

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

August 22, 2021

Words of Welcome

I have a time management problem, mostly because if someone wants to talk with me or spend time with me my door is open or my phone is near. Ephesians is making me feel a little better about the fact that I spend my time with others than just in front of a screen. Maybe there is something in this letter for you too! First though, let's begin with a call to worship.

Call to Worship

You are the One for whom we search, O God,
and we worship you because you have found us.

You are the hope for which we yearn, O Christ,
and so we follow you to serve at your side.

You are the peace which can calm us, Holy Spirit,
and so we open our brokenness so you might fill us.

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*Hymn

Take time to be holy

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1. Take time to be holy; speak oft with thy Lord.
Abide in him always, and feed on his Word.
Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak,
forgetting in nothing his blessing to seek.
2. Take time to be holy; the world rushes on;
spend much time in secret with Jesus alone.
By looking to Jesus, like him thou shalt be;
thy friends in thy conduct his likeness shall see.
3. Take time to be holy; let him be thy guide,
and run not before him, whatever betide.
In joy or in sorrow, still follow thy Lord,
and, looking to Jesus, still trust in his Word.
4. Take time to be holy; be calm in thy soul,
each thought and each motive beneath his control.
Thus led by his Spirit to fountains of love,
thou soon shalt be fitted for service above.

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of majesty and mystery,
we come before you in humble wonder and worship.
Source of all that is,
you are beyond our imagining;
your creation astounds us with its beauty and power.
Word of hope and healing,
you defy our explanations with your care.
Spirit of purpose and possibility,
you touch us when we least expect it and show us which way to turn.
Receive our praise and prayer this day;
and prepare us to receive your presence and promise
in this time of worship,
Source, Word, and Spirit of Life, ever Three and ever One.

**God of mercy,
with the community of Christ's church gathered here and elsewhere,
we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed.
We have not loved you with our whole hearts, nor have we cared for your
world or respected our neighbours as we should.**

In silence, we offer our personal confessions...

Forgive us, we pray,
and with your grace, remake us in the example of Christ, our Lord and friend.

Lord, to whom shall we go, for you have the words of eternal life. Guide us by your Word and Spirit this day, so that in hearing the Scriptures read and interpreted, our hearts may be converted to your ways, and our lives become a greater reflection of Jesus Christ, your Living Word. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

It is really that simple - God loves us.
Through the Holy Spirit, God works in us,
transfiguring our old ways, breathing life and love into us.

**We receive God's grace, so we can offer it to others.
We are caressed in God's gentleness, so we can hold the broken.
We will be quick to forgive, even as God has forgiven us.
Thanks be to God. Amen.**

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Scripture Reading Ephesians 5:3-20

³ But fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed, must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴ Entirely out of place is obscene, silly, and

vulgar talk; but instead, let there be thanksgiving. ⁵Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷Therefore do not be associated with them.

⁸For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— ⁹for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; ¹³but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴for everything that becomes visible is light.

Therefore it says,

‘Sleeper, awake!
Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.’

¹⁵Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, ²⁰giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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

Message How do you spend your time?

If ever there was a scripture passage that would appear to take all the fun out of life, it would be this one! It reminds me of stories that I have heard of very staunch Church of Scotland families that immigrated to Canada and Sundays were “go to church then sit and read books” days. No music, no card playing, no getting out there to ride your bike. Needless to say, there were kids who always managed to find a way to get out and have some fun even if it was under the guise of some other important Christian activity or gathering. Thankfully, that kind of strict upbringing has mostly curtailed, and Christian families see the value in recreational time and gathering together with friends and family.

What one might take away, from what appears to be a lot of rules, is that there are ways that are helpful and healthy in our living and there are things that lead us away from God. Some of the words in this reading can throw us off of the message of the passage. When it says, “But fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed, must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints” one sees the challenges of biblical language that feels old and dated. Basically, we are to keep ourselves from sexual relationships that do not value the intrinsic worth of another and in doing so causes harm. We all know that greed has nothing to do with healthy relationships, and obscene, silly – not silly in the

sense of funny, but silly in the sense of foolish - and vulgar talk, can be downright disrespectful.

This may seem prudish in a world of music videos and movies where everything about the body is revealed and watching a comedian who doesn't swear is something that one notices as it is so rare. But the words of wisdom shared are about becoming someone new. A new creation in Christ.

This letter was written to those who were new believers and they had all kinds of behaviours that had been part of their lived experience. Now the writer is saying, you are invited into a new life, and if you are wondering what that means, how this changes you, well, living into a community that shows kindness, respect, and leads to good relationships is part of it.

I remember having a conversation with a friend years ago about how arguments can escalate. I said that though Ken and I have had our share of disagreements it is a rare occasion when a swear word crosses our mouths in those moments because we respect one another. She nodded as she recalled the number of times she and her partner had argued and things would escalate with layers of swear words punctuating the increasing height of the anger and emotion, ending with doors slammed as one of them walked away. The author of the letter to the Ephesians recognized already then, that words that harm and are meant to make you feel pain do not lead to healthy marriages, friendships, or communities. And I know that I may get push back on this, but even in friendly banter, as soon as strong words are used it just seems to up the anti.

As I speak about this, I realize that I cannot go into detail about every line of this scripture, but I think that it may be worth talking about darkness and light. Here we find advice that one should not associate with people who live in darkness and live as children of light – “for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.” (5:9).

