

# St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

September 19, 2021

## Words of Welcome

When things feel tough and are not going how we want, it is easy to sulk and be angry or frustrated. Many have heard the story of Jonah and the whale, but today we look at what happened after the big fish spit Jonah out. It is that part that really has an impact on our thinking. Join me as we begin with a call to worship.

## Call to Worship

From sunrise to sunset,  
**Let us praise God's holy name.**

With the wisdom of the aged and the energy of the young,  
**Let us praise God's holy name.**

In our work and in our homes,  
**Let us praise God's holy name.**

One: Let us praise the Lord with our whole hearts!

**All: We will worship God now and always.**

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## Hymn

*Come sing, O church in joy*

757

1. Come sing, O church, in joy! Come join, O church, in song!  
For Christ the Lord has led us through the ages long!  
In bold accord,  
come celebrate the journey now and praise the Lord!
2. Long years have come and gone, and still God reigns supreme,  
empowering us to catch the vision, dream the dream!  
In bold accord,  
Come celebrate the journey now and praise the Lord!
3. Let courage be our friend, let wisdom be our guide,  
as we in mission magnify the Crucified!  
In bold accord,  
come celebrate the journey now and praise the Lord!
4. Come sing, O church, in joy! Come join, O church, in song!  
For Christ the Lord has triumphed o'er the ages long!  
In bold accord,  
come celebrate the journey now and praise the Lord!

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## Opening Prayer

God of all creation,

you have opened the world around us and filled it with purpose.  
Each creature declares your praise—  
the mountain states your majesty;  
the ripened field, your generosity.  
Birds flying aloft sing of your freedom;  
the tiny ant works with your persistence.  
But what do we declare about you in our lives, O God?  
We pray that our work will honour your justice and mercy.  
May our relationships speak of your love and compassion.  
So may we praise you, O God,  
not just in this hour of worship but in all the hours you grant us,  
as we follow Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Friend.

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### **Prayer of Confession**

God of all creation,  
you have opened the world around us and filled it with wonder,  
but we confess...

**our eyes are not always open to its harsher realities.**

**Our ears are sometimes deaf to cries of need.**

**Our minds are often shut to opinions which differ from our own.**

**Forgive us when we seek greatness instead of goodness.**

**Forgive us when we miss the wisdom you intend us to embrace.**

**Grant that we may see, hear, and think in ways that reflects your will and intention for the world as we bear witness to others of your love and faithfulness.**

Send us your Holy Spirit, O God, so that your Word will shed light on the path ahead.  
Help us understand the way we should follow. May your wisdom bear fruit in us so  
that we may bear your light into the world around us. Amen.

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### **Assurance of Pardon**

The prophet Micah reminds us that God requires of us three things:  
to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.

To all who truly repent and seek reconciliation with God and neighbour  
in kindness and humility, God offers forgiveness and peace.

The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

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**Scripture Reading** Jonah Chapters 3 and 4 from The Message by Eugene Peterson  
<sup>1-2</sup> Next, God spoke to Jonah a second time: “Up on your feet and on your way to the  
big city of Nineveh! Preach to them. They’re in a bad way and I can’t ignore it any  
longer.”

<sup>3</sup> This time Jonah started off straight for Nineveh, obeying God’s orders to the letter. Nineveh was a big city, very big—it took three days to walk across it.

<sup>4</sup> Jonah entered the city, went one day’s walk and preached, “In forty days Nineveh will be smashed.”<sup>5</sup> The people of Nineveh listened, and trusted God. They proclaimed a citywide fast and dressed in burlap to show their repentance. Everyone did it—rich and poor, famous and obscure, leaders and followers.

<sup>6-9</sup> When the message reached the king of Nineveh, he got up off his throne, threw down his royal robes, dressed in burlap, and sat down in the dirt. Then he issued a public proclamation throughout Nineveh, authorized by him and his leaders: “Not one drop of water, not one bite of food for man, woman, or animal, including your herds and flocks! Dress them all, both people and animals, in burlap, and send up a cry for help to God. Everyone must turn around, turn back from an evil life and the violent ways that stain their hands. Who knows? Maybe God will turn around and change his mind about us, quit being angry with us and let us live!”

<sup>10</sup> God saw what they had done, that they had turned away from their evil lives. He *did* change his mind about them. What he said he would do to them he didn’t do.

<sup>4</sup> <sup>1-2</sup> Jonah was furious. He lost his temper. He yelled at God, “God! I knew it—when I was back home, I knew this was going to happen! That’s why I ran off to Tarshish! I knew you were sheer grace and mercy, not easily angered, rich in love, and ready at the drop of a hat to turn your plans of punishment into a program of forgiveness!

<sup>3</sup> “So, God, if you won’t kill them, kill *me*! I’m better off dead!”

<sup>4</sup> God said, “What do you have to be angry about?”

<sup>5</sup> But Jonah just left. He went out of the city to the east and sat down in a sulk. He put together a makeshift shelter of leafy branches and sat there in the shade to see what would happen to the city.

