

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

World Communion Sunday, October 3, 2021

Words of Welcome

Welcome to worship! Today is World Communion Sunday and so around the globe we join people in different places, of different cultures, in all the glorious variety of churches that worship God. Many are celebrating the sacrament of Holy Communion. Trust that today we walk with all the Saints in celebrating the unity we have in Christ.

Call to Worship

We gather today, seeking the peace Christ gives.

We gather, in spite of many a conflict, many a doubt, within our souls.

We gather, longing for the breath of God's Spirit to give us courage and renewal.

Come, Christ Jesus, be our guest. Bless us through the power of your Spirit and give us the courage to live as your disciples day by day. Amen.

Ruth C. Duck, in *Flames of Spirit: Resources for Worship*, Ruth Duck, ed, Pilgrim Press, 1985, 59.

Hymn

The love of God comes close

474

1. The love of God comes close
where stands an open door,
to let the stranger in,
to mingle rich and poor.
The love of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk the Way;
the love of God is here to stay.
2. The peace of God comes close
to those caught in the storm,
forgoing lives of ease
to ease the lives forlorn.
The peace of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk the Way;
the peace of God is here to stay.
3. The joy of God comes close
where faith encounters fears,
where heights and depths of life
are found through smiles and tears.
The joy of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk the Way;
the joy of God is here to stay.
4. The grace of God comes close
to those whose grace is spent,
when hearts are tired or sore
and hope is bruised and bent.
The grace of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk the Way;
the grace of God is here to stay.
5. The Son of God comes close
where people praise his name,
where bread and wine are blest
and shared as when he came.
The Son of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk the Way;
the Son of God is here to stay.

"The love of God comes close," words by John L. Bell and Graham Maule
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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Eternal God,

as we come before you today, we recognize that, here, heaven and earth join hands. We join with your church which stretches around the world, and across many generations, to meet you in our midst. As we remember Jesus this day, unite us to those who have served you over the centuries, and to all who serve you in so many different situations today. We praise you for your amazing love which embraces countless congregations and invites us into a future you are creating for us all. O God, let us join hands with heaven and earth to celebrate your holy name through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Ever present God, you ask us to come together in peace, seeking reconciliation with you and with each other. We confess that the church has not always sought reconciliation within or beyond its walls. In this silence, we hand over to you the broken relationships, disagreements and disappointments that keep us from living in your peace.

**Free us from the burdens we carry,
so that we may be a source of peace in this troubled world
in the name of Christ who is our peace.**

By your Word, O God, open our minds to greater understanding;
open our hearts to deeper love;
and strengthen our determination to live the gospel we meet
through Jesus Christ, your Living Word. 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; see, everything has become new!

Know that you are forgiven and have the courage to forgive one another.

Scripture Reading Acts 11:1-18

Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God. ²So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, ³saying, “Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?” ⁴Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, ⁵“I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. ⁶As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. ⁷I also heard a voice saying to me, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’ ⁸But I replied, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ ⁹But a second time the voice answered from heaven, ‘What God has made

clean, you must not call profane.’ ¹⁰This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. ¹¹At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. ¹²The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. ¹³He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; ¹⁴he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.’ ¹⁵And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. ¹⁶And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?” ¹⁸When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, “Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.”

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

Message Discomfort and Challenge Grows into Courage and Knowledge

The morning I sat down to write this message I managed to spill an entire cup of hot chocolate over my desk. It flowed under my day timer and computer. It hit a magazine resource I had not even cracked open yet. I was covered and had to change and the floor was awash with the brown combination of milk and cocoa mix. Sticky, messy, and wet. I really wanted to cry. I had awoken early to get to work on my writing, had already had several distractions, and now the next half hour would be spent cleaning up the mess. Just when I thought I had it all taken care of I found that a number of items needed a second wash down and the magazine needed to have every page pulled one from another as it was drying with pages sticking together.

I was distressed, anxious, and frustrated, but managed to stay calm. Which in itself tells me I continue to mature as that would not have been my response even a few years ago. Even so Ken heard the despair in my voice and called out to see if he could help. I responded with a yes, I said even if the help only made a difference through moral support. I knew I was perfectly capable of cleaning it all up, but just knowing that I didn’t have to deal with this minor incident on my own made a difference in my day. Having Ken come alongside me was a gift.

This led me to thinking about the challenges that others face and how that might figure into my sermon writing. I was also keenly aware that September 30th had marked the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation coupled with the story from the local evening news in which a “solution” had been found to deal with the homeless encampment in Thunder Bay at an abandoned gas station in a mall parking lot. The solution being a fence so that the homeless, who are primarily Indigenous, would not be

able to take shelter under the canopy of the abandoned property, forcing them back into the nearby bushes.

Then as I scrolled through my Facebook feed, I saw posts that said something to the effect that as we roll up our orange t-shirts and put them in the drawer for next year remember that Indigenous people cannot roll up their trauma and put it away, they live with it everyday. I had my momentary challenge with a cup of hot chocolate that was taken care of in a relatively short period of time and I had help to deal with it, but what can be seen just outside the door of our church here in downtown Thunder Bay, across from City Hall no less, is generational trauma and it will take years to address. It leaves one to wonder what our role is to be in this. How do we come alongside in situations where it is more than a moment in time, but years in the making and will takes more than a mere shot in the dark to bring about any lasting hope, change, or significant restoration of human lives? How do we work through the unknowns and into a future that leads to life not just for ourselves but for all?