What may be most valuable here is to understand that each of us walks in darkness at least some of the time, not one of us gets through life without causing pain somewhere for ourselves and others. Many of us make poor choices and self-medicate with drugs, alcohol, sex, food, or shopping beyond our means. Still this scripture is a call to pay attention to our living – every aspect of it – because when we are living well, treating ourselves and others with respect, dignity, and care, then we are living as people of God and the world truly becomes a better place.

You see how our lives and how we spend our time matters. It matters for us as individuals and it matters as children of God. It matters to community, both church and where we physically live and work. We are called to be careful in how we live, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. The evil is the oppression that people live under. It can be poverty, discrimination, or addiction. Even as recently as this week people were walking the streets in the community of Ft. Frances because of the epidemic of fentanyl overdoses, and we know this is happening across the country. These things are in part

what is being talked about in the reading regarding “days of evil.” One does not need to look very far to see the ways climate change is affecting our planet, and how power and money have precedence over the needs of the planet and those who live in fear of war and famine.

And so far, it feels like a pretty big downer of a sermon, but the thing about our faith is that we are never without hope. Hope for change in our lives and in our communities. Who among us would not want for every person to be able to have housing, be healthy, and find gainful employment? Thing is there is work to be done to get us to that place. So one could ask, “How are we spending our time?”

As it was for those earliest Christians, is for us now, we have a new distinctive identity as Christians. Which means how we spend our time matters. How we build others up matters. Learning, listening, asking questions of ourselves, others, and God, helps us to become wise people. The little hymns in the scripture says, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” (5:14) It is time for us to wake up to what is going on around us and shed a new light on any darkness. Shine the light of Christ on the issues and problems that we and our world are facing.

Ponder this scripture with thoughtfulness, because though the writer says do not associate with those who deceive and are disobedient, we are still called to live in the world. Our separateness comes in our behaviour, in seeing the world through the lens of God’s love and Christ’s example. Knowing that the world is not as it should be, be filled with the Holy Spirit. Sing songs that lift your spirit and that of others. Live into the words of those songs that are life-giving, compassionate, and hopeful. Let the songs and the scriptures shape us as community and as individuals. If you don’t quite fit into the world’s ways, that may not be a bad thing as we give thanks for the ways we see God at work in and through all things and in all people.

We are called to be children of light in a world that has way too much darkness. Darkness in our souls and in our relationships. Darkness is the word used to explain that which is hidden or harmful. Light exposes things, and they become visible, and when we see the harm, as the light of Christ is cast upon the dark things, we can begin to share the healing, restorative, and reconciling love of Christ.

Thanks be to God in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!

Prayers of the People

God of all creation,
the world is filled with your goodness and all nature sings in praise of you.
We give you thanks for the stillness of night and the rest it brings,
followed by day filled with energy and creativity.
We give you thanks for summer which brings time to reflect and time to produce,
periods of hard work as well as vacation days to regather our strength.
Thank you for life unfolding with many blessings.

We thank you, too, O God, for new lives born among us,
for new opportunities emerging,
for new insights and discoveries,
and for new relationships.

Help us embrace this newness after months of isolating,
worrying and wondering what comes next.

You hold the future in your hands, O God,
and we are grateful we can trust that you will walk with us in the days ahead.
We pray for those who work on the seas and in the fields,
providing for so many others.

We know their work is uncertain in these times,
and ask you to give them courage and strength to meet the challenges.
We pray those who work in essential services, often at night or while others enjoy
leisure. We know that their work keeps us safe and healthy, maintaining services
and resources we depend on. Encourage them, O God, and give them all
perseverance to meet the different challenges they face.

We pray for those who lead and those who form policy and keep order
in this country and around the world. Make them alert to the temptations of their
offices so that power is not abused and that justice is maintained fairly, without
discrimination.

Gracious God,
As we have received, free us to give.
As we have been loved, open us to love others.
As we have known peace, let us serve as peacemakers.
As we have been freed, use us to work for freedom with justice for all.
These are gifts of your reign taking shape among us,
and so we pray as Jesus taught us, that your kingdom may come:

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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. And now I invite you, 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. P114.

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

There's a spirit in the air

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| 1. There's a spirit in the air, telling Christians everywhere: 'Praise the love that Christ revealed, living, working, in our world!' | 2. Lose your shyness, find your tongue, tell the world what God has done: God in Christ has come to stay. Live tomorrow's life today! |
| 3. When believers break the bread, when a hungry child is fed, praise the love that Christ revealed, living, working, in our world. | 4. Still the Spirit gives us light, seeing wrong and setting right: God in Christ has come to stay. Live tomorrow's life today! |
| 5. When a stranger's not alone, where the homeless find a home, praise the love that Christ revealed, living, working, in our world. | 6. May the Spirit fill our praise, guide our thoughts and change our ways God in Christ has come to stay. Live tomorrow's life today! |
| 7. There's a Spirit in the air, calling people everywhere: praise the love that Christ revealed, living, working, in our world. | |

"There's a spirit in the air, telling Christians everywhere,"

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Benediction

Created by the Father, nourished by Christ,
and sealed by the Holy Spirit, go now to imitate God's love,
spreading the fragrance of grace wherever there is need.

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