harm the earth,
we ask for your forgiveness.
Teach us how to live in this marvellous world with love and respect
for you and for your whole creation.**

Move among us with your Spirit, O God, and prepare our hearts and minds to
receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own, that hearing you, we may
obey your will and follow your ways in the example of Jesus Christ, the Living Word.
Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

God's love awaits you.

It has been lavished upon you as a gentle summer rain,
refreshing your souls, opening your hearts, healing your wounds.

Rest in God's eternal love.

Scripture Reading Ephesians 1:15-23

¹⁵I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²²And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

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

Message The Power to Love

It is getting harder each week to write a message for Sunday worship as the pain of Indigenous people across our nation is witnessed almost daily in a newsclip or video shared on social media platforms. This week it felt like in writing more care than usual was going to be necessary given the language of the scripture reading in which the church, which is the body of Christ, is promised the immeasurable greatness of God's power for those who believe.

Whether it's residential schools, racism, marginalization, or harm to LGBTQI+ persons, the church world wide has times of finding itself having to reconsider the actions that have been taken often in partnership with government. All this is puzzling as Jesus died because of the actions of those in power. Our faith is based in the love of God who sent his Son so that all might have life and have it abundantly.

So it is with humility that we come to this scripture trusting that there is a life giving message in the text. Context being important, one needs to remember that the early church did not have power, it was struggling, often persecuted, and was mostly made up of people from the margins of society. The words are written to people in need of a

message of hope and promise. The writer begins this portion of the letter with a prayer that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give a spirit of wisdom and revelation as people come to know him, so that with the eyes of the heart enlightened, people may know what is the hope to which God has called them.

The sentence in the scripture is not complete yet, it breathlessly goes on, but let's stop and take a look at just this part. The first thing that is asked is for a spirit of wisdom and revelation to be given so that we can come to know Jesus, the one who willingly became flesh and blood, lived in the challenges of being human, died an inhuman death, all for the sake of the possibility of human beings having a relationship with their loving God.

This action on the part of God was not taken for just a few people, it was for every person who has, is, and will be living on the land of the earth, it was action taken for all time with the hope that we would come to know, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the wisdom and revelation needed to be in relationship with God and to live well with one another. There is a hope to which God has called us. It is about richness of life which is the glorious inheritance that is given to those who would believe. It is about the immeasurable greatness of God's power for those who believe according to the working of God's great power that was put to work in Christ when God raised him from the dead and seated Jesus at his right hand.

This is not about human power. It is about the power of God to change lives, to change relationships between us and God and between us and those we care about. Just as important is the power of God working in us to bring about a change in relationship between those who have been greatly harmed by oppressive policies and decisions, whether they happened a day ago or a hundred years ago. We are given power as the church to witness to the presence of Christ in the world...Christ who offered peace, grace, hope, joy, and love in the face of adversity, enemies, harm, and even death.

For Christians, it was God's immeasurable great power that went to work in bringing Jesus from the depths of death to the heights of heaven, to a place that is far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. In other words, Jesus' power and authority is all encompassing.

This power is not just about governments and earthly authority, it is about authority over our personal decisions and the work of the church. And I will say it over and over again, how we live and witness to Jesus in the world is not about our power unless it is the power to forgive, to love, to heal, to bring hope and speak loudly for justice in a very broken world, one in which the church and individuals who consider themselves Christians have made excruciatingly bad choices.

This scripture is about Jesus' presence in the world and beyond the world, it is about Jesus being the head of the church and the people the body and never should the body think it has become the head. The church is the body that reveals the fullness of Christ who fills all in all.

How we witness to the world as Christians has brought to mind through the discussion of this passage a poem that is attributed to St. Teresa of Avila. I have used it before in worship, but it is powerful and so for those who may find it a valuable reminder of how we are to show power in the world I share these words...

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

This scripture from Ephesians is an invitation to know you have access to the loving, forgiving, hope filled power of God. It is there for you personally; it is there for the church and it is for the world.

