

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

August 15, 2021

Words of Welcome

Judging others by their words and actions is common place. We all do it. Cancel culture is all about judging others, and we all know there are consequences to our words and actions, but even as easy as it is to judge others, we appreciate it when others allow us grace, room for change and growth. The letter to the Ephesians has some thoughts that can help us be less judgemental, but also has guidance on how to live with integrity. As we begin, we join in a call to worship.

Call to Worship

Watch what God does: mostly God loves us.

We would learn a life of such love so we might do as God does.

Watch how Christ loves us: not with caution, but with extravagance.

We would practice such lavish love, not noticing what it costs us.

Watch how the Spirit loves us: moving in us, breathing love into us.

We would live such love for others, keeping company with God.

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Hymn

Where charity and love prevail

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| 1. Where charity and love prevail,
there God is ever found;
brought here together by Christ's love,
by love are we thus bound. | 2. With grateful joy and holy fear,
God's charity we learn;
let us with heart and mind and soul
now love God in return. |
| 3. Forgive we now each other's faults
as we our faults confess;
and let us love each other well
in Christian holiness. | 4. Let strife among us be unknown;
let all contentions cease;
be God's the glory that we seek;
be our God's holy peace. |
| 5. Let us recall that in our midst
dwells God's begotten Son;
as members of his body joined,
we are in Christ made one. | 6. No race nor creed can love exclude,
if honoured by God's name;
our family embraces all
whose Father is the same. |

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Creator, Christ, and Spirit,
when our souls hunger for fulfilment,
you give us the Bread of Life.
You touch our deepest hungers and fill us with good things.
Creator, Christ and Spirit,

when our souls thirst for communion with you,
you offer us the fullness of life itself.
You refresh us with living water.

Creator, Christ and Spirit,
when we long for what is authentic and for what endures,
you show us the Way, the Truth and the Life.
And so we come to worship you,
Creator, Christ and Spirit.

Receive all our praise and gratitude, Living God,
for you are the Source of all that matters.

**God of all that matters,
Forgive our forgetfulness of what matters to you.
Forgive the sins we know and those we have forgotten,
the sins we have tried to hide and those we were once proud to commit.
Forgive the sins we have done to please ourselves
and the sins we have done to please others.
Heal our lives and our relationships with your mercy,
and bless what we can become through your faithfulness to us.**

God of all wisdom and understanding, prepare our hearts and minds to hear your
Word speaking through the scriptures. Quiet all that distracts us, so that we may
learn how best to follow you, in the example of Christ, your Living Word. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

When we love others, we imitate God.
When we help others, we imitate God.
When we offer mercy to others, we imitate God.
May others continue to see God in us,
even as we are loved, helped, and forgiven by our God.

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Scripture Reading Ephesians 4:25-5:2

²⁵ So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another. ²⁶ Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and do not make room for the devil. ²⁸ Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. ²⁹ Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. ³¹ Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, ³² and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

5¹Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, ²and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

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

Message A Fragrant Life

There are a lot of terms that have come up in recent years that are new and often I find I am behind on what many of them mean. With all due respect to the women with the name Karen, some of whom I call friends, and an entire culturally distinct group of people from Myanmar who are kind and generous, who are Karens, I had to look up what a “Karen” was. If you don’t know what that term refers to, I leave it to you to do the homework.

Growing up in an era of CBC National news with Peter Mansbridge and CTV news with Lloyd Robertson I never imagined a day when a former president would be claiming that anyone in the news media that disagreed with his take or opinion was fake news. Or that there would be 24-hour news channels just trying to make the ratings with whatever they can think of to call news.

Another term that seems to have no strict definition is cancel culture. I recently went to the online Urban Dictionary to find a definition of Cancel Culture. This is what I found,

“Cancel Culture: A modern internet phenomenon where a person is ejected from influence or fame by questionable actions. It is caused by a critical mass of people who are quick to judge and slow to question. It is commonly caused by an accusation, whether that accusation has merit or not. It is a direct result of the ignorance of people caused by communication technologies outpacing the growth in available knowledge of a person.”¹

Wow! There is a lot there to unpack, but my main point today is that cancel culture is pretty much the antithesis of Christian culture. Or at least it should be. And it affects more than the rich and famous, as everyone from janitors to professors, who find themselves or their words taken out of context, can suddenly be out of work or boycotted.

Sadly, the internet has given a larger platform to many, Christian and not, who think it is important that what they understand is truth and should be called out, get some air time. And to be fair, the first line of our scripture reading states, “putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours.” Some take this to mean that we are to tell people “Like it is” whether they like it or not, and that we have a responsibility to let people know when they have it wrong.

I can tell you that I have had that thought on occasions to numerous to mention in the last couple of years as I scroll through my Facebook feed, or get caught up in a rabbit

¹ <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Cancel%20Culture>. Accessed August 9, 2021.

hole of people going back and forth in the comments of a social media posting. Politics, black lives matter, sexual orientation, policing, residential schools, vaccinations, or anything to do with Covid, one could go on...the number of topics with people trying to shout the “truth” is deafening.

Still, we are told to put away falsehood and all of us speak the truth to our neighbours. What is missing is the rest of the guidelines for living with others, the biggest piece of which is “we are members of one another”. This isn’t about just one thing, all of the topics I mentioned and more are important and need attention. We forget is that we are community, and the church is about Christian community. I am going to read more of this scripture again and ask you to listen with an ear for how what we do and say impacts others for better or for worse, and to hear, as Christians, how we might strive to be imitators of God, seeing everyone as a beloved child of God, living in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

So, after the piece about speaking the truth, the writer of the letter to the Ephesians goes on to say, “Be angry but do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil.” The recognition here is that anger is something we all experience. It is when our anger hurts another, causing you to be a perpetrator of pain to another human being, physically or emotionally, then you have gone to far. For lack of a better way to explain what has gone on, you have made room for the devil. Use your anger in ways that move you and others to make the world a better place where people are fed, and housed, and safe.

