

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

Fourth Sunday of Advent - December 19, 2021

Words of Welcome

Meaning and purpose for our lives is a lifelong quest for many people. Some go through life without considering such things, but maybe this is a moment for all who join in this time of worship to ponder what that means to and for us.

As it is the fourth Sunday of Advent we begin with a call to worship with a focus on the love of God for us.

Call to Worship: Waiting in Love

What are you waiting for?

May your unfailing LOVE come to me, Lord,
your salvation, according to your promise.

“My unfailing LOVE for you will not be shaken,
nor my covenant of peace be removed,”
says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

God first LOVED us.

This is how God showed his LOVE among us:
He sent his one and only Son into the world
that we might live through him.

We LOVE because he first LOVED us.

You, Lord, are forgiving and good,
abounding in LOVE to all who call to you.

We respond with LOVE.

A new command I give you: LOVE one another.
As I have LOVED you, so you must LOVE one another.

LOVE is patient, LOVE is kind.

It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

LOVE does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly LOVED,
clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness,
humility, gentleness, and patience.

We are saved because of LOVE.

The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying,
“I have LOVED you with an everlasting LOVE;
I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.

Put your hope in the Lord,
for with the Lord is unfailing LOVE
and with him is full redemption.

He has remembered his LOVE
and his faithfulness to Israel;
all the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.

LOVE comes with Jesus’ birth.

The Father LOVES the Son and has placed everything in his hands.
“The reason my Father LOVES me is that I lay down my life,” Jesus said.
For God so LOVED the world that he gave his one and only Son.

What are you waiting for?

—adapted from Psalm 119:41; Isaiah 54:10; 1 John 4:9, 19; Psalm 86:5; John 13:34; 1 Corinthians 13:4, 6; Colossians 3:12; Jeremiah 31:3; Psalm 130:7; Psalm 98:3; John 3:35; John 10:17; John 3:16. Chris Walker. What are you waiting for – A Series for Advent and Christmas – Reformed Worship September 2021.

Advent Candle Lighting – The Candle of Love

Advent is a time of waiting.
We wait in hope.

[The first candle is lit.]

We wait in peace.

[The second candle is lit.]

We wait in joy.

[The third candle is lit.]

As we wait, we are filled with love: love for God, love for others, and, yes, love for ourselves. We love because God first loved us. God loved you so much that God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into this world to save you. Nothing can satisfy our longings except God’s love.

Today, we light the candle of love. As we wait, let us be people of love.

[The fourth candle is lit.]

Chris Walker. What are you waiting for – A Series for
Advent and Christmas – Reformed Worship September 2021.

1. Oh come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant;
oh come ye, oh come ye to Bethlehem.
Come and behold him, born the King of angels:

Refrain

*Oh come, let us adore him; oh come, let us adore him;
oh come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.*

2. God of God, Light of light, born unto Mary,
the virgin blest, very God, begotten, not created:

Refrain See how the shepherds, summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks draw nigh with holy fear;
we too will thither bend our joyful footsteps:

Refrain

*Oh come, let us adore him; oh come, let us adore him;
oh come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.*

3. Sing, choirs of angels; sing in exultation;
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above:
“Glory to God in the highest!”

Refrain

5. Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be glory given;
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing:

Refrain

Words and Music: public domain

Prayer of Approach

Holy God,
scattering the proud, you look with favor on those the world ignores.
For you, we wait for the One who will feed us;
for you, we wait for the One who stands with us in our loneliness and pain.
For you, we wait.

Jesus Christ,
born in a backwater town: in you, God fills the hunger of our hearts;
in you, God lifts us from our hopelessness; in you, all the promises come true.
For you, we wait.

Holy Spirit,
Hallower of God's people: from you comes faith, so we might believe;
from you comes belief, so we might be blessed;
from you come all blessings, so we might give them away.

For you, we wait.

God in Community, Holy in One, for you, we wait even as we confess...

We are not the people you hope us to be, Advent God. The very ones you favor? All too often, we ignore them, or worse fill them with ridicule. The ones you knock off their pedestals? We continue to admire them, seeking to emulate their ways. The drumbeat for more and more? We give into the rhythm so easily; we risk being sent away empty.

Forgive us, Mighty God who comes in the weakness of a baby. Look with grace upon us, so we might see your love shining down. We could live secure in your hope, we could be the ones of peace for our world, we could learn to do your will, if we but welcome Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, into our hearts and into our lives.

