

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

Transfiguration Sunday - February 27th, 2022

Words of Welcome

I am curious how you are doing. Like really, how are you? I am not okay. I am burdened with the news of Russia's invasion of the Ukraine. I am burdened by the divisions in our families, communities, and country. I am burdened. While I sit with this, I read of Jesus and believe in one who is true freedom, even when I don't fully understand. I pray that today as you join me, we will hear and see more of Jesus who gave all of himself to free us.

Call to Worship

We come together today in awe and wonder before the God we worship.

**We also come burdened down with the worries of the world
and the struggles of our individual lives.**

But in the midst of the worries and the struggles is God,
our radiant source of love and hope.

**We worship together today in awe and wonder
to worship the God who transforms our lives.**

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Hymn

Before the world began

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| 1. Before the world began
one Word was there;
grounded in God he was,
rooted in care;
by him all things were made;
in him was love displayed;
through him God spoke, and said,
"I am for you." | 2. Life found in him its source;
death found its end;
light found in him its course,
darkness its friend,
for neither death nor doubt
nor darkness can put out
the glow of God, the shout:
"I am for you." |
| 3. The Word was in the world
which from him came;
unrecognized he was,
unknown by name;
one with all humankind,
with the unloved aligned,
convincing sight and mind,
"I am for you." | 4. All who received the Word
by God were blessed;
sisters and brothers they
of earth's fond guest.
So did the Word of Grace
proclaim in time and space
and with a human face,
"I am with you." |

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of grace and God of glory,
you reveal your presence to the world
in radiant glory and gentle whispers,
on mountain tops and lowly plains,
in classrooms and hospital beds,
in homes and churches,
in the silence of nature and the sounds of cities.
Yours is the presence that pushes past our fears,
yours is the touch that transforms our doubts.
We come before you to celebrate your goodness,
to focus on your light,
and offer you all praise, honour and thanksgiving,
for you are our God and we are your people,
now and always.

**God of mercy and forgiveness,
facing the light of your goodness,
we confess all that keeps us from sharing that goodness.
We are distracted by the desire to have more than we need.
We focus on our own disappointments
rather than trust the future you create.
We feel discouraged by the pandemic
and fail to claim the hope you hold out to us in Christ.
Transfigure us by your grace,
and shape us into disciples who follow Christ's leading each day.**

God of all wisdom and truth,
we seek your guidance as we hear the Scriptures read and interpreted today.
Send your Holy Spirit to open our minds and hearts,
to give us fresh understanding and a renewed commitment to follow your Word. Amen

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Assurance of Forgiveness

Do not be afraid. God's forgiveness shines into the world.
The morning star rises in our hearts and we are made new.
Know that you are forgiven and forgive one another in Christ's name.

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Scripture Reading Luke 9:28-36

²⁸Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹They appeared in glory and

were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³²Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” —not knowing what he said. ³⁴While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. ³⁵Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” ³⁶When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

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

Message Seeing the Glory

The images on my screens, be it tv, computer, or phone, are more than I can bear, but I watch anyway, trying to stay connected to the world and the people who are a part of it. Seeing people huddled in the subway system in the Ukraine, arms wrapped around their children. Others, holding tightly to their cell phones, knowing that right now, it is the only thing connecting them to love ones. Lines of vehicles on roadways as people try to flee the area...flee their country. Scenes reminiscent of World War II.

I can hardly write as I recall just in the last weeks people comparing Canada and Trudeau to the Nazi regime because they were being asked to take a vaccine to protect them and others, then the Emergency Measures act invoked to stop the occupation of our nation's capital. And I am not here to make a judgement on any of it, except to say, that things are broken. Our world has always been broken, the Bible and history are filled with stories of one group of people wanting to control other people, not because of love and concern, but because of personal agendas, power, and wealth, whether that be money or materials.

I do not profess to be a political analyst of any sort, I am not a card-carrying member of any group except to call myself a Christian, but I am hurting. I am hurting for my family that is seeing divisions about vaccines, religious beliefs, and more. I am hurting for the Presbyterian Church in Canada and all religious groups struggling with deep divisions in foundational ways of being people of faith.

I am grieving.

Now I must say that I usually try to give myself space between working things out and preaching about those things. But right now, with all that is happening, the struggle, grief, divisions, and down right nastiness of the last years, pieces of which were in place well before the pandemic hit...the reality of our world is closing in. It is difficult if not impossible to stay removed from it. There is no conversation in which people are not talking about polarizing positions, about anger, frustration, and fear.

I share these things in hopes that maybe you too are feeling some or all that I am feeling and need to know that you are not alone.

One of the first things that happened over the course of the last days as the Russian front moved in on the borders of the Ukraine and then the invasion, was the continual posting, sharing and resharing, of images on social media regarding Prayer for Ukraine. The news on Thursday evening ended with a video of a small group of people gathered in a city square in the Ukraine kneeling and praying.

When the Freedom Convoy went across Canada there were many people praying for the work and purpose of the people involved in the convoy and as they occupied the streets of Ottawa and key borders between Canada and the US. There were also people praying that God would find a way to end all of this peacefully, and that those involved would see that their way of expressing their displeasure with the government was harming others directly through their presence on the streets of Ottawa and economic consequences nationally.

Again, though I hold very strong and specific views, this sermon is not intended to uphold any specific agenda. As I read the scripture about the transfiguration of Jesus, I wondered what has this to say about our circumstances in this moment in time. The words that resonated with me were about prayer. "Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray." (9:28).

