

# St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

**15th Sunday after Pentecost - September 5, 2021**

## Words of Welcome

If you are someone that has attended church at any point you will have heard the phrase "Hallelujah!" It means, Praise the Lord! But what does it mean in our lives to praise the Lord? How does it look? This is an initiation to spend time together and see if this phrase has any relevance in our lives. We begin with a call to worship.

## Call to Worship

Put your confidence in God.

**Those who have God as their helper will rejoice.**

God gives justice to the oppressed and food to the hungry.

**God frees the prisoners and opens the eyes of the blind.**

So, put your trust in God's goodness.

**Let God's reign endure forever! Let us worship God.**

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## Hymn

*Praise to the Lord, the Almighty*

**321**

1. Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, who rules all creation.  
my soul, praise God who alone is your health and salvation.  
Come, all who hear, sisters and brothers draw near,  
joining in glad adoration.
2. Praise to the Lord, who in all things so wondrously reigning  
hides you with sheltering wings, ever gently sustaining.  
Have you not seen how your heart's wishes have been  
granted through God's kind ordaining?
3. Praise to the Lord, who will prosper your work, who defends you;  
surely God's merciful goodness here daily attends you;  
ponder anew what almighty can do,  
when in great love God befriends you.
4. Praise to the Lord, and with all that is in me adoring,  
all who have life and breath, come with glad  
praises outpouring! Let the Amen sound from God's people again:  
now and forever adoring!

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## Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Eternal God, first and last, our beginning and our end,  
beside you there is nothing or no one greater.

You gave breath to all living things.

By your Spirit, you are among us still, breathing new life,  
turning anger into reconciliation,  
division into unity,  
grief into consolation.

Through your grace, you open up new directions and new possibilities  
for the world you love.

So, we offer you our lives and our labours in worship and in service,  
joining in creation's song of praise and adoration:

Holy, holy, holy are you, O God,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and always.

**God of mercy,**

**we know you judge the world with an eye for the poor and outcast.**

**We confess we fail to live with the same eye for those on the margins.**

**We have been silent when we should have spoken up, and uncaring in the face of injustice. We have not shown the same generosity to others that you have shown us. Forgive us for putting ourselves first, and help us to serve you with the kindness we meet in Jesus Christ.**

Gracious God, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit.

As the scriptures are read and interpreted, may we hear what you are saying to the church today, and find the courage to follow your will. **Amen.**

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## Assurance of Pardon

Take comfort in the assurance

that even those things that are hidden from memory,

or are too deep for our words, are not beyond God's forgiving love.

God, who knows us completely, bestows pardon and peace.

**Thanks be to God.**

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## Scripture Reading Psalm 146

<sup>1</sup> Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord, O my soul!

<sup>2</sup> I will praise the Lord as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

<sup>3</sup> Do not put your trust in princes,

in mortals, in whom there is no help.

<sup>4</sup> When their breath departs, they return to the earth;  
on that very day their plans perish.

<sup>5</sup> Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,  
whose hope is in the Lord their God,

<sup>6</sup> who made heaven and earth,  
the sea, and all that is in them;  
who keeps faith for ever;

<sup>7</sup> who executes justice for the oppressed;  
who gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets the prisoners free;

<sup>8</sup> the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.

The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;  
the Lord loves the righteous.

<sup>9</sup> The Lord watches over the strangers;  
he upholds the orphan and the widow,  
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

<sup>10</sup> The Lord will reign for ever,  
your God, O Zion, for all generations.

Praise the Lord!

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

### **Message** Responding to God

Over the summer we have watched as athletes completed for our country at the Olympic and Para-Olympic games. Women on the Canadian team have dominated for our country in various sports, many bringing new heights and experience to their respective sport in our country. One highlight during the Olympics was when the Canadian Women's Soccer team won gold. Witnessing their overcoming was truly inspiring. We have also had opportunity to watch as the Canadian Women's Hockey team became IIHF World Champions defeating their long-standing opponents and friends of the USA hockey team as we savoured the win with them.

Some have called it the summer of Canadian Women. These moments had people cheering from their living rooms and in pubs in small groups. Normally the stadium and hockey arena would have been filled to capacity with cheering crowds, this time we had to be satisfied with knowing that many across the country had gathered and were cheering right along with one another.