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Assurance of Pardon

God passes the heirloom of mercy down
from generation to generation, always loving,
always forgiving, always calling us to new life.

**As we open our hearts to God, we are filled
with the joy that was sung at the Birth,
with the Hope that walked among us,
with the Grace which is always with us.
Thanks be to God, we are forgiven! Amen.**

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Scripture Reading Joel 3:17-21

- ¹⁷ So you shall know that I, the LORD your God,
dwell in Zion, my holy mountain.
And Jerusalem shall be holy,
and strangers shall never again pass through it.
- ¹⁸ On that day
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
the hills shall flow with milk,
and all the stream beds of Judah
shall flow with water;
a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD
and water the Wadi Shittim.
- ¹⁹ Egypt shall become a desolation
and Edom a desolate wilderness,
because of the violence done to the people of Judah,
in whose land they have shed innocent blood.
- ²⁰ But Judah shall be inhabited forever,

and Jerusalem to all generations.

²¹ I will avenge their blood, and I will not clear the guilty,
for the LORD dwells in Zion.

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

Message Waiting to be Satisfied

Turmoil would be an understatement to describe the world's experience in the last two years. The pandemic has and continues to destabilize people personally and countries nationally and internationally. Markets fluctuate based on government restrictions, travel plans are tenuous at best and disrupted, interrupted, delayed or cancelled at worst. Our hope that just maybe things were looking up have come crashing down in the last few days with announcements of restrictions coming to sporting events and large venues, travel, and in this last week of school before Christmas break, many children are bringing home all their belongings in case things switch to virtual classes in January.

To make matters more difficult for so many has been fire, drought, flooding, storms, tornadoes, and more as the climate destabilizes. In Kentucky last week as the tornadoes decimated entire communities and in the last weeks when BC dealt with massive flooding and slides, the realities hit home that we cannot control everything about our lives. Catastrophic events can and do happen to anyone regardless of how one lives their lives or conducts themselves.

Then there are personal tragedies of loss that hamper our ability to live our lives on our terms whether it be illness, loss of employment or status, loss of loved ones, abuse by people or of substances, or loss of our own mobility.

The book of Joel is written to those who have experienced great loss. In this story of catastrophe wave after wave of locusts have destroyed everything in their wake. Now, one must be careful when interpreting these types of texts. Many times, Christians have said things that infer that catastrophe happens when people are deep in sin and it is God's way of bringing about repentance and change.

I hesitate to go there, weather is weather, and what we are doing to our earth has a whole lot to do with us rather than what God may or may not be up to. Nature too has cycles and rhythms and to read more into these events than they are...just natural disasters...would be trying to read the mind of God.

When we experience hardship, illness, and circumstances beyond our control, there are no easy answers for why things happen, and to blame God takes away from the fact that this world is a place of beauty and of brokenness. That is how it is it. Do our actions

factor into many things? That is for sure, but not all things are in our control nor is God to blame.

What Joel teaches us is that in times of disaster, whether natural or man made, coming together in worship and in community is a way to make us aware that even when all things are out of control God is present to and for us. It doesn't take us out of our circumstances, but does give us an anchor, a place where our hearts can be sure that no matter the outcome. God goes with us and is with us in the messiness, the chaos, and the dark places.

Still, that does not take away our responsibility for doing the work of restoration. Scientists, doctors, health care providers, teachers, carpenters, electricians, geologists, truck drivers, construction crews, psychologists, cooks, ministers, artists, musicians, crafters, law enforcement, each has a place in the restoration of relationships and community. What is provided to us through scripture is an example of what is important and how we might do this work in ways that are compassionate, just, and grace-filled, even imaginative.

When looking at a book like Joel, we are reminded that this particular writing comes before the birth of the one who we now understand and trust to be the Word of God made flesh, God incarnate, God with us in the child born as Jesus.

The people of Joel's time in Jerusalem had experienced much destruction and devastation. The writing is thought to be from the time when the people who had been in exile had returned to their homeland and things were not as good as they had hoped for upon taking possession of their land again. Nature was still nature, people and countries still warring and clashing. They thought that when they returned home they would be satisfied and yet they were still waiting, waiting for things to return to normal. But life is never normal. We get through one thing to be faced with another. We are always waiting to be satisfied.

