

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

August 8, 2021

Words of Welcome

You may wonder what the church is and why it is. Does church mean one congregation or is it bigger than that? You may even wonder if you need the church or if the church needs you. Well, I have some thoughts about that. First, let's join together in a call to worship.

Call to Worship

Come, let us worship our God,
for there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
one God and Parent of all,
who is above all and through all and in all.

**We come with humility, gentleness, and patience,
bearing with one another in love.**

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

Hymn

Blest be the tie that binds

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| 1. Blest be the tie that binds
our hearts in Christian love;
the fellowship of kindred minds
is like to that above. | 2. Before our Maker's throne
we pour our ardent prayers;
our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
our comforts and our cares. |
| 3. We share each other's woes,
each other's burdens bear,
and often for each other flows
the sympathizing tear. | 4. When we asunder part,
it gives us keenest pain,
but we shall still be joined in heart,
and hope to meet again. |

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Living, giving God,
you are the source of all good things.
In Christ you give us the Bread of Life.
and we know your care for us is beyond measure.
Through the Holy Spirit, you are present in all situations, both large and small,
yet your majesty is infinite.
Your love reaches wider than the expanding universe,
and your kindness embraces even the tiny sparrow.
And so we gather in worship to offer you our praise,
our love and loyalty,
the best of ourselves,
for surely you deserve all we can offer, our living, giving God.

**Living, forgiving God,
in Christ you promise us new life,
but we confess that we are in love with our old ways.
We nourish bitterness over disappointments;
anger can hold us hostage for years.
We find it easy to say one thing to someone's face
and something else behind their back.
Forgive us for falling short of your hopes for us.
Free us from the captivity of old habits and resentments,
and by your grace, renew us to live for love's sake.**

God of wisdom, you have taught us that we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from you. Send us your Holy Spirit to open our minds and hearts to receive your Word, speaking through the scriptures. Strengthen us to live that Word as our daily bread. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

God is tender-hearted and gracious to all and has forgiven you in Christ Jesus. Trust in God's grace and be kind to one another, forgiving others as God has forgiven you.

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Scripture Reading Ephesians 4:1-16

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

⁷ But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.

⁸Therefore it is said,

'When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive;
he gave gifts to his people.'

⁹(When it says, 'He ascended', what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) ¹¹The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. ¹⁴We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. ¹⁵But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

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

Message Body Building

The past two weeks those who have been watching the Olympics have been witness to some of the most amazingly physically fit people in the world. Their bodies and minds have been trained, stretched, and pushed to the limits of their endurance. It takes every muscle, ligament, and joint to be strong in order that no weakness in one part of the body limits the outcome of the athlete's achievements. For a couple of nights when I was watching it was weight lifting that was the featured event. The first night I watched as Canadian Maude Charron lifted her way to a gold medal in her weight class.

Olympic weight lifting consists two lifts, the "Snatch" and "Clean and Jerk." With the Snatch the weight must come off the ground in one smooth motion. In the Clean & Jerk the lifter rolls the barbell up the body, resting it in various spots along the way until it finally makes its way to the shoulders and then, with all their might, they press the barbell overhead. In Olympic Weightlifting for either of those lifts you get three attempts and have one minute to pick the bar up off the floor. Once you begin the lift, the bar must continue in an upward motion.

One minute, three attempts, and no guarantees that you will even make it to the podium. Glory may come in the fact that one had worked hard enough and was fit enough to represent your country at the Olympics. Not many of us ever challenge ourselves to the degree of an Olympic athlete with the number of hours, days, months, and years of training so that each part of the body...back, knees, elbows, shoulders, arms, legs and everything that holds the body together is in peak condition.

All of this training, strengthening, hours of work, and dedication came to mind as I read the last verse of this reading from Ephesians, "from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love." (v16) Can you imagine what our churches might look like if we dedicated ourselves like an Olympic athlete to making sure that our own spiritual lives were strong and sure? Equipped and ready for ministry our participation in the body of Christ, which is the church, would strengthen and join together with other parts that are working properly, to promote the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Side note, when Paul is talking about the body's growth it is not about numbers of people sitting in the pew. It is about our spiritual growth and how each of us is connected to one another, building each other up in love. Having said that, a healthy and connected congregation that exudes love and care for all people is bound to grow in numbers as well.

Let's get back to the beginning of this piece of scripture as there are many important things to unpack there too. I have to admit that when I see words like "prisoner in the Lord" I usually have a moment because no one wants to be a prisoner, not physically or mentally. Everything in our being wants to move away from such language. Yet when the writer used that phrase, it was meant to be a statement of faith. That type of language is often misunderstood and for those who are not Christian, using words like prisoner or captive, even using the word "Lord" are all reasons to stay far away.

But for a Christian, to be a prisoner in the Lord actually means freedom. It is freedom to become who we truly are because we know that we are loved and forgiven – that we have every reason to hope, and live with joy because of God's love for us. This is not like being behind bars, but is exactly the opposite. As is written, "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (vv 1-3) This is about living life in a way that we become people of unity and peace.

Another criticism of the Christian faith is that we have so many different denominations and to be honest, we don't interpret the scriptures in exactly the same way, so people only see the things that divide us rather than what unites us. In our denomination of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, we don't venerate the Virgin Mary or tend to say the rosary as our Catholic siblings do. Nor do we celebrate the feast days of the saints as would Lutherans and Anglicans, even if this particular church is named St. Andrew's.

Some churches would never have a woman in the pulpit, while obviously that is not the case here. Still even in the Presbyterian Church we will find a spectrum of understanding and belief about words of Scripture. The most recent example would be the vote to change the definition of marriage to include two consenting adults rather than only a man and woman, and the move to allow for the ordination of LGBTQI+ individuals to be ministers in the PCC.

