

# St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

## Reign of Christ - November 21, 2021

### Words of Welcome

There are words in the Bible that just seem wrong to us given global and personal experience, words like domain, reign, lord, and kingdom, but I would like to suggest that there is still value in that language when understood in light of Jesus life. Join me as we consider this conversation.

### Call to Worship

We come diffidently weighed down by the excesses and the sorrows of the past.

**Grace to you and peace,  
from the God who is and who was and who is to come.**

We come hopefully

knowing that the presence of God will not be limited by our human constructs.

**Grace to you and peace,  
from the God who is and who was and who is to come.**

We come thankfully discovering abundance born not of possession but of the heart.

**Grace to you and peace,  
from the God who is and who was and who is to come.**

~ written by Katherine Hawker. Posted on Liturgies Outside. <http://liturgyoutside.net/>

### Hymn

#### *O God beyond all praising*

448

1. O God beyond all praising,  
we worship you today  
and sing the love amazing  
that songs cannot repay,  
for we can only wonder  
at every gift you send,  
at blessings without number  
and mercies without end.  
We lift our hearts before you  
and wait upon your word;  
we honour and adore you,  
our great and might Lord.

2. Then hear, O gracious Saviour;  
accept the love we bring,  
that we who know your favour  
may serve you as our king,  
and whether our tomorrows  
be filled with good or ill,  
we'll triumph through our sorrows  
and rise to bless you still:  
to marvel at your beauty  
and glory in your ways,  
and make a joyful duty  
our sacrifice of praise.

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### Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of Power and Possibility,  
In Jesus Christ, you have tipped the world upside down.  
You have revealed your strength through weakness

and your power through his surrender to the Cross.  
The story of salvation you have told your people across the ages teaches us that nothing, no seemingly dead end or hopeless situation, can prevent your glory from shining forth.  
This day, we proclaim Jesus as Lord and offer you our love and loyalty.  
Turn the world upside down once more,  
so that your mercy prevails over those who would rule by force,  
and your truth triumphs over the world's deceptions.

**Lord Jesus Christ,  
we pray for the coming of your kingdom week by week,  
but we confess we're not exactly clear on what that means.  
Will you come to set things straight in the world?  
Will you come to judge us and show us where we've all gone wrong?  
Will you bring all things to an end, or will you offer us a new beginning?  
Jesus, forgive us when we mix up our own desires with your purposes for your people. Teach us how to live out your truth.**

O God, your thoughts are not our thoughts, your ways are not our ways. So, guide us by your Word and Spirit, and open our minds and hearts to your truth, speaking through the scriptures. By that truth, may our thoughts and our ways become a greater reflection of yours. And may all honour and blessing be yours, Holy God, world without end. Amen.

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## **Assurance of Pardon**

Shout for joy, children of God!  
The God who was and is and is to come loves you, forgives you, and renews you.  
**God's Spirit rests upon us, grace and peace are the gifts of our loving God.  
Amen.**

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## **Scripture Reading John 18:18-37**

<sup>18</sup>Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself. <sup>19</sup>Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. <sup>20</sup>Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. <sup>21</sup>Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said." <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" <sup>23</sup>Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" <sup>24</sup>Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. <sup>25</sup>Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." <sup>26</sup>One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked,

“Did I not see you in the garden with him?”<sup>27</sup> Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

<sup>28</sup>Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate’s headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. <sup>29</sup>So Pilate went out to them and said, “What accusation do you bring against this man?” <sup>30</sup>They answered, “If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.” <sup>31</sup>Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.” The Jews replied, “We are not permitted to put anyone to death.” <sup>32</sup>(This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.) <sup>33</sup>Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” <sup>34</sup>Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” <sup>35</sup>Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” <sup>36</sup>Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” <sup>37</sup>Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

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

## **Message** Whose Kingdom?

One of the things that I have appreciated about being able to study scriptures in order to preach is that I regularly have to question my assumptions, my Sunday School upbringing, and what I have come understand as I have matured in my faith. I give thanks because it means that I am still learning, that I have not become stuck in one way of thinking, unwilling to change. One of the ways we learn about scripture is through hymn singing. Like any music, the words get stuck in one’s head and through repeated listening, and singing, whether off key or not, we absorb the meaning, or what we think is the meaning.