<sup>6</sup> God arranged for a broad-leafed tree to spring up. It grew over Jonah to cool him off and get him out of his angry sulk. Jonah was pleased and enjoyed the shade. Life was looking up.

<sup>7-8</sup> But then God sent a worm. By dawn of the next day, the worm had bored into the shade tree and it withered away. The sun came up and God sent a hot, blistering wind from the east. The sun beat down on Jonah’s head and he started to faint. He prayed to die: “I’m better off dead!”

<sup>9</sup> Then God said to Jonah, “What right do you have to get angry about this shade tree?” Jonah said, “Plenty of right. It’s made me angry enough to die!”

<sup>10-11</sup> God said, “What’s this? How is it that you can change your feelings from pleasure to anger overnight about a mere shade tree that you did nothing to get? You neither planted nor watered it. It grew up one night and died the next night. So, why can’t I likewise change what I feel about Nineveh from anger to pleasure, this big city of more than 120,000 childlike people who don’t yet know right from wrong, to say nothing of all the innocent animals?”

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

## Message From Anger to Pleasure

Anger seems to be in the air. It hangs around hospitals as protesters fight masks, vaccines, and vaccine passports, seemingly targeting those who are at their most vulnerable, whether tired hospital staff or fearful parents with a child facing cancer treatments. Anger is hurled back and forth as political candidates in our current election accuse each other of failures to deal with climate change, the pandemic, or clean drinking water, all promising that they can do better than the other. They talk over one another in debates, and once elected bang their fists on their parliamentary desks to show approval or disapproval like children who have not taught proper manners.

Anger is seen in the fight for safety and recognition for all who find themselves the victim of racism. Anger is there as people align themselves, or not, with the LGBTQI+ community. When those for and against abortion face off it is often not that pretty as angry crowds gather. Anger is in our homes and in our hearts. I don't think I have met anyone that hasn't experienced anger. Spend time with any two-year-old and you will find that anger is a pretty normal emotion, it is part of the package of joy, sorrow, fear, hope, humour and much more. It is part of being human.

The story of Jonah is a prime example of anger toward God. Let me take you back to chapter 4 verse 2. Jonah is a more than displeased with God for sparing Nineveh the wrath that Jonah figured was due to them because they had been a cruel and fierce people, threatening the well-being of the Hebrew people. In his anger, frustration, and sulking he says to God, "That's why I ran off to Tarshish! I knew you were sheer grace and mercy, not easily angered, rich in love, and ready at the drop of a hat to turn your plans of punishment into a program of forgiveness!"

Oh my goodness! That response reminds me of me. Eugene Peterson writes in his introduction to the book of Jonah, "One reason that the Jonah story is so enduringly important for nurturing the life of faith in us is that Jonah is not a hero too high and might for us to identify with – he doesn't do anything great. Instead of being held up as an ideal to admire, we find Jonah as a companion in our ineptness. Here is someone on our level. Even when Jonah does it right (like preaching, finally, in Nineveh) he does it wrong (by getting angry at God.)"<sup>1</sup>

A couple of things to say here, one is that God can handle you being angry at God. The Psalms are a testament to how God can handle our anger and all emotions as the writings are filled with the angst of human experience. Another piece is that God at times chooses to work with us regardless of where we are at. Jonah never stopped believing in God or God's power. In fact, he was sure that God had the power to change the hearts of the people of Nineveh and he wanted nothing to do with it. He preferred his anger to the pleasure of having the Ninevites know that God is rich in love.

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<sup>1</sup> Peterson, Eugene H.. The Message (MSG) [The Message](#) Numbered Edition The Bible in Contemporary Language Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018.

Thing is God's love extended to the Ninevites and also to Jonah as well as the Hebrew people. By changing the hearts of the people of Nineveh, they would no longer have to fear the battles as they would longer be a threat.

Before we go further though, let's take a look at what type of writing was used for the Book of Jonah. Now it is very difficult to take this piece as decisively historical. There are references to Jonah elsewhere in the Bible and archeologists have found a mound as they have dug at the site of ancient Nineveh which is marked as "The prophet Jonah." Which in itself is interesting. We also know that Nineveh was one of the capitals of the kingdom of Assyria. So it is not that all the details are without merit. But there is no place in other historical writings or storied diagram or symbols that would attest to the truth of a whole city, with the influence and importance of Nineveh, turning to trust in the God of the Hebrews.

This story is what one would call a satire. So a little review from English class. "Satire is a technique employed by writers to expose and criticize foolishness and corruption of an individual or a society by using humor, irony, exaggeration or ridicule...Usually, a satire is a comical piece of writing which makes fun of an individual or a society to expose its stupidity and shortcomings."<sup>2</sup>

I have always thought that if we were made in the image of God and we have humour, God must appreciate humour as well. We like to think of the Bible as a very serious piece of work, and no doubt it is, but if we take out the humor, irony, and sass, well, we can miss the point of why a story like Jonah is in the Bible in the first place.

