

# St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

23rd Sunday after Pentecost, October 31, 2021

## Words of Welcome

Showing love. Seems like a simple thing to do on the surface, but when we truly love with heart, soul, mind, and strength, what does that look like? What does it take? And what has that got to do with God? Something worth taking a look at. Let's begin with a call to worship.

## Call to Worship

You are welcome in this place, where God meets us in love.

**We are here to love God with all that we have and all that we are.**

You are welcome in this place, where God loves us as children.

**We are here to love ourselves as deeply as God loves us.**

Welcome to this place, where God serves us at the Table of love and grace.

**We are here to be sent forth to love others as deeply as we love God and ourselves.**

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Jesus said that the first commandment was to love the Lord your God, and so in song we are reminded of that important teaching.

## Hymn

*Love the Lord your God (sing through twice)*

715

Love the Lord your God,  
with all your heart.

Love the Lord your God  
with all your soul.

Love the Lord your God  
with all your mind,

Love the Lord your God  
with all that you are.

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart" Tune: © 1991  
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In prayer we remember that it is God who invites us and we who come to worship.

## Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Living God:

when there is a famine in our souls, you feed us with grace;

when there are pockets of poverty in our love for others,  
you bless us with generosity;

when we are empty and alone, you move into our hearts.

Jesus, Bearer of the good things which have come to us:  
you bend down to lift us from despair;  
you embrace those who haven't a friend in the world;  
you open the eyes of those struck blind by arrogance and ambition.

Eternal Spirit:

you walk with us wherever we go;  
you take the fragments of our lives and reshape us into holy people;  
you are with us, and not even death can separate us.

God in Community, Holy in One,

we are hesitant to confess, hard it is to love as you wish. It is easy to love you with all that we are, except when you ask us to love our neighbor with all that we have. We find it hard to love our neighbor, when it is linked to the way we love ourselves. And it is difficult to love anyone - even You - more than we love ourselves.

Forgive us, Love Eternal. As you took a risk in creating us, help us to take risks to love others compassionately, to love ourselves genuinely, and to love you as completely as you love us in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

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## Assurance of Pardon

In God's Kingdom, all are loved for who they are, not what they do;  
in God's Kingdom, all are forgiven for what they do, and don't;  
in God's Kingdom, all are welcomed and fed by God's grace and hope.

**Forgiven, loved, sent forth - we are not far from God's Kingdom!**  
**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

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## Scripture Reading Mark 12: 28-34

<sup>28</sup> One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" <sup>29</sup> "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.'<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>30</sup> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>31</sup> The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'<sup>[c]</sup> There is no commandment greater than these." <sup>32</sup> "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. <sup>33</sup> To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." <sup>34</sup> When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

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

## Message Of Most Importance

In a Reader's Digest article, Morgan Cutolo wrote,

If you've ever come close to achieving something but didn't quite get to the goal, you've probably heard the saying, "Close, but no cigar." You probably just accept defeat and move on...The expression, "Close, but no cigar" means that a person fell slightly short of a successful outcome and therefore gets no reward.

The phrase most likely originated in the 1920s when fairs, or carnivals, would hand out cigars as prizes. At that time, the games were targeted towards adults, not kids. Yes, even in the '20s most carnival games were impossible to win which often led the owner of the game to say, "Close, but no cigar" when the player failed to get enough rings around bottles or was just shy of hitting the target. As fairs started to travel around the United States, the saying spread and became well-known.<sup>1</sup>

Makes one wonder about Jesus' response to the teacher who asked, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" And after a little back and forth, some agreement and Jesus determining that the man had answered wisely, he said to him. "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

Not far from the kingdom. Close but no cigar.

There is another saying, "Close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades." It seems that maybe close is not quite enough when it comes to love. According to Jesus we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. This not close or no cigar, this is "all in" thinking. We can't hope to love God just enough for God to notice that we are doing and saying all the right things. We are called to consider God's love for us, for others, and our love for God and how that moves us to love others in every thought, act, deed, and word.

That is a lot to consider, but let me give you a little context for this discussion. Jesus had entered Jerusalem and according to Mark's gospel, he had been fielding questions and been drawn in to debates with chief priests, scribes, elders, Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees. They were testing him to see if they could trip him up...trap him into saying something blasphemous. So far that has not gone well for them. All the while and on the sidelines has been a teacher of the law listening to the debate and as the scripture says, "Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked of Jesus, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rd.com/article/close-but-no-cigar-origin/> Accessed October 29, 2021.

Of all that is those pages of story about God and his people that is the Old Testament, the question is, what is of most importance in Jesus' mind?

Before we hear Jesus' answer again, ponder for yourself...If I asked you what was of most importance to you, how would you answer that. Many of us would not answer with "Love God." We might think that is how we should answer, but how we actually live and think can paint a different picture. Many parents would answer that their children are their highest priority, others may say having a good job so that they can support themselves and others. Given our society's propensity for wealth, power, and prestige, it is pretty easy to get caught up in striving for any one of those things through family, our work, or online presence.

How we prioritize things in our lives can be a pretty clear indication as to what is of most importance to us. Even well-intentioned pastors can get caught up in what needs doing, giving that priority over who it is being done for. This was something I recognized this past week as I found myself feeling depleted in energy and enthusiasm. There have been many demands and requests on my time in the last two months and so spending time with God in prayer and study ended up sidelined as I have worked to meet deadlines and answer inquiries, prepare worship services, as well as be leadership presence at a number of funeral and internments as people were finally able to gather to bury loved ones.

I hit a wall last week, God's reminder that what had become of most importance to me was work rather than for whom I was working. To that end I am taking study leave to set aside time to study, pray, and rest in God. I desire to love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, but when one doesn't give that priority on a daily basis, well things get a little or a lot out of alignment.