When Ken and I were driving to Alberta this past summer listening to some music that we grew up on, *Blinded by the Light* started playing and we laughed as we still don’t know what the words are, let alone what they mean, but we sang that line “Blinded by the light” faithfully every time it was repeated in the song. With Siri, it was easy to look up the lyrics, and now I know why I have never known the words, they are rather nonsensical and random in my mind.

Speaking of music, there is an old 19<sup>th</sup> century hymn that I rarely choose to sing or have sung in worship. and it is because I have always understood it to be militaristic. *Onward Christian Soldiers* has caused me great consternation as I envision Christians “marching as to war,” as it says in the chorus, and making nations Christian at all cost, “with the

cross of Jesus going on before!” And that has never jived with my understanding of God’s love for all people, people created in God’s own image, regardless of colour, culture, gender, or any other filter we want to place on people.

Imagine my surprise when I learned it was written for Sunday school children gathering from one village with another. It does have many overtones of the superiority that was prevalent regarding British triumphalism, but that it was written for children never crossed my mind. I’m still not crazy about the hymn though I can, upon study, have some appreciation for what was being expressed, especially when one uses another approach to the words of the hymn based in Jesus’ words in John 18 saying, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”

Again, this passage has been interpreted for a long period of time as saying, Jesus’ kingdom is not of the world, because if it were, people would have fought for Jesus, so Jesus must be talking more ethereal than physical. Even Jesus’ followers did not understand what was happening. They were afraid, and just wouldn’t stand up for him, but this approach assumes that Jesus followers would need to take the Romans and Jewish authorities on by force. Heck the followers of Jesus themselves thought this was the only way to bring about the kingdom of God, something they understood and assumed from the Hebrew scriptures. More than once they sought to have Jesus take up his power and lead them into a battle that would consummate in victory for Jesus’ followers.

But here is Jesus, standing in front of Pilate because he has been handed over by the Jewish authorities to be punished, and yes done away with in the way that all knew was the end for those who sought to threaten the powers that be in the Roman Empire. Which is why Pilate asked, “Are you the King of the Jews?” He was not looking for some religious answer or understanding of Jesus’ teaching, he was inquiring because he wanted to know if Jesus was a threat to Pilate’s power and authority.

Now Jesus’ answer seems a little cryptic, something like the lyrics for *Blinded by the Light*. Jesus, as I mentioned before answers with, “My kingdom is not from this world...my kingdom is not from here. I think that many of us have been inclined to understand that meant Jesus’ kingdom was in heaven, some far off place that we might all get to see after we die. But what if Jesus’ kingdom, God’s kingdom, was right here, right now, and the reason Jesus’ kingdom was not from this world is because the kingdom of God is all about love, and to have people fight one another for dominance and power through intimidation, strength, and violence alone would have meant being like any other power the world had seen and experienced before and since.

Now I get the we are not Jesus and in this world at times we seem to have to find justice and peace through wartime experience. Our commemoration of Remembrance Day attests to that fact, but what if generally we all aimed for a response of loving kindness, forgiveness, and grace when we approach anything from how we feel about ourselves,

to how we treat our co-workers or the people who live in the room beside us, and then extended it into the corridors of power on Parliament Hill. Good chance attack adds, and smear campaigns would be out the window. We would not have the polarization of positions in conversations and actions. There would always be concern for the well-being of others rather than decisions about what is best for me and my family without regard for the vulnerable, and this conversation extends from health care to access to opportunities and income, as well as governance and power.

Today is Reign of Christ Sunday. We don't tend to like the terms reign, kingdom, domain, King or Lord. These words come across as archaic and reek with overtones of dominance over others in ways that we don't want to participate. Yet, is there a way to understand and use of these words in ways that are helpful? If they become defined by how we treat others in light of Jesus' love and sacrifice, God's grace and hope, does that take the sting off?

We do like these words when we use them to describe our own self-sufficiency. We want to be lord of our lives. Our homes whether a small room or acres of land we want to reign over. These are our little kingdoms. We also claim domain names on the internet. So maybe the words are not as archaic as we believe, we just need to adjust what they represent. Rather than a kingdom that lords over others with power and dominance, we think of the kingdom of God as a place where love does conquer all, where a peaceable kingdom is achievable, our domains, whether virtual or physical, are places where all are welcome, hospitality provided, and grace abounds.

This is the kingdom that Jesus was talking about when he answered Pilate and the reason Jesus' kingdom is not from this world. And yet, even after more than 2000 years we still don't get it. We still don't understand what kind of kingdom Jesus was talking about. We still want to dominate, be on top, be in control and we will use whatever means we need in order to achieve our own little kingdoms. Nations will still do whatever it takes to dominate over nation, and leaders work to dominate over those who follow whether in business, politics, or relationships.

