

# St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany - February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022

## Words of Welcome

There are some things our western culture does not like to deal with and one of those is death. We seem surprised every time we are faced with it. We think of it as defeat and loss, which depending on circumstances it may feel like that, but the Christian faith has more to say on death than we usually talk about. May this time together be an invitation to consider this conversation.

## Call to Worship

Come before the God of love.  
Come as you are, no pretence, no judgment,  
come with your thoughts and your feelings,  
in the highs and lows of life,  
come with your successes and failures,  
come knowing that you are loved unconditionally.

**We come before the Lord our God,  
in the quiet spaces and the busy places,  
in worship, praise and thanksgiving,  
for all we have and all we are is a gift from God.**

[20 February, 7th Sunday After Epiphany | The Church of Scotland](#)

As we anticipate spring even in these cold temperatures, the lengthening days give us hope. So it is with our bodies. We anticipate a day when we will be transformed in who we are now and look forward to the time when we are fully transformed, body and all, in the likeness of the risen Christ.

## Hymn

*In the bulb there is a flower*

674

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| 1. In the bulb there is a flower,<br>in the seed, an apple tree,<br>in cocoons, a hidden promise:<br>butterflies will soon be free!<br>In the cold and snow of winter<br>there's a spring that waits to be,<br>unrevealed until its season,<br>something God alone can see. | 2. There's a song in every silence,<br>seeking word and melody;<br>there's a dawn in every darkness,<br>bringing hope to you and me.<br>From the past will come the future;<br>what it holds, a mystery,<br>unrevealed until its season,<br>something God alone can see. |
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3. In our end is our beginning,  
in our time, infinity;  
in our doubt there is believing,  
in our life, eternity,  
in our death, a resurrection,  
at the last, a victory,  
unrevealed until its season,  
something God alone can see.

"In the bulb there is a flower," words and music by Natalie Sleeth © 1986 Hope Publishing Co. All rights reserved. Annual License with podcasting OneLicense.net A-723877

Our prayers acknowledge that we live in God's world and that it is God who invites us to worship, so we offer a prayer of adoration and confession.

### **Prayer of Adoration and Confession**

Faithful God,

You have gathered your people in faithfulness throughout many generations.

You have offered your blessing to us through their examples,  
and led the Church through many changes and challenges by your Spirit.

Draw near to us this day to guide us in these uncertain times.

Root our faithfulness in the compassion and courage we meet in Jesus.

Renew us through your steadfast love so that we may dare to trust our future to you.

All praise and honour are yours, O God, Source, Saviour and Spirit of Life.

**Gracious God,**

**you test the mind and search the heart,**

**so you know the thoughts and intentions we keep hidden.**

**Trusting in your wisdom and mercy,**

**we confess the ways we have failed to love one another,**

**the times we looked the other way when someone needed help,**

**and the ways our actions betrayed your goodness.**

*Keep a brief silence.*

**Forgive us for missing opportunities to share your love,**

**and carrying grudges that keep us from offering the forgiveness we hope for.**

**Renew us with your mercy to become more merciful to others we meet,**

**in the example of Christ our Lord.**

God of wisdom, your Word brings life and hope.

By the power of your Spirit, open our minds to understanding,

teach our hearts to love,

and strengthen our wills to follow Jesus, your Living Word. Amen.

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### **Assurance of Forgiveness**

Hear and believe the good news: anyone who is in Christ is a new creation.

The old life is gone, and new life has begun. Trust that you are forgiven by God's generous love, and have the courage to forgive one another for Christ's sake.

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The scripture reading from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians may be confusing when read separately from the rest of the letter, still we hear this passage and then consider what it means for our living today.

### **Scripture Readings 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-58**

<sup>35</sup>But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" <sup>36</sup>Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. <sup>37</sup>And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. <sup>38</sup>But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

<sup>42</sup>So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. <sup>43</sup>It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. <sup>44</sup>It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. <sup>45</sup>Thus it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. <sup>46</sup>But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. <sup>47</sup>The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. <sup>48</sup>As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. <sup>49</sup>Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

<sup>50</sup>What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. <sup>51</sup>Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, <sup>52</sup>in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. <sup>53</sup>For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup>When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:

"Death has been swallowed up in victory."