Not only in the church, but in all parts of life it seems that divisions reign between people and their opinions from politics to medical advice and so much more. We would do well to remember that this scripture was written to a group of people who also were very much of two minds, Jews and Gentiles, each finding reasons to criticize the other. And yet, in Ephesians it is all about breaking down dividing walls and creating unity. This

unity comes in realizing that, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” (vv4-6).

This unity is not about uniformity. We are not called to all be the same, which is why all the different denominations of Christian faith work and why even within the same denomination there can be differences. This does not make it easy. How many times have I had to remember these words from Ephesians when I want to judge others? Yet, jumping over part of the scripture to get to another, there are also the words in the same reading that say, “We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming.” (v14). Still, one would be cautioned to not think so much of themselves that they believe their way of being a Christian in the world is the only way, and maybe leave the judging to God, who coincidentally loves all of us regardless of our flawed thinking.

Let’s get back to that section that was jumped over. It starts with the grace given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. The gift being his life. We are so loved that Christ gave his life in order for ours to be saved. Then through the work of the Holy Spirit many gifts are given to the body of Christ through each person to build up the body, equipping it to participate in God’s mission as the church in the world.

In this reading the emphasis is put on the gifts of those who are apostles, prophets, evangelist, pastors and teachers. That work is done “to equip the saints” – which is every single one of us – “for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.” (vv12-13). Now that is body building!

I may be a pastor and teacher that is called as part of the congregation to equip the church through preaching and the care of the congregation. Yet, each of us has the ability to care and teach, from our own space and place, those who God put in our realm of influence, from friends and neighbours to children and grandchildren. You don’t have to go to seminary to teach others about the love of God.

Still, being a learner, strengthening your heart and mind muscles, making sure that you are in the best spiritual condition that you can be in, is so important when it comes to the church and building the body of Christ. We are not body builders in the sense that weight lifters or other athletes are. Each of us is in a different place in our spiritual training and maturity, but without everyone of us, there is no body, there is no church equipped to work properly which in turn helps each one of us to grow and mature into Christ so that we too can teach others of God’s love. I cannot fully realize who I am to be in Christ without you, and each of us gives that gift one another.

The onus is on you and me to build up our individual spiritual lives and learning so that each of us can promote growth and maturity in the church, being joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped. It doesn't matter what part of the body you think you are; you are necessary and needed to help the whole body, the whole church function, be healthy and strong for the work we are called to in the world. We help each other in becoming strong through our love for God, one another, and the world. This is like the kindness Olympics of Tokyo where two high jumpers share the gold, and two running rivals trip, fall together, and then put their arms across each other to finish the race together. Kindness and building the whole body where a triathlon runner consoles her sobbing competitor who came in last or a swimmer gives his gold medal to the teammate he had replaced in the finals.

This is not a competition; this is the church. It is not one church against another or one denomination at odds with another, Building the body of Christ, promoting the body's growth, building the church and every individual up in love, this is the church; one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all. Amen.

Prayers of the People

God of all generations,

We look back over the past few months, and we are grateful for your steadfast presence with us through uncertainty and upheaval.

We have witnessed tragedy and courage;

generosity and selfishness,

resentment and resilience,

fear and faithfulness.

We ask that you show us the lessons of this pandemic and make us wiser people.

God of church and community,

We look back over the past few months, and we are grateful for your inspiration and support through transition and times of testing. We have witnessed isolation and new ways to connect, old traditions set aside and new opportunities emerging.

We have seen decisions and dissent, noticed people drifting away and others reconnecting, called on the skills of many generations to maintain our life together.

Show us the lessons of this pandemic and make us more faithful people.

God of nations and neighbours,

We look back over the past few months, and we are grateful to you for cooperation and creativity in our leaders in politics, education, health care, in business, labour and community life.

We have witnessed both energy and indifference, selfless dedication and harsh criticism, deep differences and important collaboration. We know some neighbours

and nations have lost much and need help to re-establish well-being. We know some have felt deep anger within and others have had that anger targeted at them. Show us the lessons of this pandemic and make us more engaged citizens.

God of family and friends,

We look back over the past few months, and we are grateful to you for sustaining relationships. Those nearby and those supported by computer and phone call.

We have witnessed both loneliness and loving kindness, arguments and appreciation. We know some families have been torn apart by distance or dispute and others have renewed their life together. Show us the lessons of this pandemic and make us better able to honour our important relationships.

God of healing and hope,

We look back over the last few months and know many are still suffering in body, mind and spirit; many are grieving and others do not know what the future holds for them. Hear us in this holy silence as we name in our hearts those people and situations that concern us deeply.

Remembering all you have done for us, with us and through us, O God, we pray the words that Jesus taught:

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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 Letter to the Ephesians challenges us to lead a life worthy of the calling we have in Christ Jesus, to practice humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love. We offer gifts to God along with the support for the ministry we undertake in Jesus' name. Know that all your gifts contribute to building up the body of Christ.

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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.

1. We are One in The Spirit, we are One in the Lord,
we are One in The Spirit, we are One in the Lord,
and we pray that all unity will one day be restored,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our Love,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love.
2. We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,
we will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,
and together we'll spread the news that God is in our land,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our Love,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love.
3. We will work with each other, we will work side by side,
we will work with each other, we will work side by side,
and we'll guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our Love,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love.
4. All praise to the Father, from whom all things come,
and all praise to Christ Jesus, who is God's only Son,
and all praise to the Spirit, who makes us one,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our Love,
and they'll know we are Christians by our love.

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Benediction

Go into the world with all humility, gentleness, and patience,
bearing with one another in love, in the unity of the Spirit,
the bond of peace, and the name of Jesus.

<https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/6179/worship-elements-august-1-2021>