

# St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021

## Call to Worship

Come, people of God, worship the One who listens to our prayers.

**We will worship the One who hears us.**

Come, people of God, worship the One who watches over us.

**We will worship the One who cares deeply for us all.**

Come, people of God, worship the One who offered his life for us.

**We will offer thanks and praise to the One who gives us life.**

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The hymn, "Deep in the Shadows of the past" reminds us of our history as people of God and the gift of the scriptures. As we listen, we might ponder how God has spoken to God's people over the eons.

## Hymn

Deep in the Shadows of the past

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1. Deep in the shadows of the past,  
far out from settled lands,  
some nomads traveled with their God  
across the desert sands.  
The dawning hope of humankind  
by them was sensed and shown:  
a promise calling them ahead,  
a future yet unknown.
2. While others bowed to changeless gods  
they met a mystery,  
invisible, without a name:  
"I AM WHAT I WILL BE";  
and by their tents, around their fires  
in story, song and law,  
they praised, remembered, handed on  
a past that promised more.
3. From Exodus to Pentecost  
the promise changed and grew,  
while some, remembering the past,  
recorded what they knew,  
or with their letters and laments,  
their prophecy and praise,  
recovered, kindled and expressed  
new hope for changing days.
4. For all the writings that survived  
for leaders, long ago,  
who sifted, copied, and preserved  
the Bible that we know,  
give thanks, and find its story yet  
our promise, strength and call,  
the model of emerging faith,  
alive with hope for all.

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## Opening Prayer

Living God, artist of the changing skies, builder of the steadfast earth,  
Lively Christ, born to walk life's journey with us,  
Spirit of life, always moving in us and among us,  
Your presence surrounds us here and everywhere we go.

Your purpose holds the world in its place;  
Your imagination engages us each step of the way.  
In our time of worship, show us how we can serve you,  
and open our imaginations to the future you create,  
for we seek your guidance and your grace now and always.

**God of time and eternity,  
we confess that we have long memories, especially for things that hurt us,  
for moments we resent or regret.  
Week by week we seek your forgiveness for our mistakes,  
but we confess we do not forgive others so faithfully.  
Sometimes we seek opportunity to even the score.  
Confront us with your mercy, O God, and open our hearts to its cleansing power.**

God of Wisdom, the Psalmist tells us your law is perfect, making the simple wise.  
Send your Holy Spirit to quiet any distractions within us, so we may hear your voice  
and grow wiser as we learn to follow you. Amen.

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### **Assurance of Pardon**

From now on, St. Paul declared, we regard no one from a human point of view.  
If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.  
Everything old has passed away; and everything has become new.  
Through Christ God has reconciled us and given us a ministry of reconciliation.  
Thanks be to God that we can all make a new start, this day and every day!

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### **Scripture Reading Exodus 3:1-12**

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup>There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. <sup>3</sup>Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up."<sup>4</sup>When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." <sup>5</sup>Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." <sup>6</sup>He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

<sup>7</sup>Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, <sup>8</sup>and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. <sup>9</sup>The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the

Egyptians oppress them. <sup>10</sup>So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”

<sup>11</sup>But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” <sup>12</sup>He said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.”

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

## **Message** Belonging and Purpose

The Times-Reporter of New Philadelphia, Ohio, reported in September 1985 a celebration at a New Orleans municipal pool. The party around the pool was held to celebrate the first summer in memory without a drowning at any New Orleans city pool. In honor of the occasion, two hundred people gathered, including one hundred certified lifeguards.

As the party was breaking up and the four lifeguards on duty began to clear the pool, they found a fully dressed body in the deep end. They tried to revive Jerome Moody, thirty-one, but it was too late. He had drowned surrounded by lifeguards celebrating their successful season.

[One may] wonder how many visitors and strangers are among us drowning in loneliness, hurt, and doubt, while we, who could help them, don't realize it.<sup>1</sup>

It seems that often we are oblivious, not paying attention to, or simply ignoring what is going on around us. This past year and a half, it has been pretty easy to tune out to what was outside of our households because we had such limited ability to engage anyone or anything. Still there has been much discussion as to the struggle many have experienced as the pandemic took hold. On Friday evening one of the news stories was about how the mental health of children and youth has been adversely affected by the months of isolation and lack of interaction with friends, family, learning situations and extra-curricular activities.