In order to feel satisfied we use our purchasing power to consume products, food, entertainment. We work thinking that our purpose is to have enough stuff, enough prestige, power or money. We find leaders around the globe who desire power to the degree that nothing else matters but that they can control everything even to the clothing that is worn, or who is or is not able to worship, work, or move about the land freely. And then a pandemic hits and every life is impacted. In another instant flooding happens taking out roadways, and products from food to gas cannot get to those who need it. A tornado rips your house from its foundations and you are lucky to get out with your life and that of those you love. Cancer strikes and you can't catch your breath.

And Joel's response is God is with us. God's response in Jesus is God is with us. In our time the Holy Spirit is God with us. This is not a plan for getting us out of our mess, but

rather a guarantee that because of Jesus we are not alone. That when we lay in a hospital bed in a room by ourselves, feeling isolated and overwhelmed, when the bank account is dry, when grocery stores shelves are empty, when your farm has been devastated by flood and animal lives lost, when you have to flee because of nature or manmade horror, even when you are just lonely, God has not abandoned us or our world.

It is in these moments that we listen for God in our hearts and minds, and in the words and actions of others coming alongside us. We will never find satisfaction in this world alone. Our satisfaction comes in the relationships we build no matter where we are, with Christ's love, hope, joy, and peace filling us up regardless of the circumstances we face. This is not fanciful thinking or positive thinking; it is so much more than that. It is based in the lived experience of God's people for millennia. It is about knowing God moving and working in the world as powerfully as ever and that this world does not have the last word – God does!

Because of Christ we know that God's love is the final judgement, the final word for us and for all creation. As we move into Christmas and into a New Year with all of its uncertainty know that our wait is over. God has spoken in Christ, given us community in the church, and given us work to do that will provide the satisfaction of meaning and purpose in our lives. And we do it all, all this living, all this relationship building, in the community of the church, amongst one another.

Through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit we go each day to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

Prayers of the People

God of Zechariah and Elizabeth and John,
God of Mary and Joseph and Our Lord Jesus Christ,
Throughout all generations you have been faithful to us.
You have given new life to the world through sons and daughters,
through grandchildren and great grandchildren,
who took up the promises you made to their fathers and mothers
and followed your way in the world.
In this time and in the time to come,
raise up a new generation who will live out the new life you promise in Christ Jesus,
with us and with your church in every neighbourhood and nation.

Thank you, O God, for all the faithful saints we have known in our lives.
Their trust in you gives us hope whenever our own faith wavers.
May we be faithful in this generation as others have been before us,
so that our ministry and mission in Jesus' name will be renewed,
engaging the world in refreshing, respectful ways.

We pray today for those struggling with loss and discouragement this season:
for those who have lost someone dear;
for those who cannot find meaningful work;
and all for whom challenge and change make the future uncertain.
(Keep a time of silence)

Embrace them with your compassion and strength to persevere.

We pray for those for whom sickness and death
obscure your promise of health and salvation;
and for those who have given up on themselves and on the goodness of others.
We remember those who face conflict in their homes or their homelands,
who wonder or fear what tomorrow may bring.
We pray for the creation that has suffered from fire, storm, tornadoes and
earthquake this year, and for the lives disrupted by drought and despair.
(Keep a time of silence)

Embrace all who suffer with your comfort and courage.

God of All Life and Each Life,
As a challenging year comes to a close, and a new year beckons,
come to us and be with us once more as we celebrate Christ's birth.
With the tenderness of your Spirit, lighten our burdens,
and show us new possibilities for our own lives
and for the ministries we take up in Jesus' name,
with hope and with trust we pray. Amen.

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Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Invitation to make an offering

We make our offering this day with hearts full of love, filled with the hope and joy this season brings. Give knowing God's love will spread far and wide through what we offer in Jesus' 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**

Hark! The herald angels sing

139

1. Hark! the herald angels sing
glory to the newborn King,
peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.
Joyful, all ye nations, rise;
join the triumph of the skies;
with the angelic host proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem."
Hark! the herald angels sing
glory to the newborn King.
2. Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come,
offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!
Hail the incarnate deity!
Pleased on earth with us to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark! the herald angels sing
glory to the newborn King.
3. Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the sun of righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
Risen with healing in his wings,
Mild, he lays his glory by,
born that we no more may die,
born to raise the lost of earth
born to give us second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing
glory to the newborn King.

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Benediction

The love of God the Father, the faithful creator,
the peace of Christ, the wounded healer,
the joy of the challenging Spirit,
the hope of the Three in One
surround and encourage you
today, tonight, and forever.

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