

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

September 26, 2021

Words of Welcome

Paul was an unlikely character for God to use in bringing about a movement of people who would share the gospel throughout the known world. Many of us feel like we are unlikely people to make any change in the world as well. Taking a little time with the story of Saul later called Paul might give you some food for thought.

Call to Worship

The heavens are telling the glory of God

May our worship reflect God's glory.

The firmament proclaims God's handiwork.

May we see each other as the handiwork of God.

Let our prayer and praise, our singing and proclamation project the love of God.

**We commune with Christians around the world,
with Christians throughout time.**

With Christians across geography and across time,

Let us worship! —from *Jesus Sets the Table*, resources by the United Church of Christ, posted on their [Worship Ways](http://www.worshipways.org) website.

The hymn we are about to sing uses an American Folk Tune and updated imagery for things that have been created. God is still creating, giving us minds to solve problems, inventing new ideas, and using science to expand our knowledge.

Hymn

God, who stretched

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| 1. God, who stretched the spangled heavens
infinite in time and place,
flung the suns in burning radiance
through the silent fields of space.
We, your children in your likeness,
share inventive powers with you:
great Creator, still creating,
show us what we yet may do. | 2. Proudly rise our modern cities,
stately buildings row on row;
yet their windows, blank, unfeeling,
stare on canyoned streets below,
where the lonely drift unnoticed
in the city's ebb and flow,
lost to purpose and to meaning,
scarcely caring where they go. |
| 3. We have ventured worlds undreamed of
since the childhood of our race:
known the ecstasy of winging
through untraveled realms of space;
probed the secrets of the atom,
yielding unimagined power,
facing us with life's destruction
or our most triumphant hour. | 4. As each far horizon beckons,
may it challenge us anew:
children of creative purpose,
serving others, honouring you.
May our dreams prove rich with promise,
each endeavour well begun;
great Creator, give us guidance,
till our goals and yours are one. |

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Opening Prayer

Holy One, Source, Story and Spirit of Love,
You are perfect in wisdom.
You are faithful in love.
You are relentless in seeking reconciliation.
When we feel alone, you offer community.
When we face pain, you give healing.
When danger surrounds us, you give us courage.
When we work against each another, you urge peace.
Holy One, you are the wellspring of grace and goodness.
We come to worship you in gratitude for all you offer
through Christ in the power of the Spirit.
Receive our praise this day,
and renew us to serve you in the world you love.

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Prayer of Confession

Holy One,
Your generous mercy became flesh in Jesus Christ.
Yet we confess that often we hold grudges and cling to the past.
We focus on what we lack and resent what others have.
We turn a blind eye to what we know is evil
and fail to act for what we know to be good.
Forgive our jealousies and resentments,
and free us from any temptation to put others down.
By your generous mercy,
strengthen our commitment to follow Jesus' example day by day.

God of wisdom, speak your Word to us through the scriptures, read and interpreted.
By your Spirit, plant your truth deep within us so that we may grow in the likeness of
Christ, who is your Living Word. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

The good news is this:
God loves the world so much as to make it a fit place to live;
God loves us so much as to reshape us into people of faith.
Like a cup of cold water,
forgiveness revives us, restores us, gives us new life.
Thanks be to God, we are forgiven! Amen.

~ written by Thom Shuman, and posted on Lectionary Liturgies.

Scripture Reading Acts 9:1-22

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" ⁵He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." ⁷The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. ⁸Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

¹⁰Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, ¹²and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." ¹³But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; ¹⁴and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." ¹⁵But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; ¹⁶I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." ¹⁷So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, ¹⁹and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, ²⁰and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." ²¹All who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" ²²Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

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

Message What's God up to?