We celebrate that which seems worthy of praise. We often see this kind of praise in sports, but it also happens in music when people clap and cheer for the music they have

heard at a concert, making sure that the musicians know and experience our appreciation. It is easy to get caught up in praising those who have brought our emotions high or moved us in some way.

The last psalms in the book of Psalms are all praise songs to God. Praising God is a response to experiencing God's goodness, provision, and presence in our lives. Observing the breath-taking beginning or ending of a day in a sunrise or sunset, climbing a mountain to see the world from a different perspective, sitting by a calming stream or roaring waterfall, watching the leaves change colour from green to gold, orange, and red, can all bring a response of praise to God as we experience God in nature and the glorious and wonderful ways nature reflects the brilliance of our Creator leading us to praise.

The writer of the psalm, known as the psalmist, begins with "Praise the Lord!" All, everyone together, is called upon to praise God. We also seem to need a reminder to praise God as individuals. To praise God as long as we live, throughout our entire lives. Or as the psalmist says, "Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long."

It can be difficult remembering or even think about how God is present to us in all circumstances. In a time when we are headed into a nation-wide election, those who engage in the process of discerning who we might vote for, listen to the promises of party leaders and local candidates. We put a lot of trust in those who will represent our needs and desires. We hope that they will bring our nation to a place of peace and prosperity, along with well-being for all. Now there are a lot of nuances when it comes to what people value and are looking for in their elected representatives, and we are more than encouraged to participate in the process. Thankfully in Canada we have the right to vote for who will take a seat in parliament.

With all of this, the psalm cautions us, "Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help. When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish." This does not diminish our responsibility to participate in the voting process, but to remember that politicians come and go, they are not saviours, they are people like you and me, mortals, who too will die. We are reminded of the fact that those we vote for are as human as we are as almost everyone fails to follow through on their plans, sometimes because of their own decisions, sometimes because others work against their being able to do the good they wish to do. Over time many become enamoured by their own power and prestige.

As Christians, in times of elections and when making decisions, it may be helpful for us to think of the people that God has a deep compassion for and actions that God would deem important to the well-being of all. Psalm 146 is thorough in listing what and who is

important to God. Our God executes justice for the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. That seems pretty straight forward. It could be a pretty blanket statement that to see all people in the world stand proud, to not live in fear, to have an abundance of food for themselves and their families, would make for a more just and beautiful world.

The Psalm continues with, “The Lord sets the prisoners free.” This may cause some to exclaim – No Way! – yet remember this is about restoring people to wholeness and community, to right relationships with God, themselves, and others. There are already movements like restorative justice that aim to get people back into community and living whole and productive lives. In our time it is not likely that all will come to that place, but looking at the justice system, fixing the flaws, examining thinking and our society where there are disproportionate numbers of people from certain groups in jail cells, is all worthwhile work.

God is in the business of unbinding people who are bound by limitations, whether it be a jail cell, or blindness of heart, mind, or body, as well as those who are bowed down because of physical burdens or burdens of the heart.

The Lord loves the righteous. This group, the righteous, are part of the reconciling and restoring work of God. Hopefully this is the group in which all Christians can be found, where we are working to bring God’s promises and purposes to fruition in the world. Here at St. Andrew’s, we use three words to speak of how we are working to participate in God’s plans and desire for the world - Responding, Restoring, Rejoicing! It is our hope that everything we do can be represented in these words and always in the way we bring healing and wholeness to those who are broken in spirit or need to be lifted up.

“The Lord watches over the strangers...upholds the orphan and the widow.” These two groups represent those who are marginalized and powerless, the people who seem to have few to no one to speak on their behalf, who are lonely, those without means and possibility. Remember this is written in a time when strangers were not often welcomed, and the orphan and the widow had to rely on the help and handouts of others to protect and care for them.

To translate this directly into our experience in the 21<sup>st</sup> century does not work, but it is a reminder that even today there are those who come to a new community, work, or family and are strangers to the circumstances they find themselves in and the people they are with. As well, there are still those who do not have the means nor the power to get themselves out of the situations they have found themselves in, whether it is of their own doing or the decisions made others, be it families, friends, work environments, or governments.

It is pretty easy to praise God in the good times and celebrate with others. It may be good practice to say aloud “Praise the Lord!” When in a crowd it has even more power

as those words are spoken and celebrated together. Sadly, we often forget to praise God for the presence, love, forgiveness, and provision we receive in the big and little moments.