Makes me think about having one's tires aligned. Have you ever traveled behind a vehicle and thought, hmmn, the back tires are not following the front, things are out of alignment? Well, our lives get like that too. God leads and loves us, has given us what we need to follow, but we get off track, a little off center, and if that is not dealt with then we can find it takes more to get things back on track. Repairs and reparations in our relationship to God and with others, whether family, friends, co-workers or colleagues, even our neighbours – in the house next door, or in another place – that work needs to be done and at times the work can be pretty difficult.

Of all the commandments, which is the most important?

The most important one, answered Jesus, is this: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this, Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.

Did you catch it? Jesus gave what sounds like two commandments, the first to love God and the second, to love our neighbour as you love yourself. And then ends with “There is no commandment – singular, not plural – there is no commandment greater than these.

Loving God with all you heart, soul, mind and strength, is about understanding and demonstrating that love in how we love others and ourselves. You cannot say you love God and then go gossip about what someone did. You cannot love God and then cheat on your partner in love or business. Loving God means taking time for God, and taking time for those God brings into our lives. Loving God with everything that makes you you means that you will love others and yourself with dignity, value, forgiveness, and understanding.

This does not mean that you will be in perfect agreement with everyone all the time. One can disagree and still love. You need only watch the news or jump on social media to see how many good, loving, well-meaning Christians are caught up in arguing about mask and vaccine mandates, politics and policies. It is here that I think the example of the teacher who stood on the sidelines watching the debate can teach us a little something.

It is unlikely that the teacher started to follow Jesus, but the two of them found common ground in their faith, a starting place for dialogue. In Deuteronomy 6:4-9 we read the words of the Shema. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might.” This was a place of commonality for Jesus and the teacher, and interestingly enough when Jesus expanded this saying to include, with all your *mind*, the teacher agreed, saying” You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your *understanding* and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

Jesus said *mind* and the teacher said *understanding*, words that are both about how we think. And our thinking, our priorities, what is of most importance to us, determines how we love. If we love God then we will love our neighbour. The two are so interconnected in action and in thought that they cannot be separated.

Now of course, none of us does this perfectly all the time. Few of us even do it consistently well. Still, we strive for these things, to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and in so doing are able to love our neighbour and ourselves with compassion, kindness, generosity, and hope. Unlike a game of chance where it is close but no cigar, where we are not far from the kingdom of God, maybe being all in means that we love to the best of our ability and God honours that and we find ourselves as part of the kingdom of God, right now in our daily living.

We ask forgiveness, and do better as we know better. God knows our hearts, and whether or not God is of most importance in our being even when we fall short. May you take time to ponder this and answer it honestly. Look at how you treat yourself and others, those you love dearly, and the stranger you don't know. Where is your heart, mind, soul, and strength? What do you pour all of that into?

May this reading from Mark remind each of us of what is of most importance, as we live our lives in the Spirit of Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Prayers of the People**

Enduring God,

On this day, we thank you today for your faithfulness to us and to the traditions that have shaped us as disciples of Jesus. Thank you for your living Word which continues to reveal him, and for the gift of your Spirit to help us interpret your wisdom in the midst of challenging times.

God of guidance,

**Speak into our lives today.**

Eternal God,

On this day we mark the faithfulness of all your saints, we give you thanks for people in our lives and across the ages who have shown us your loving kindness through their witness to Christ in so many different situations.

Inspire us by their examples and show us how we, too, can live out our faith in the midst of challenging times.

God of guidance,

**Speak into our lives today.**

Loving God,

You keep calling us to care for those in need and show hospitality to strangers in our midst. Thank you for your persistent love which continues to comfort and challenge us all. Open our hearts and eyes so that we can see how to offer that love to others in the midst of challenging times.

God of guidance,

**Speak into our lives today.**

Living God,

You bring new life to the discouraged and those facing danger and death. Thank you for signs of hope which break into pressures of the pandemic and its consequences for so many, in the midst of challenging times.

God of guidance,  
**Speak into our lives today.**

Creating God,  
we praise you for the beauty of this world and the rhythms of nature which sustain us. Give us courage to act on behalf of your creation where it is stressed or broken, and nurture our commitment to act as your stewards within creation in the midst of challenging times.

God of guidance,  
**Speak into our lives today.**

Wise God,  
hear us in this time of silence as lay before you the people and places on our hearts this day: *(Keep a time of silence for 15–30 seconds.)*

Now we join our voices with the followers of Jesus in every time and place in the words he taught us all:

### **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**

By sharing from the blessings God have given us we can love our neighbors, especially those who need to know they are loved – by us as well as by God.

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**

*I'm gonna live so God can use me*

**648**

1. I'm gonna live so live so God can use  
me anywhere, Lord, anytime!  
I'm gonna live so live so God can use me  
anywhere, Lord, my Lord anytime!

2. I'm gonna work so work so God can use  
me anywhere, Lord, anytime!  
I'm gonna work so work so God can use me  
anywhere, Lord, (my Lord) anytime!
3. I'm gonna pray so pray so God can use  
me anywhere, Lord, anytime!  
I'm gonna pray so pray so God can use me  
anywhere, Lord, my Lord anytime!
4. I'm gonna sing so sing so God can use  
me anywhere, Lord, anytime!  
I'm gonna sing so sing so God can use me  
anywhere, Lord, my Lord anytime!

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## **Benediction**

Hear this: the Lord our God is the one and only Lord.  
Therefore go out into the world and love the Lord your God  
with all your heart, soul, mind and strength,  
and love others as you love yourself.

And may God give you justice and freedom;  
May Christ Jesus set you free for love;  
and may the Holy Spirit go where you go  
..... and protect you on your way.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

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