Some of you may remember the Rock Opera, released by The Who in 1969, which is the story of a boy named Tommy. At the time was he was referred to as a "deaf, dumb,

and blind boy”. I am not so interested in the back story of the opera, but rather just to say it was the song that came to mind as I pondered once again the story of Saul, later called Paul, as he experienced Jesus on the road to Damascus. Damascus was where Saul was headed to hunt down anyone who belonged to The Way in order to bring them bound back to Jerusalem to face the Jewish authorities there. The Way was the name given to the Jewish communities that believed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The song *See Me, Feel Me*, begins with the repeated words,

See me, feel me, touch me, heal me

In no way is a parallel being drawn between the story of Tommy and Saul, other than to say, it is when we are experiencing something profound many senses may be involved. As Saul was making his way on this road to what he thought was his purpose and mission Jesus stops him, and though he was blinded by the light – yes I know another song reference, sorry for any ear worms that are being caused today – though he was blinded by the light it seems that it is the first time he sees clearly who Jesus is. For the next three days Saul is without sight, and neither ate or drank. He is feeling the full effects of having experienced something that was unexpected and powerful.

It is through the touch of Ananias that Saul regains his sight and in a sense is healed. His healing is restoration of his strength and a renewed sense of purpose and mission, this time in support of those he once meant to harm.

Because Saul/Paul, is such an important writer of much of the New Testament it is helpful to understand a little of who Paul was. Paul’s work and life became instrumental to the movement of The Way, or Christianity as it would later be called as it moved into new territories.

Now the Book of Acts, which is fully called the Acts of the Apostles, it not so much about the apostles themselves as it is a powerful story that is really focused on God. It is about what kind of communities God is drawing together in these early days of the church. None of these communities were perfect. Paul’s letters throughout the New Testament are about addressing the challenges faced by the various Christian communities that have been established by himself and others in difference locals. These are imperfect people trying to be the church in difficult and trying circumstances.

There are some imbedded imageries in this story that are helpful in unpacking how important this story is to our history as Christians, but also to how we can approach the future. The first is that the story happens on the road to Damascus. The road is not actually mentioned, but it is how they are traveling. They are on a journey, even if it starts out as a journey of persecution. This journey takes Saul from one way of being in the world into a whole new direction or way of being. That segues us into another interesting point, and that is the calling of people who were followers of Jesus The Way. It was their way of living, of witnessing, of thinking differently about how God was working in the

world through the power of the Holy Spirit and in people that made this the way of transformation. Jesus also referred to himself as the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6), and those who believed in his name, came to understand the profound and meaningful ways that following Jesus was so different from what culture at the time was dictating.

We tend to forget how many of the basic human rights that are intrinsic to governments and policies come out of the changes that were affected by this very small contingent of people that over time grew and transformed how many people and countries in the world build relationships and care for one another. This work is still ours today. As Christians we are still called to be living The Way of Christ in our churches and in our homes with our sights on how we continue that work, God's mission of redemption in the world.

Presently there are three different Presbyterian congregations that I am working with. There is my home congregation of St. Andrew's that has already started the preparation work for New Beginnings, a program of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. The goal is to find how we are to be living out our calling in our community in ways that bring hope, light, and life to others while we ourselves are shaped and transformed by the experience.

There is a congregation in Geraldton that nearly two years ago took a leap of faith and became a shared ministry with the Anglican church in the community. There is to be a gold mine coming to the area and part of their future will be to see where God is leading them in the community as it is now and how God's mission will be shaped and transformed by the people and work that is brought to their community in the coming years.

And there is a congregation that has felt on hardship in the last year or more and they are looking at a different kind of transformation, one that may see their legacy of love, compassion, and generosity, live on in the life of a completely different community of faith, but one they had a hand in bringing to Canada in their work to resettle refugees.

Each of these congregations is figuring out, like Paul, how their life as a community of faith might align with what God is doing in the world. It is a call into a new way of life, a new way of being in the world. It is being witnesses to Christ's love for those who need the most care and compassion.

And like Paul, this call to witness, to be transformed, to figure out how our lives might align with what God is doing in the world, to finally see Jesus and share Jesus with others, it will be life-giving!

This is also a story of fear, trepidation, and challenge. Not for a moment I am suggesting that anything that the church may try to do or you may face will be easy. We are not called to easy. The other major character in this story is Ananias. He did not think that the Saul thing was a good idea and protests, basically saying to God, "I think you must

have the wrong guy. You know this Saul character is trying to kill us.” But God responds with “Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen.”

Just as we may experience some of what Paul experienced, the determination, the strength, the understanding, the power, the change, we may also find ourselves feeling like Ananias, fearful, approaching the situation with caution and maybe even protest, but God does have the ability to work with whatever we do and however we feel. It is about our hearts, our openness to look at what God might be doing in our midst and with others and saying, “I’m in!”