One practice I have had over the years is to replace "you" in the scripture with the name of a person that may be in need of God's power through Christ in their lives. Often I have used my own name so that I claim the power of God in my life. In light of what is happening in Canada and in the Presbyterian Church in Canada, for me, the name of our congregation or other congregations will find a way into this scripture that is a prayer for the eyes of the heart to be enlightened through the spirit of wisdom and revelation as we come to know our loving God who gave his precious Son for the world. To show you what is meant, the prayer would go something like this...

I do not cease to give thanks for St. Andrew's as I remember the church in my prayers. I pray that the God of our lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give the congregation a spirit of wisdom and revelation as we come to know God, so that with the eyes of our heart enlightened, we may know what is the

hope to which God has called us, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of God's power for us, this congregation, who believe...

I hope you get the gist of what can be done with this scripture that melds the prayer for us today with the words of power to bring about restored relationships in families, in communities, and in this country.

Our power is the power of Christ who loves – period. If by our actions we are bringing harm then we do not love as Christ loved. Jesus' life was lived for all. Jesus' death was one death for all. Jesus' reign is the power of God accessible to each of us and to the church to heal.

May the grace and peace of God our Creator and the Lord Jesus Christ be our wisdom, our guide, our hope. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Good and generous God,
in Jesus Christ you came to us, promising life in abundance.
We give you thanks today for the abundant gifts we receive in him—
the assurance of your love day by day;
the relief of your mercy when we recognize our own failings;
hope to sustain us when things seem bleak;
and peace that comes when we trust ourselves to your eternal keeping.
These are the gifts that matter, O God,
so for all these gifts and other blessings we recognize around us,
we give you thanks in these moments of silence:

Generous God, today we pray for all whose lives seem empty of joy—
because the going is tough, and friends still seem far away...
because their hearts are filled with disappointment...
because their sorrow and grief are keen this day...
Support each one in your abundant compassion.

Generous God,
we remember before you those whose lives are empty of peace and hope—
because they are struggling with illness or disability...
because they are powerless in the face of violence
or other forces beyond their control...
Especially today we pray for all those facing discrimination
because of their culture or their religion,
and those still struggling to overcome the effects of the pandemic...

Send your peace and promise with signs of new possibility and real hope.

Generous God,

we remember before you those for whom life is frustrating—
because they are without work...

because they have made poor choices and cannot find a way forward...

because what comes next does not seem clear...

Support each one in your abundant mercy and lead them in new paths.

Good and generous God,

fill us with energy & compassion to reach out to those facing difficult times.

May we become the gift we have received in Jesus,

for it is in his name we pray, saying the words 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

God's goodness flourishes around us in this season of growth and re-creation. Our gifts to God are a token of our gratitude for all we receive in Christ and in creation. These gifts will also help God's goodness flourish through the ministries we undertake in Jesus' name.

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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

At the name of Jesus

340

1. At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him King of glory now;
'tis our God's good pleasure we should call him Lord,

who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

2. Humbled for a season to receive a name
from the lips of sinners unto whom he came.
Faithful, Jesus bore it spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious when from death he passed.
3. Name him, Christians, name him,
with love strong as death, name with awe and wonder,
and with bated breath; this is God the Saviour;
this is Christ the Lord, ever to be worshipped, trusted and adored.
4. In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue
all that is not holy, all that is not true.
Crown him as your captain in temptation's hour;
let his will enfold you in its light and power.
5. Christians, this Lord Jesus shall return again,
with his Father's glory and an angel train,
for all wreaths of empire meet up on his brow,
and our hearts confess him King of glory now.

"At the name of Jesus," Words: Public Domain. Tune: KING'S WESTON 6 5 6 5 D; Ralph Vaughn Williams.
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Benediction (based on Ephesians 1:19-21)

As you go from here, remember this:

The same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead
and placed all things under his authority—
this same power is at work within you
and in all who believe.

Praise God! <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2011/05/more-benedictions-for-ascension-day.html>