I know from talking to many of the seniors in our congregation and elsewhere that not being allowed to leave their rooms for meals and social activities even within their own buildings left them feeling isolated and lonely with neither family nor friends able to take away the burden with a hug. Phone calls and computer screens became lifelines.

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<sup>1</sup> Larson, Craig Brian. *Leadership Journal. 750 Engaging Illustrations for Preacher, Teachers, and Writers*. Baker Books. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1993, 1996, 1998. 2002. Page 374.

Our church and many others felt the loss of community as we closed for in person worship and the work and ministry that we have done together for decades was ordered shut-down as a means to stop the spread of the virus. For our community members around the church and elsewhere in the city that have no means and no housing the challenges became increasingly difficult.

Now all of this has been necessary to one degree or another in order to keep each other safe from the threat of serious illness and death, but it certainly came with a cost. One of the burdens I personally felt was how restriction limited our ability to touch the lives of others. As Christians we are wired for community. One cannot see themselves as Christian and deny the need for community. Our communities of faith are a source of connection and purpose or at least they should be. Churches should be where all can find a place of love and belonging.

So, though it is a place of belonging, it is also a place of discomfort and change. If the church is a place where all should find a welcome it will mean being willing to be shaped and transformed constantly as each person who finds a place here brings new ideas from their lived experience, from their cultures, history, work, education, family, status in the community or lack thereof.

Christ was known for how he reached out to the stranger, the lost, the sick, those on the margins of the community and cared for them when others ignored them. Christian community was formed in ever changing environments and cities with different ethnicities and unique circumstances. And yet somehow, we have become change adverse and really comfortable with our traditions, expectations of what worship should look like and who we want in our pews. We have become complacent in our desire to seek out those who are in need, welcome them, and adapt to the changing climate and experiences of those who are struggling in mind, body, and spirit or simply looking for a place to belong.

One of the most memorable, iconic, and important figures of the Old Testament was Moses. Moses shouldn't have even survived. He was born into a time when Hebrew babies were being killed and yet he survived through the cunning of women in his life. Most astoundingly he was raised by Pharaoh's daughter. This was a guy who most certainly could have remained in the comfort of his own home and yet observed what was happening to the people and ended up exiled for a time in fear for his life. This is a very curtailed description of what happened to get us to the point of Moses tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro when he sees this burning bush. The bush that was on fire but not consumed by the fire. Holy ground from which God choose to call on Moses, this disgraced Hebrew man, Egyptian prince, and now shepherd. God called him to work with God in freeing people from slavery.

Moses wasn't too keen on the project. He protested, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt." This won't be Moses' only objections or complaint in times to come, but it was his first. God responded, "I will be with you."

Just like we are not to compare ourselves with Jesus, we are not Moses either. For most of us, God's voice is more like a thought in our minds, or a strong sense of what one should be doing. but even so God is still the God of our ancestors. God has always been a part of human history. Sometimes God's presence has seemed silent, but God has always been with people and God is still using human agency to work in the world. This is the calling to which you and I, and the church in general has been summoned.

We can ignore, protest that we are not enough, that we don't have the words, the means, the money, the time yet God still says, I will be with you. We don't have a mountain to worship at, but we have our churches as a sign that we are the community of faith called together to show God's love, compassion, and presence to those who are in fear, who are in bondage because of debt, loneliness, illness, who relationships are challenging or downright dangerous. Those who are homeless, those who don't have anyone to call family, those whose life experience is vastly different from our own.

These interactions will only broaden our understanding of the world around us and when we look for what God is already up to in our midst then we will also be filled with awe and wonder, but also frustration and challenge as we work to comprehend our own experience and walk along side those who are in need.

When speaking of need, we must not limit that word. People can be in poverty of mind, body, and spirit. There are those who have limited access to things that many of us don't even consider a problem because we have resources and or people to help.

The congregation of St. Andrew's here in Thunder Bay is finding ourselves in a surprising and wonderful place as we come to this fall of 2021. We have an opportunity to see how God may be sending us to bring about justice for the oppressed, life to our congregation and those whose lives we intersect with, and how we might find like minded individuals or organizations to more fully bring about God's kingdom on earth right now.

