

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

Harvest Sunday October 10, 2021

Words of Welcome

We work to achieve a lot of things. We strive for financial and personal independence. We put a lot of pressure on ourselves to get our lives right. God gets that, but in our scriptures, we are told also to strive to have relationship with God because that puts everything else into perspective. Come along side me today as we explore that theme further.

Call to Worship

What can we do to have life?

We can seek God, who gives us life in every moment.

What can we do to serve justice in our world?

**We can set aside that which keeps us
from following Jesus – wealth, pride, power, whatever.**

What can we do to share the good news with others?

**We can open ourselves to the Spirit,
so people can see God at work in us.**

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Hymn

For the fruits of all creation

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1. For the fruits of all creation, thanks be to God;
for the gifts of every nation, thanks be to God;
for the ploughing, sowing, reaping,
silent growth while we are sleeping,
future needs in earth's safe-keeping, thanks be to God.
2. In the just reward of labour, God's will is done;
in the help we give our neighbour, God's will is done;
in our world-wide task of caring
for the hungry and despairing,
in the harvests we are sharing, God's will is done.
3. For the harvests of the Spirit, thanks be to God;
for the good we all inherit, thanks be to God;
for the wonders that astound us,
for the truths that still confound us,
most of all, that love has found us, thanks be to God.

"For the fruits of all creation," words by Fred Pratt Green

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of all creation,
in this season of thanksgiving for the harvests of the earth,
we are struck by the beauties of autumn,
leaves in bright colours, birds flying south in formation, fields ripe with produce.
Such beauty speaks of your goodness,
your desire to provide what each beloved creature needs.
As we gather this day,
renew our sense of thanksgiving for what you give to us
in the fruitfulness of creation,
and in Christ Jesus who teaches us how to walk wisely on the earth you made.
For all your good gifts we honour you with thanks and praise,
now and always.

**God of our lives,
when we give thanks for your good gifts around us,
we know that we enjoy an abundance many cannot even imagine.
Yet we confess we do not always see the blessings in which we share.
We worry about the future,
if we can recover from the pandemic,
whether we will have enough for our families to flourish.
Forgive our fears of going without,
and our failure to be grateful for how much goodness is already ours.
Remind us of your steadfast presence and provision.**

God of wisdom, through your holy Word and the gift of your Spirit, open our minds to greater understanding, our hearts to deeper love, and our wills for greater service, through Jesus Christ, your Word made flesh. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news! Because God loves us, we lack for nothing; because God forgives us, we have everything we need; because God surrounds us with people, we do not journey alone.

Committing everything to God, trusting in the One who redeems us, we decide to live as God's faithful and forgiven people. Amen.

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Scripture Reading Matthew 6:19-21, 24-34

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in

heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ²⁴“No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

²⁵“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ³²For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴“So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

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

Message What are you striving for?

Trouble enough for today. Who of us cannot relate to that statement? It seems that quite regularly there is trouble enough and at times more trouble than we think we can handle in a day. There is trouble when a pandemic hits the entire globe. There is trouble when climate change brings sweeping changes to landscapes and livelihoods. There is trouble when people need to flee their countries because of conflict or food shortages. There is trouble when the colour of your skin affects how you walk in the world. There is trouble when you are homeless with nowhere to lay your head safely. Name your trouble.

Actually, do name your trouble, because there are the world-wide situations that we do need to pay attention to, but there are also the troubles that come to each of us in any given day, week, month, or year. Your trouble may be money, lack of time, illness, energy, or broken relationships. Right now, I have far too many family and friends that are fighting illness and most days I have to remember to breath because my to-do list is longer than the hours in my day, and that doesn’t include taking care of our home. Having said that, I will take my full-on list of to-dos against the financial struggles Ken and I have known.

The first year Ken and I arrived in Thunder Bay and bought our home, due to a number of circumstances in the last days of 2013, I remember having just over \$3.00 left in my pocket, our credit cards were maxed out, and there was no money in the bank, our children had been with us for Christmas and we were headed back to Alberta with our sons. I had promised that I would purchase the apple cider mix for the Wassail Service before leaving for Alberta, I hoped that when I went to the checkout I had enough money to cover my purchase – I did – but one never forgets the worry. My stipend cheque was just a day or so away, but in that moment, we were so broke.

Still, when I hear of people struggling with health, and lack of adequate housing or access to food, my heart sinks. My troubles have been temporary. Many that I know and love will not ever get well again. Or when I think of those I have met on our front steps of the church, I often wonder if I will see them again, or will they become one of the statistics of people that never found a way out of their circumstances. The challenges and people are as varied and compounded as you can imagine, or may know intimately yourself.

These challenges are not new, and to the people Jesus was speaking to on that day in what has come to be known as the Sermon on the Mount, we know that there were many challenges for adequate shelter, clothing, and food. Jesus also recognized that people were struggling in their relationships and spoke about anger, adultery, divorce, taking oaths or as we might call making promises. He also spoke about emotional, mental, and spiritual darkness. He spoke about retaliation, love for enemies, prayer, and money. What people then and now face is usually not just one thing, but compounded and layered situations. Our money issues or serious illness can bring about anger and resentment. Being without food and struggling to keep a roof over one's head can bring about depression.

After all this teaching Jesus says, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" Well, ain't that just so helpful. He goes on to say how God clothes the lilies of the field and feeds the birds of the air. One might think this guy was just a little off his rocker. Who of us, or in Jesus' time would not be concerned for our well being and that of others?

Again, we need to reflect on this passage in the context of what Jesus has been saying. Jesus knows every struggle. God knows that we strive to make ends meet, to be a better parent, grandparent, or friend. God knows that we need to have food, shelter, and clothing, as well as healthy minds and bodies. God is concerned about all of this. So when Jesus says, 'Don't worry,' he is not asking you to be Polly Anna about your life.