Jonah is a story about going from anger to pleasure. God's anger is turned to pleasure when the Ninevites turn from their sins. The story is one of hope, new life, and the willingness to change. Stories like the book of Jonah have a way of telling us something about ourselves. Do we sulk when we don't get our way or someone else seems to be rewarded when they don't apparently deserve it? Do we judge others harshly when we ourselves are just as guilty of not always getting it right, when our words or actions are harmful to others?

Not unlike many churches, our congregation is looking at how we are to engage the conversations, world and community challenges that outside the doors of our sanctuary, because that is where God is at work. God is with us here as we worship, but God is not limited by our walls, only we are. The same goes for our personal lives, we may have limitations on our ability to fully enact the changes we want to see around us, but God is not limited in that same way, so to align ourselves wholeheartedly to the love and concern God has for others, for those who are particularly at risk of exploitation and hardship, is to see the pleasure of God at work and being partners in it.

I have heard it said, "The church does not have a mission; God's mission has a church." We are the church whether we are gathered in a building together on a Sunday morning,

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<sup>2</sup> <https://literarydevices.net/satire/> Accessed January 20, 2018

worshipping online, going to work, bingo, a concert, or a rally. The church gives us a place and opportunity to listen and learn through study and conversation whether or not our hopes align with God's. What we look for in the church is wise counsel with one another as we do this work of discerning together, asking for the Holy Spirit to be present among us, guiding, teaching, comforting, and challenging us to go beyond our comfort zones, beyond our fear of the unknowns, from our places of just being angry and self-righteous, to forgiving, loving, and welcoming. From anger to pleasure in all that God has in store for us and for those who we feel shouldn't receive God's sheer grace, mercy, love and program of forgiveness! Thanks be to God that God's got this. Amen.

## **Prayers of the People**

God of all people and places,  
we come to you in prayer,  
giving thanks that you are with us in all situations.  
You bring us strength and courage when we are anxious or afraid.  
You provide wisdom and direction when we face choices and challenges.  
Thank you for your faithfulness to us.  
In this time of prayer, enlarge our love and sharpen our vision  
so that we may serve the well-being of the world you love more faithfully.

We pray for those who dwell on the margins of the economy,  
facing the challenges of unemployment or financial insecurity  
in these days of transition.  
Give leaders in government, business and labour a mutual vision  
that reflects the values of your kingdom,  
so that everyone has enough resources and respect to live well and wisely.

We pray for all those facing famine and drought this year,  
and for those who have lost everything through fire, storm, or pandemic.  
Bring support to those people and agencies who work to alleviate suffering  
and help them rebuild lives and communities.

We give you thanks for those who work for peace and mercy  
in a world divided by bitter conflicts,  
and for those who keep peace and lead negotiations in international disputes.  
Give them courage and perseverance.  
We remember those who face violence, persecution, or discrimination daily,  
and pray for all whose lives are marked by danger or upheaval.  
Send your Spirit to protect the vulnerable and shame the vicious  
so that justice and well-being will prevail.

We pray for teachers, students, educational administrators and support staff  
as another school year begins.  
Thank you for the gifts of education,

for insight into this ever-changing world  
and the ability to distinguish truth from error.  
Grant those in education this year mutual respect  
and commitment to the shared venture of learning.  
Help each of us bring the benefits of our education to our life of faith  
and give us all a teachable spirit.

We pray for all those anywhere who struggle with pain or illness,  
disability or daunting diagnosis.  
Stay by their side.  
Be with those who face death this day,  
and those who weep for loved ones who have died.  
Unite us in love, whatever we are facing,  
and grant us the peace and hope you have promised us in Christ Jesus.

Hear us now as we say the prayer that Jesus taught all his followers:

### **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 gifts we offer to God support many good works through our congregations and, in our case, the work that Presbyterians undertake together around the world. We pray that they may bear much fruit in Jesus' name.

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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.

### **Hymn**

*Christ's is the world*

758

1. Christ's is the world in which we move;  
Christ's are the folk we're summoned to love;  
Christ's is the voice which calls us to care,  
and Christ is the one who meets us here.

*Refrain*

*To the lost, Christ shows his face;  
to the unloved, he gives his embrace;  
to those who cry in pain or disgrace,  
Christ makes, with his friends, a touching place.*

2. Feel for the people we most avoid –  
strange or bereaved or never employed.  
Feel for the women and feel for the men  
who fear that their living is all in vain.

*Refrain*

3. Feel for the parents who've lost their child,  
feel for the women whom men have defiled,  
feel for the baby for whom there's no breast,  
and feel for the weary who find no rest.

*Refrain*

4. Feel for the lives by life confused,  
riddled with doubt, in loving abused;  
feel for the lonely heart, conscious of sin,  
which longs to be pure but fears to begin.

*Refrain*

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**Benediction** (please stand)

Let us go now, as a people united in Christ,  
to reconcile what is divided, to heal what is broken,  
to bring together what is torn apart.

By the power and grace of God, we are called to minister to one another  
in the name of the One who came for us all.

Peace, joy, and love be among us in every new day. Amen.

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