In these last weeks particularly, but even before that, I have been wondering about prayer...Why pray? Does it change anything? Does it move mountains? Cause it sure doesn't feel like it sometimes. What is the purpose of prayer? Each of us, based on our experience will answer this differently.

Then I read, "Jesus...when up on the mountain to pray." It wasn't the only time, there are many recorded instances in scripture of Jesus praying. Just a few verses and days before this story was recorded, we are told that "Once when Jesus' was praying alone..." (Luke 9:18). Another passage records, that Jesus was praying at the time of his baptism, "Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying..." (Luke 3:22). Jesus also prayed as he knew he faced certain death. As he and the disciples were at the Mount of Olives before Jesus' arrest he said, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial. Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed 'Father if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.'" (Luke 22:40-42).

There are many other times that Jesus prayed. Jesus, the one we call Christ because we know of his life, death, resurrection, and ascension...when he lived as flesh and blood, Jesus' prayed...often. It did not stop nations from rising against nation, it did not stop his own death. So, what was the purpose of prayer? The Son of Man and of God prayed to God and stayed connected to the one that brought life even when all things spoke of death and dying.

In this moment, in the scripture reading about Jesus' transfiguration we are told that he prayed "And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they (they being Peter, John, and James) saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. Jesus, Moses and Elijah appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." (vv 29-30).

In this moment of prayer, Jesus was transfigured, and we are told that Moses and Elijah joined him, and then the part I have never paid attention to before, they "were speaking of his departure". Prayer did not stop Jesus from facing what was to be faced. He was still going to die and he knew it. Still, something else I learned recently was that the Greek word for departure and for exodus are the same. Jesus' death was...is an opportunity for our exodus. It is a place of freedom just as it was for the Israelites centuries before when they finally left their slavery and bondage in Egypt. Jesus is for us freedom.

The cross is about release, living free from slavery and the power sinfulness has on us, while opening the future to possibly. One connection between prayer and the cross may very well be that though it does not take us out of our circumstances, at least not immediately, prayer recognizes the hope, promise, and eventual freedom that is ours through the power of Christ's resurrection and the work of the Holy Spirit in and among us now.

The power of darkness, whether it be people not living in the image of God, seizing power and control globally, locally, or relationally, the power of darkness cannot ultimately overcome the resurrection power of God.

And so we pray, "Father if you are willing, remove this cup...yet, not [our] will but yours be done." We pray even when we cannot know or see how God is at work in our world and in our families. We pray trusting that God is at work, that our prayers have power, power to change the course of events, to bring hope and healing, to bring about lasting and meaningful change, knowing that in our lives we will not likely see the fullness of living a resurrected life, but trusting that God, through Christ, is present, is with us, with every person regardless of country, sexual orientation, economic power or lack of, homelessness or vulnerability, struggling with physical, mental, or social illness. Whether we agree with our neighbour, family member, or church.

We pray because our Lord prayed. We pray because it is the way we can be a part of the healing of the world. We pray.

Prayers of the People

Revealing God,

You bless us with your presence and wisdom,
and we marvel at the wonders of your love.

You created a beautiful world that reveals your majesty.

You sent your Son to show us how to live with compassion.

Your Holy Spirit guides us on our way.

Thank you for opening our eyes to your presence each day.

Help us to recognize you not only in mountaintop experiences,
but also in everyday tasks and in times of great challenge.

Loving God,

Much in this world needs the transformation only you can provide.

Where there is violence, bring calm;

where there is poverty, send sustenance;

where there is confusion, bring wisdom;

where there is chaos, create order;

where minds and hearts are troubled, bring comfort;

where pain is crippling, grant release.

Move the hearts of the rich to share with those in need;

and call the powerful to act with justice for those at risk.

Give us all the will to work for the wellbeing of the earth

and to live with respect for the fragile balances within your creation.

Hear us now in this time of silence

as we raise to you the names and situations on our hearts this day:

Hear the cries of all who suffer and bring each one hope of new life with you.

Eternal God, we pray for your church around the world and for our congregation.

Give your people the energy to shine

wherever there is persecution, despair or discouragement.

Bless each congregation with wisdom and vision,

as we face the changes in the world caused by the pandemic.

Renew our imagination and commitment

to develop new forms of ministry and mission for the days ahead.

Gather us as a people again after months of distancing,

and inspire us with greater delight in your mystery,

and greater joy in seeking your presence.

We ask all these things through Christ Jesus,

who revealed your will to us through your revolutionary love,

and taught us to pray these words 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 the offering

God has been revealed in glory for the healing of the world. We have glimpsed that healing in the hope we share in Christ, even in these challenging times. Let us present our gifts to God so that this healing and hope will continue to spread in the world God loves.

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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

Jesus bids us shine

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1. Jesus bids us shine with a pure, clear light,
like a little candle burning in the night.
In the world is darkness, so we must shine,
you in your small corner, and I in mine.
2. Jesus bids us shine, first of all for him;
well he sees and knows it if our light grows dim.
He looks down from heaven to see us shine,
you in your small corner, and I in mine.
3. Jesus bids us shine, then, for all around;
many kinds of darkness in this world abound;
sin and want and sorrow; so we must shine,
you in your small corner, and I in mine.

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*Benediction

In the coming week,
may you experience the presence of God with joy.
May the holy cloud comfort you.
May the divine voice encourage you.
May the power of the Spirit transform you,
transform us,
transform our world. Amen.

~ written by Joanna Harader and posted on Spacious Faith. <https://spaciousfaith.com/>