What Jesus is saying here is that what we need to strive for above all else is a relationship with God, to loosen our grip on worry, fear, and our anxiety over it all. It is about trusting that you are not alone in your struggle. Writer, David Ewart sums this up with, “The opposite of worry/fear/anxiety is faith – or better still – trust. If we were to trust in God as simply and completely as the birds of the air and the flowers of the field do, we would not be anxious. We WOULD still have responsibilities but would not be anxious about them.”¹

Most of this passage is about what we are striving for and where is our heart. In all of the struggles that people face in their lives the thing about the Christian faith is that we know where our hope comes from. Our hope is in God. It is not a hope that thinks that all things will be perfect if we just get it right or that we need to strive to make it on our own. It does not take away our responsibility to do the best in the circumstance we face, but we know that we are not alone. God knows our need and is working all things together for our good. (Romans 8:28) What we get from God is grace, peace, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is about looking for God in the moments of joy and challenge and choosing to trust. Again, Ewart writes, “Having our intentions aligned with God's desires plus trusting God frees us from being anxious / worried / fearful about what will happen next; allows us to let go of expectations.”²

And often it is our expectations that get in the way of living into the truth of who we are and God's love and compassion for us. We expect that life should go a certain way and when it doesn't, which is more often than not, we are disappointed, frustrated, and even angry. When we face unknowns in terms of our future, which again is always an unknown until it actually happens, we feel anxious and maybe even panic. Yet, we have been given the means by which to live the Christian life. As another faithful writer, Neil Chappell has said, the means are – “the grace of God, the peace of Christ, the gift of the Spirit. We need to have trust. To have faith. To have confidence.”³

Life is filled with challenge, distractions, disruptions so living for God and in relationship with God is something that we need to strive for. We can strive for many things, a secure income, a good job, wonderful healthcare to be there for us, governments that are compassionate and just, but above all other things in our lives we might just want to make our most important striving a loving, trusting relationship with God.

One of my other go-to theologians is Scott Hoezee, he writes, “Jesus asks us to look at even our distractions, even our interruptions, through new eyes. If this is the context in which, somehow or another, we are able to seek first the kingdom of God and its

¹ Ewart, David. <https://www.holytextures.com/2011/02/matthew-6-24-34-year-a-epiphany-8-february-25-march-3-2-sermon.html> Accessed October 8, 2021.

² Ewart. Ibid.

³ Chappell, Neil. <https://aweirdthing.wordpress.com/2011/02/20/dont-fuss-about-whats-on-the-table/> Accessed October 8, 2021.

righteousness, then that kingdom and that holy way of living is possible not by our breaking *out of* the routine but smack *in the midst of* it all.”⁴

New eyes for seeing every situation, every person, every experience. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things, the peace of Christ, the grace of God, and the presence of the Holy Spirit will be given to you in order that you can live at peace with yourself and others, being confident that what you are facing you do not go through alone. Trusting that God’s desire for you is goodness and believing that striving for relationship with God will give you eyes to see, ears to hear, and a mouth with which to speak new life into your own life and that of others.

On this Thanksgiving weekend, this Harvest Sunday, may our bounty be the love of God outpoured on us and on the world. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Kind and Generous God,
on this Thanksgiving weekend,
we pause to give you thanks for all those things, both great and small,
those moments of wonder and those ordinary exchanges
which fill our lives with meaning and offer us a sense of well-being.
(Keep a brief silence)

By your Spirit, O God,
May our friends see in us signs of a grateful heart.

Merciful and Generous God,
as we give thanks for the harvests of the earth and its goodness,
show us how to live respectfully in creation
and protect all that is precious to you.
In a year when harvesting has been disappointing in many places,
show us how to share what has been produced so that no one goes hungry:

By your Spirit, O God,
May our friends see in us signs of a grateful heart.

Just and Generous God,
we pray for the good of your world and the common good in our community.
Where there is hostility between peoples or nations,
inspire leaders to show wisdom and courage in decision making.
We pray for areas hard hit by flood, storm, fire or earthquake,
and for all those struggling with the impact of the pandemic.
May neighbours with resources maintain generosity and compassion
for the long work of reconstructing lives and livelihoods

⁴ Scott Hoezee. <https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2014-12-15/matthew-624-34/> Accessed October 8, 2021.

By your Spirit, O God,

May our friends see in us signs of a grateful heart.

Healing and Generous God,

we pray for all those facing health challenges or difficult times for any reason,
and we pray for family and friends under stress or in sorrow
whom we name in silence before you

(Keep silence for 30 seconds)

Give us patience and understanding as we draw near to them
and help us reach out with compassion.

By your Spirit, O God,

May our friends see in us signs of a grateful heart.

O God, in Jesus Christ we have met your generous love and mercy.

Through our lives and by our prayers,

reveal his love and mercy in this generation,

for it is in his name we offer the prayer 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

At this time of harvest, we celebrate the gifts of God's good earth which sustain us. Yet this year we know in some places, harvests will not be plentiful. In every community, neighbours still struggle to recover from what has been lost during the pandemic. So today we offer what we have to share, grateful for God's gifts large and small, praying they will make a difference in difficult times, trusting that God goes with us, whatever we face.

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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. Seek ye first the kingdom of God
and his righteousness,
and all these things shall be added unto you.
Allelu, alleluia!
2. Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
seek and ye shall find;
knock, and the door shall be opened unto you.
Allelu, alleluia!
3. We do not live by bread alone,
but by every word
that proceeds from the mouth of God.
Allelu, alleluia!

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Benediction

Each day as we harvest the gifts of God's grace,
may our thanks be abundant, appreciative, and full.
With growing gratitude, serve well in Christ's name. Amen.

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