Once again, we don’t have to do it alone, Paul always had companions along the way and we are companions for each other. We discern together, plan together, hope, dream, and work together. No one is excluded in this work as God will find a way to have each one of us participate in what God is doing, which is bringing healing and wholeness, transformation, compassion, hope and love into the world. And God wants to use you, to use us. May we come, ready or not, to be the way others find peace, hope, forgiveness, love, and community. We are imperfect people trying to be the church in difficult and trying circumstances, while trusting God’s plan and goodness. In Christ, with Christ and through Christ. Amen.

Invitation to make an offering

The wonderful works of God surround us. How will we show our gratitude?

The generosity of God exceeds all our limits.

How will our manner of life reflect the abundance of God’s mercy?

Surely our offerings are one measure of our response.

lifeinliturgy.wordpress.com/2021/09/14/proper-21b-pentecost-18

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.

Prayers of the People

Gracious God,

you have called many people together to become the church that bears Jesus’ name.

Thank you for joining us in fellowship in so many different places, and giving us opportunities to make a difference for Christ’s sake.

Bless our congregation and our denomination,

so that we are united in mission and purpose, wherever and however we serve.

Creator God, you made all things and called them good.
May the earth be held in reverence by all people.
May its resources be used wisely,
and the fragile balance between all its species respected.
Be with those whose lives have been disrupted by wildfire, storm and drought,
and bring healing to creatures and communities struggling for life.

Comforting God,
your Son became a refugee with no place to call his own.
Look with mercy on all those who are fleeing from danger,
and find themselves homeless and hungry.
Bless and protect those who work to bring relief;
and inspire generosity and compassion in hearts that have resources to share.
Guide the nations to work together to bring an end to conflict
so that little children may grow up safe and happy in their own homes.

Eternal Ruler,
all nations rise and fall in your sight.
Hear our prayers for those who rule in countries around the world,
that they may act with integrity, establish justice for all citizens,
and seek the ways of peace.
Give guidance to the new government elected in Canada this week,
to address the needs of the most vulnerable,
and to lead recovery from the pandemic in prudent and generous ways.

God of hope,
we bring before you the names of people and places on our hearts this day,
seeking the right gift only you can give them: *(pause for silent prayer)*

Ever faithful God,
you have knit together your people from all times and places
into the body of Christ through his resurrecting love.
Keep us in communion with all your saints,
those we have known and loved, as well as those known best to you.
Inspire us to learn from the examples of their faith in action,
and bring us together in the joy we will know in your presence.

Merciful God,
accept our prayers, spoken and unspoken,
and strengthen us to do your will through Jesus Christ,
who taught us to pray, saying:

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The 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.

It is said that the church doesn't have a mission. God's mission has a church. We are partners in the work with Christ. How that looks is for us to figure out, but there is not doubt we are called as partners in Christ's service. Let us sing!

Hymn

Called as partners in Christ's service

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| 1. Called as partners in Christ's service,
called to ministries of grace,
we respond with deep commitment,
fresh new lines of faith to trace.
May we learn the art of sharing,
side by side and friend with friend,
equal partners in our caring
to fulfil God's chosen end. | 2. Christ's example, Christ's inspiring,
Christ's clear call to work and worth,
let us follow, never faltering,
reconciling folk on earth.
Men and women, richer, poorer,
All God's people, young and old,
Blending human skills together,
Gracious gifts from God unfold. |
| 3. Thus new patterns for Christ's mission,
in a small or global sense,
help us bear each other's burdens,
breaking down each wall or fence.
Words of comfort, words of vision,
words of challenge, said with care,
bring new power and strength for action,
make us colleagues, free and fair. | 4. So God grant us for tomorrow
ways to order human life
that surround each person's sorrow
with a calm that conquers strife.
make us partners in our living,
our compassion to increase,
messengers of faith, thus giving
hope and confidence and peace. |

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Benediction

Lean upon God to be strong. Learn from God to be wise.
Seek out Christ to be found. Serve with Christ to be free.
Trust in the Spirit to be healthy. Live by the Spirit to be whole.
And may the blessing of Creator, Son, and Holy Spirit be with us!