It may be more challenging to remember to praise God when things are tough, when we face illness or death, loss of work or family and friend relationship, when our bank accounts are always tight, or in the red. When arguments and hurt abound or we feel forgotten. May you find that even in those moments you can trust that God is near, present and available to you. Look for who God is sending to you, what God is providing for you. It is said, "Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God." This is not necessarily a bubbly rejoicing happy, but in these times may be the reassuring refrain that "God with us."

The God of Jacob refers to the fact that God covenants or promises to be with those who remember God is with them. God is not demanding our praise, but like all of us, desires that our response to God's presence and provision be one of praise and love. The church is a place for that response to be experienced in community, we do it in prayer, in music and singing, in reading scripture, in working and celebrating together, in participating in the Lord's supper of communion and making a commitment in baptism or confession of faith to the work of God in the world through the church and our responding, restoring, and rejoicing together with those who God has deep compassion for.

We hope in the Lord, hope for a day when all the struggle will be done, when the way of the wicked will be brought to ruin. When we can count on people to always work for the good of others, seeking the best for all not just a few. When sorrow and sickness will end. May it be our desire to be people who work in partnership with God to bring heaven on earth in our time as we sing praise to God in our church, in our homes, and in our lives, trusting that we do not go alone. God is with us. Praise the Lord!

## **Prayers of the People**

O God in whom we live and move and have our being:

We come to you in prayer as the summer season draws nearer to its close:

We give you thanks for the occasions we have enjoyed

to catch up with family and friends;

to travel for recreation and restoration and let our worries go.

We are grateful for each moment to savour the beauty of creation.

Refresh us for the season ahead we pray,

and renew our commitment to serve you.

O God, Jesus faced many demands wherever he went,  
and pressure from critics, whatever he did.

We pray for all those who have not found rest this summer:

for those whose work is stressful, exhausting, or unappreciated;  
for those whose livelihoods remain uncertain,  
because of the pandemic or through disasters caused by heat, fire, or storm.  
We pray for those which hard choices to make,  
about work or school or what comes next,  
about relationships and priorities,  
or about social policy and community leadership.  
May they know your strength and guidance day by day.

Today we remember those for whom this summer has been filled with suffering:  
We pray for those who have lost loved ones,  
and those facing an uncertain future or a difficult diagnosis.  
We pray for those who have lost their homes, for whatever reason,  
and for those who despair about the climate crisis  
and what can be done to repair the suffering earth.

We pray for all those who join efforts to relieve suffering of any kind.  
May each one find courage to face tomorrow in your company.

O God, we need the embrace of your presence, each in our own way.  
As we prepare to leave this service, walk with us,  
and show us how to live each day as those who follow Jesus,  
for we dare to pray the words he taught us, saying:

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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

God calls us to reach out to those in need in kindness rather than judgment, and with generosity, not just good intentions. As we give our gifts, our offering, may our faith in Christ's love be expressed through our actions and generosity in the church that bears his 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

### *A mighty fortress is our God*

315

1. A mighty fortress is our God,  
a refuge never failing,  
our helper sure amid the flood  
of mortal ills prevailing.  
For still our ancient foe  
yet seeks to work us woe  
with craft and power great,  
and, armed with cruel hate,  
on earth has not an equal.
2. Did we in our own strength confide,  
our striving would be losing,  
were not a Saviour on our side,  
the One of God's own choosing.  
Who is this Saviour, who?  
Christ Jesus, living, true.  
Lord Sabbaoth by name,  
from age to age the same,  
already wins the battle.
3. And though this world, with evil filled,  
should threaten to undo us,  
we will not fear, for God has willed  
the truth to triumph through us:  
the powers of death and hell  
our God will surely quell;  
their rage we can endure,  
for look! Their doom is sure:  
one little word will fell them.
4. That Word above all earthly powers—  
no thanks to them! — abiding,  
ensures that all God's gifts are ours,  
through Christ in us residing,  
whose summons rings above  
all good, all earthly love.  
Earth's powers waste away;  
God's word endures always,  
whose reign will last forever.

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## Benediction

Go now, and invest your lives in the works of faith.  
Make a name for yourselves for generosity and compassion.  
Fulfill God's holy law  
by putting love into action as eagerly for others  
as you would for yourselves.

And may God be your defender and provider;  
May Christ Jesus dispel all that disturbs or disables you;  
and may the Holy Spirit make you rich in faith  
.....and loving and merciful in action.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

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