Engaging together we may find ourselves on an adventure of faith and future that we could not have anticipated. God has not stopped calling people to participate in God's life-giving work in the world. This is possible here in our church with this building. It is possible in your own life. It is exciting, it should be engaging, and it should be transforming of our ministry and our lives.

May you eagerly seek God working in and through you. Even if you are a little or a lot afraid of what that may mean for your life, know that you are in good company. Even Moses had fear and trepidation. If you follow his life through you will see how the faith of

one person had an effect on all those around him, it changed a people, and even though he felt inadequate, fearful, and doubted, God was pleased to work through this man and God is pleased to love you and love others through you and all people of faith.

We do it together as we learn, worship, sing, pray, and love in community. Where all can and should find meaning and purpose for their lives, and in a place where all can know they are worthy of belonging. Where all are lovingly surrounded, remembered, and known. Amen.

Prayer is an opportunity to take to God our concerns and hopes, trusting that God hears and responds. Let us pray.

### **Prayers of the People**

God of inspiration and imagination, you are the artist of our lives.  
You have filled your world with gifts,  
expressed through the creativity and dedication of so many.  
We give you thanks for a new season of opportunity  
to gather together again and share gifts that have lain in wait  
for months of isolation and uncertainty.

Artist of our lives,

**Awaken our gifts again to serve you.**

Today we give you thanks for the artists among us,  
emerging from time in solitude and reflection:

Thank you for painters and poets,  
for lines on a canvas and lines on a page,  
which inspire us and leave us wondering.

Thank you for sculptors and storytellers  
who fashion faces in stone and scenes in words  
to outline the profile of your truth for us.

God of grace and goodness,

We know your creativity in the arts of fabric and foodstuff,  
and in hands that work with wood and keep machinery humming.

We give you thanks for those who stitch patterns with thread  
and those who set patterns on our plates, mixing colours and flavours.

Thank you for those who build and repair, refinish and restore  
the things we need and the things we cherish.

God of music and movement,

We know your beauty in the gifts of keyboard and composer,  
in the blending of voices and the bending of dancers.

We thank you for these sounds and sights  
that can touch our hearts once more,  
and open our souls to praise you.

Artist of our lives,

**Awaken our gifts again to serve you.**

God of hope and healing,

We thank you, too, for the healing arts,

for the care and relief offered by professionals throughout our health-care system  
and for support given to those who suffer by friends and volunteers.

We pray for all who seek healing—

those anticipating or recovering from surgery.

those living with pain or illness,

those struggling with grief and loss,

those who bear anxiety, depression or dementia,

and other conditions which trouble mind and body.

Give each one your presence and peace through our prayer and friendship.

Reach out through us to bring aid and advocacy

to the most vulnerable of your creatures.

We sum up all our prayers, silent and spoken, in 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

All around us, we are reminded that we are not on our own, but our lives intersect with the poor, the hungry, the hopeless, our sisters and brothers. As we seek to follow Jesus, we share from the abundance God have poured out upon us, so all might experience God's grace and life.

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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.

As we prepare to take leave of this time of worship, we remember in song that God calls us to new adventures all the while leading, guiding, and inspiring us...

**Hymn** I, the Lord of sea and sky 592

1. I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.  
All who dwell in dark and sin my hand will save.  
I who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.  
Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?

Refrain

Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?  
I have heard you calling in the night; I will go, Lord, if you lead me.  
I will hold your people in my heart.

2. I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my people's pain.  
I have wept for love of them: they turn away.  
I will break their hearts of stone, give them hearts for love alone.  
I will speak my word to them. Whom shall I send?

Refrain

3. I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame.  
I will set a feast for them; my hand will save.  
Finest bread I will provide till their hearts be satisfied.  
I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send?

Refrain

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## Benediction

God sends us forth to love all people, no strings attached.

**We will share grace and hope with everyone.**

Jesus sends us forth to forgive our sisters and brothers.

**We will offer mercy, not judgment, to those around us.**

The Spirit sends us forth to trust God in every moment.

**We will live in faith, not in fear, sharing our hearts with all we meet.**

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