<sup>55</sup>"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

<sup>56</sup>The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup>But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>58</sup>Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

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

**Message** Raised in Glory

There is a scene from the classic Disney movie Bambi that most everyone is familiar with, even though the movie was first released in 1942. It is where Bambi's mother dies. Since the invention of VHS and now the ability to PVR, I have known of families that would fast forward through that scene so that their children would not have to face the reason Bambi is on his own in the forest. I have a feeling that reflected as much on the parent's own worry about mortality than the child worried about losing their parent, and that is in part the problem. We don't like the thought of dying.

When I was a young mom, I too worried about dying before my children were of an age where they could at least take care of themselves. It didn't stop me from allowing my children to face death in movies and stories, but it certainly did occupy my mind. It is like death has an ugliness about it.

As an organist in my small hometown, I have lost count of how many funerals I played at in that time. I had ample opportunity to consider the loss, the heartache of death, as well as it being the topic of many sermons I listened to. As a minister for just over eight years, I have spent time with over 130 families as we prepared for a service for a loved one. Death is something I deal with regularly, and so I am often thinking about how to bring hope to people in this time where loss can be overwhelming for those who continue without the person that was of importance to them. Sometimes I am helping families figure out how to move past relationships that brought nothing but pain, and death seems to take away any hope of change or reconciliation.

It was also an inward study on grief, death and dying, as I considered how my own siblings and I processed the death of our mother just over five years ago, while watching my dad deal with it in his own way. At times I find I am still processing that loss in my life. And then there are the times we are with people that we know are facing death or without the right treatment will surely die that bring us face to face with our mortality. Death seems so final for those of us left to face the world without someone who brought meaning and purpose into our lives.

And yet, yet...for Christians, death is not final. In this first letter to the Corinthians who were struggling with many things including the question of death, the Apostle Paul, steps in to bring as much clarity as he can considering he too has only seen death from the vantage point of someone living. What he had though, that we can only read about in scripture was the accounts of those who had seen the Risen Lord. Jesus was as much flesh and blood as you and I for those years he walked the earth, but he was the first fruits of the life promised to us as the resurrection of the dead.

Paul does not assume that we will be raised with our earthly bodies, but he doesn't go to the place that it seems some of the Corinthians did, where they believed that what happened on earth was of no consequence because it was only their spirit that would be resurrected. Now I don't presume to understand all that Paul is getting at, as even he declares that this is a mystery. The mystery though that he speaks of, as theologian

Diane Lipsett writes, is, “for Paul, *mysterion* refers...to the hidden counsel or purposes of God, knowable not through reasoned problem solving, but through revelation, proclamation, or fulfillment.”<sup>1</sup>

To help the reader of the letter understand a little of what Paul is trying to say he uses imagery that was been a common in the experience and understanding of nature, that of a seed being sown or planted. Looking one way, and then as it grows and matures it turns out looking nothing like the seed that was started. So too our bodies that are perishable, that look one way, like the seed of a plant, in death are transformed. We as Christians will often say that people are raised in glory. Meaning their transformation and reconciliation with God has been completed in their dying, because for Christian’s death is not an ending, it is but a part of the creation and our living. And we know that God has not abandoned creation or us.

Another author and theologian, Kyle Fedler writes,

For Paul, two views of death stand in tension; death as natural and death as final enemy. First, death represents the natural end of human life. Death is the termination of our lives on this earth. We are mortal beings, never intended to live forever, ‘like grass that is renewed in the morning; in the morning it flourishes...in the evening it fades and withers’ (Ps. 90:5-6). Death may be a cause for regret for the dying and a source of mourning for the survivors, but it is not evil; it is simply the intended ending point of our creaturely lives (Heb. 9:27).<sup>2</sup>

In death there is a resurrection, a victory, and it is promised because we know Jesus. This is so important to our Christian identity. We believe in a risen Christ, and that reality, witnessed to in the scriptures by real people, brings meaning and purpose to our lives right now. It gives meaning and purpose to death. And what of our living? Well, it matters as we also believe that just as the seed is part of the grown plant, so our earthly existence is part of whatever being raised in glory will look like. How we live matters. God is as concerned with our well being in our flesh and blood existence as what happens to us in death.

For God it is all part of who we are and who we become. It is also and always about relationship. Living with compassion, grace, and love, with a heart for justice for the oppressed is part of that growing from a seed into the full glory of what is to come. None of our living is compartmentalized. What we experience, what we do, how we live, the pain and the joy are part of the whole of who we are and who we are becoming. It is why Paul can write, “Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the

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<sup>1</sup> Lipsett, B. Diane. *Feasting on the Word: Year C Volume 1 Advent through Transfiguration*. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2009. P399.