The letter continues with something that might sound like common sense to most of us. “Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy.” Most of you watching this (or reading this) are Christians. You have grown up with the Ten Commandments, and you know that stealing is against the law, both religious law and the law of the land, so one might wonder what this is about. Why does it need mentioning?

But remember that this letter was written to Gentiles who did not grow up knowing these things, stealing was not right, but they had to be taught that to be Christ like one should earn their living honestly and that to give to others through your own generosity honours not only God and others, but also creates a sense of value in one’s own being. Trusting that who we are and what we give from the work of our hands brings about a transformed experience of well-being and participation in God’s mission in the world.

And in this time that we are living through, if everyone of us repeated the next verse everyday, maybe, just maybe, we would begin to speak as people who care about others regardless of whether they agree with us or not. If people knew that we were Christians by the way we built others up, now that would be something to strive for. As is written, “Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.” (2:29)

I repeat, “Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace – may give grace - to those who hear.”

Remember that first line about speaking the truth to our neighbours. That is in the context of only saying what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that our words may give grace to those who hear. Remember, your need to speak and another’s need to hear your “words of wisdom” may be two different things, and thinking about that before we open our mouths is helpful.

This does not mean, keep your mouth shut. If there is injustice, pain, inequity, these are things that Christians are to call out. Don’t be silent, but build the community up with not only your words, but your actions as well. Support those initiatives that bring about transformed lives in our church, in our outreach, and in the community, in whatever ways God has called you to bring good and grace into the world.

Once again, we are reminded that these words, though words of wisdom for anyone, were specifically written to the Christian community, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.” This is about baptism. When we are baptized, we are given the seal of the Holy Spirit. We still have choices to make about how we live, hence all these other thoughts about how to speak and act, but we strive to be loving and grace filled. Baptism is the mark of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit moving in and through the church is the mark of Christian community.

There is yet more to be said about how we live together; it hits at the heart of our self-righteous anger and desire to be heard. If we are going to strive to be imitators of God, as beloved children, then “put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.” Pretty plain talk. As Christians we know this is how we should walk in the world, but some days it is a pretty tall order. Still, through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, each day we should be more and more transformed into this kind of community and individuals within it.

Last week one of our hymns was “We are one in the Spirit” in which each verse ends with the refrain, “And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love, and they’ll know we are Christians by our love.” Love, grace, forgiveness, words that build up, all marks of a Christian and Christian community who desire to be a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

May our living be a fragrance that draws others into the love of God, like a hot apple pie coming from the oven, the warm embrace of a loved one, or the fresh air after a warm summer rain cleanses the earth. May we be that fragrant offering. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Gracious God,
we are grateful for your presence with us in all things,

especially in times of challenge and change.

We thank you for times of rest and reunion this summer,
for opportunities to see those we have been missing during times of lockdown.
Yet we know this summer still holds deep challenges for many,
and so we bring before you those people and places on our minds and hearts.

We pray for the families and communities facing fire and flood,
watching and worrying about what will remain of their homes and hometowns.
Protect those who fight fires and conduct rescues,
and open our hearts in generosity to do what we can to assist recovery.

We pray for the earth, for the land and the seas suffering in the heat,
and for the creatures being displaced by disaster and disruption.
Protect all that is precious to you in creation, and open our hearts to live more
responsibly within the balance of life you created.

We pray for people facing hatred and discrimination,
and those coming to terms with historic injustice and injury.
Guide the relations between Indigenous people and other Canadians
to correct misunderstanding and create justice for all communities.
Open our hearts to discover what we share as your children
and appreciate the different gifts we have to offer to each other.

We pray for all those who are suffering this summer:
those who face pain or illness,
those who are dying or who know bereavement,
all who are anxious about what lies ahead,
and any who do not have enough to make ends meet.
Bring courage and comfort to those who are struggling,
and open our hearts to offer the friendship and companionship
which can ease their journey.

In silence we hold before you those near and dear to us.
Speak to us the truth we need to hear and guide us in our relationships:

Receive our prayers, spoken and unspoken, O God,
as we offer the words Jesus 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

Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. As beloved children, let us be imitators of God, presenting our gifts as a fragrant offering and sacrifice, through Christ our Lord.

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

As we are people from different churches and places following this service. I encourage each of you to present your offering 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

Help us accept each other

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| 1. Help us accept each other
as Christ accepted us;
teach us as sister, brother,
each person to embrace.
Be present, Lord, among us
and bring us to believe
we are ourselves accepted
and meant to love and live. | 2. Teach us, O Lord, your lessons,
as in our daily life
we struggle to be human
and search for hope and faith.
Teach us to care for people,
For all—not just for some,
To love them as we find them
Or as they may become. |
| 3. Let your acceptance change us,
so that we may be moved
in living situations
to do the truth in love;
to practice your acceptance
until we know by heart
the table of forgiveness
and laughter's healing art. | 4. Lord, for today's encounters
with all who are in need,
who hunger for acceptance,
for righteousness and bread,
we need new eyes for seeing,
new hands for holding on:
renew us with your Spirit;
Lord, free us, make us one! |

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Benediction

Go out and imitate God, living in love.

Put your hope in God's Word and let your own words be truthful and constructive.

May sin rouse your anger. . . but never let anger cause you to sin.

Don't allow any room for evil.

And may God always hear your voice.

May Christ Jesus raise you to new life;

and may the Holy Spirit nourish you for the life of love.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,

. . . In the name of Christ. Amen.

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