Turning to the story of Peter we come upon him trying to explain to his peers why he went into the home of a Gentile person. You see part of the challenge here is that Gentiles were considered unclean and, well, you were not supposed to hang with that crowd especially if you were one of the original disciples. And yet, Peter has had this experience that he believes is from God. An experience that makes him understand that God's love go far beyond what we humans in our limited knowledge can begin to comprehend.

There was also Cornelius, who was not referred to by name in the reading, but is named in the scripture where the actual event is laid out. It was his home to which Peter was brought, where Peter preached, and where other Gentiles became believers in Christ. Peter and Cornelius both had to become open to the presence of the Holy Spirit that was leading them to new ways of being in the world. In their discomfort and challenge, along with that of all of the apostles and believers who were in Judea, things changed, the community of faith was broadened and opened. Through them, God was doing the work of reconciliation between people. God is still doing the work of reconciliation between people.

This week in particular and in the coming year St. Andrew's is embarking on a path that we hope will lead us into a new way of being in the world, a way that will be challenging and uncomfortable at times. What we are called to is to see what God is doing in the world around us, right from our doorstep to the broader context of needs in other places, then determine our response to God. Will the challenge and discomfort make us fearful and want to stay safe or will we be determined to be courageous, open, and become knowledgeable?

This is a question for the church and for individuals. Are we willing to become courageous and knowledgeable about others? Are we willing to provide hospitality and at times accept hospitality that is out of our comfort zone? You see God's story in Acts is about drawing wide the circle of people that God loves and has concern for. We do not limit God. Peter states in verse 17, "If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" One might simplify that to say in all ways, "Who I am I that I could hinder God?"

If God's love is expansive and inclusive, then we are also called to an expansive and inclusive love. If God's plan is for reconciliation of all people to Godself and us to each other, then our call is for reconciliation of all people to God and us to each other.

If we are to be the church in the world, if we are to be people of God in the world, we need to prepare to be uncomfortable and challenged. Being the same, doing the same as we have done in the past, even if that worked in the past, does not address the changes and challenges we are experiencing in our time and in our place in the world.

May our hearts and minds be opened like Peter and Cornelius as well as all those people that moved an entire church into a new way of being in the world, of coming along side those in need. Not to fix them or their problems, but to let them know they are not alone, that they are cared for, have value, and we are in it for the long haul. We may not get it right every time. That is okay. We will learn from our missteps and errors. It is our time and turn now and if not, if not us, then who? We come alongside in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers of the People

God of mercy and of love, you have called us to live in communion with all of your created world. Give us a new appreciation for the diversity of creation, and for the people of our world whom you love with an everlasting love. Help us to serve the needs of all who are suffering, sick, lonely, and broken by the struggles of life with the compassion and joy of true servants of Christ.

Give us grace to work with passion for the unity of your Church throughout the world, and to take our place among its people without expectation of reward, beyond the smile of your approval. May our ministries be anchored in your love of justice and peace, and may all who serve be encouraged by the promise of Christ's presence with us. Make of us a more obedient people, gladly giving what we have received from your faithful hand.

Hear our prayers, O Lord, for those whose lives are closely linked with our own: (names), whose needs we entrust to you along with our own needs. (silence)

Grant, O Lord, that we might grow in grace and in love for you as we commend ourselves to your care and guidance. Take us by the hand, O God, and by your Holy Spirit lead us to fulfill your calling in our lives through Jesus Christ our Lord.

<https://lifeinliturgy.wordpress.com/2021/09/23/proper-22b-pentecost-19/>

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

Priorities of our lives can be witnessed in our giving. John wrote: "If any has earthly resources and sees a brother or sister in need, but closes their heart against them, tell me, how is God's love abiding in such a person?" Good question. How do we answer? Let our offerings speak faithfully of God's abiding presence with us.

<https://lifeinliturgy.wordpress.com/2021/09/23/proper-22b-pentecost-19/>

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 prophet-woman broke a jar

588

1. A prophet-woman broke a jar
by Love's divine appointing.
With rare perfume she filled the room,
presiding and anointing.
A prophet-woman broke a jar,
the sneers of scorn defying.
With rare perfume she filled the room,
preparing Christ for dying.

2. A faithful woman left a tomb
by Love's divine commission.
She saw, she heard, she preached the Word,
arising from submission.
A faithful woman left a tomb,
with resurrection gospel;
she saw, she heard, she preached the Word,
apostle to apostle.
3. Though woman-wisdom, woman-truth,
for centuries were hidden,
unsung, unwritten and unheard,
derided and forbidden,
the Spirit's breath, the Spirit's fire,
on free and slave descending,
can tumble our dividing walls,
our shame and sadness mending.
4. The Spirit knows, the Spirit calls,
by Love's divine ordaining,
the friends we need, to serve and lead,
their powers and gifts unchaining.
The Spirit knows, the Spirit calls,
from women, men and children,
the friends we need, to serve and lead.
Rejoice, and make them welcome!

"A prophet-woman broke a jar," words by: Brian A. Wren
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Benediction

Go out into the world.
and in your words and in your lives
bear witness to the Christ who has ascended
to be everywhere present.

And as you come to know him,
may God give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation,
may Christ Jesus lift up his hands and bless you,
and may the Spirit open to you all the riches of Christ's inheritance.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

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