<sup>2</sup> Fedler, Kyle. *Feasting on the Word: Year C Volume 1 Advent through Transfiguration*. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2009. P400.

work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (15:58). So, our living matters, our dying matters, we matter to others and to God.

Paul also uses an analogy of dust. You will hear words that allude to that at an internment of ashes or a body, "ashes to ashes, dust to dust." Still, Paul does not say that we lose all representation of who we are in death. He says, "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust [our physical living and being], we will also bear the image of the man of heaven [our spiritual living and being]." (15:49 my amplification)

This verse does not say we lose or shed our image as a human being but rather that whatever is next will also bear the image of the resurrected Christ. When our mortal lives end, we put on immortality through Christ and as we live in the Spirit.

I am still wrestling with what Paul has written in the letter to the Corinthians, still working my way through understanding and as it will be a mystery to us until our time when we put on immortality through Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Yet I believe that God is at work now in our living, in our dying, and in our resurrection through Christ. I don't fully understand, it is like looking at a mirror that is fogged up with steam. You know it is you in the mirror but things are blurred, yet we are still certain that it is truly us looking back through the mist. We don't fully understand what Paul has written, but it is a beginning to our understanding, our questions, and our reflection.

Faith really does have a strong element of trust, but our trust is grounded in scripture, in witness both from the words of the Bible and through lived experience, of what being transformed can and does look like. Lent begins in March this year, leading us to Easter where we celebrate the resurrection of Christ, may this letter from Paul to those early Christians in Corinth be a place of hope and wisdom for us to begin that time of reflection, breathing new life into our faith and lived experience. In Christ, with Christ, and through Christ who was raised in glory and is the promise and hope for us.

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The concerns of our country, our families, and the world are never ending, but we trust that God will lead us through the complexities bring hope, healing, and wholeness. Our prayers are a way that we step into God's work in the world. Let us pray.

## **Prayers of the People**

God of all life and each life:

You created us and set us in relationship with each other  
in families and neighbourhoods,  
in communities and countries,  
in cultures and nations.

Today we give you thanks for all the gifts of home life and community celebration  
which bring meaning and encouragement to our lives.

Thank you for the blessings we know  
through the contributions of those who have gone before us.

Help us offer what we can  
to sustain the wellbeing of our community and country,  
so that all who make it their home will find security and dignity.

God of our faith and our future,  
there are so many pressures we face today,  
so many problems without simple solutions.  
Draw near to anyone who is struggling in economic difficulty,  
and all those burdened by challenges to their health and happiness.  
Guide us all through the changing face of the pandemic,  
and support all those who are finding the stress overwhelming.  
Ease any conflict in homes and workplaces  
and inspire solutions that express mutual respect and deeper understanding.  
Help us share with others the hope we find in your presence.

God of mercy and forgiveness,  
You call us to live together in peace and unity.  
We pray for our neighbourhoods and the nations of this world.  
Where people are divided and bitterness turns into resentment,  
show us how to work for reconciliation.  
Where violence and fear turn neighbour against neighbour, or nation against nation.  
equip leaders to work for justice that will bring peace.  
Help us build a world where children enjoy a future  
filled with good health and happiness.

God, our hope and our help,  
send your Spirit to equip our congregation with skill and resilience  
to weather the challenges the pandemic has brought for our life together.  
Strengthen friendships, new and old,  
and make us a source of encouragement and connection to each other.  
Help each one find a place and a purpose in our mission and ministry  
for it is as your children that we pray together in the words Jesus taught us:

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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 the offering

Our lives are new each day, and we look forward to a newness that we cannot yet understand. Our offering is a gift of hope for each day as it is lived out now and for what our world can yet be when our gifts are used to minister to others.

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.

It is in joy and trust that we sing our praises as we close this time of worship.

### \*Hymn

*Now the green blade rises*

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1. Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,  
wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;  
love lives again, that with the dead has been:  
love is come again like wheat new-springing green.
2. In the grave they laid him, love by hatred slain  
sure that he would never, never wake again,  
laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:  
love is come again like wheat new-springing green.
3. Forth he came at Easter, like the risen grain,  
he that for these three days in the grave had lain;  
raised from the dead my living Lord is seen,  
love is come again like wheat new-springing green.
4. When our hearts are wintry, grieving or in pain,  
then your touch can call us back to life again,  
fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:  
love is come again like wheat new-springing green.

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### \*Benediction

Go now and share God's love with all you meet.  
Go now and share the joy of Jesus.  
Go now and share the inspiring breeze of the Spirit.  
Go in peace assured of God's love.

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