And maybe that is the crux. Jesus' kingdom, God's kingdom, is about relationships of love, compassion, hope, grace, and forgiveness. This is not about dominance but rather about how to be in relationship with others in ways that honour and value the other, right from our familial relationships through to global relationships.

I get it, we are not there, not by a long shot. We still think in terms of lording it over one another rather than loving one another, and until we figure it out there will be wars, strife, and harm. Still, I don't think we need to give up so easily or resign ourselves to this fate. Jesus came so that we might have life and have it abundantly. Jesus demonstrated what a kingdom of love could look like and when we pray "thy kingdom come, thy will be done" we do it with expectation and desire that Jesus' reign of hope, peace, joy, and love will find a place in our own lives and then from us out into the world.

So today, I still don't want to sing *Onward, Christian soldiers*, but rather let's sing, "We've a story to tell to the nations that shall turn their hearts to the right, a story of truth and mercy, a story of peace and light, for the darkness shall turn to dawning, and the dawning to noon-day bright, and Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth, the kingdom of love and light." Amen.

## **Prayers of the People**

Holy One, the Source, Story and Spirit of Love,  
We praise you for the signs of your reign among us:  
For hope overcoming despair, trust rising above hurt,  
love prevailing over hatred, and peace restoring harmony after discord.

God of Hope Beyond Fear,  
We pray that you will comfort this broken world.  
May the vision of your peaceable kingdom take root—  
in your church, in our families, in our community,  
and in countries marked by violence and struggles for power.

God of Wholeness Beyond Fracture,  
We pray for a world where differences are overcome by understanding,  
and everyone can find a place of dignity and respect.  
Shape our hearts soft with the kindness of your Spirit  
so that all our relationships honour your image in each person,  
and our actions and attitudes help you mend the world you love.

God of Life Beyond Death,  
We pray for all those who are grieving the loss of a loved one,  
the loss of hope or the loss of a dream. Be present with each one living through a  
time of sadness or discouragement. Bring them comfort through your presence,  
and show us how to be good companions on the journey to renewed hope.

As we honour Christ, the only King and head of the church,  
we pray for the continuation of Christ's ministry through the church.  
We have faced many challenging months, separated by the pandemic and the  
divisions it has created among us. Send your Holy Spirit to knit the church together;  
bring renewed life and commitment to each congregation and parish;  
enliven ecumenical action on needs in every community;  
open minds and hearts that have experienced disagreement to mutual  
understanding; and refresh all who are tired out with a vision of the future you will  
create for us, with us and through us, in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son,  
our Saviour, who taught us to pray together:

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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

On the Sunday of Reign of Christ, we declare our love and loyalty to Jesus by the gift of our praise and the offering of our lives. Let your gifts this day proclaim your commitment to him as our Lord and our friend.

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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

*We've a story to tell to the nations*

**765**

1. We've a story to tell to the nations  
that shall turn their hearts to the right,  
a story of truth and mercy,  
a story of peace and light,  
a story of peace and light,  
for the darkness shall turn to dawning,  
and the dawning to noon-day bright,  
and Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth,  
the kingdom of love and light.
2. We've a song to be sung to the nations  
that shall lift their hearts to the Lord,  
a song that shall conquer evil  
and shatter the spear and sword,  
and shatter the spear and sword,  
for the darkness shall turn to dawning,  
and the dawning to noonday bright,  
and Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth,  
the kingdom of love and light.

3. We've a message to give to the nations,  
that the Lord who reigneth above  
hath sent us his Son to save us,  
and show us that God is love,  
and show us that God is love,  
for the darkness shall turn to dawning,  
and the dawning to noonday bright,  
and Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth,  
the kingdom of love and light.

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### **\*Benediction**

People, there is no greater joy in life, no greater freedom,  
than to offer our lives in service to God.

Let the same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus,  
who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.

May the Lord God who is, *Rev. 1:8; 2 Sam. 23:1;*  
and who was, *Ps. 132:9*  
and who is to come,  
the Almighty,  
be your strength, your hope, and your joy,  
this day and forevermore.

Feasting on the Word Worship Companion: Liturgies for Year B, Volume 2 © 2015 Westminster John Knox Press. P257-258