

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

Second Sunday in Lent - March 13th, 2022

Words of Welcome

Transitions in life can be exciting and scary at the same time. Fear nearly always goes with times of change, even if it is a small change or when change will make our relationships and lives better. For people of faith, we are reminded that God is present and always with us regardless of the transitions and changes we face. We ponder these things as we join together in a call to worship.

Call to Worship Psalm 95:1-7

- ¹ O come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
- ² Let us come into God's presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to the Lord with songs of praise!
- ³ For the LORD is a great God,
and a great Sovereign above all gods;
- ⁴ **in whose hand are the depths of the earth,
and also the heights of the mountains.**
- ⁵ **The sea belongs to God who made it,
and the dry land, which God's hands have formed.**
- ⁶ O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
- ⁷ **For the Lord is our God,
and we are the people of God's pasture,
and the sheep of God's hand.**

O that you would listen to the voice of the Lord today!

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Hymn

O Lord my God! /How great thou art

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1. O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder
consider all the worlds thy hands have made,
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
thy power throughout the universe displayed,

Refrain:

*then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
How great thou art! how great thou art!
Then sings my soul! My Saviour God, to thee,
How great thou art! how great thou art*

2. When though the woods and forest glades I wander
and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees,
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
and hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze,

Refrain:

3. And when I think that God, his Son not sparing,
sent him to die, I scarce can take it in,
that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
he bled and died to take away my sin,

Refrain

4. When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration,
and there proclaim, my God, how great thou art!

Refrain

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God ever creating, ever loving, ever leading:
when things around us feel chaotic, you are peace.
When so much we hear is not reliable, your word is truth.
When we are paralyzed by fear and anxiety, your presence is freedom.
When we feel bereft and helpless, your love gives us hope.
God, you are the Source of all that matters.
We bring you our prayers and our praise this day,
for you reveal yourself to us in the goodness of creation,
in the love and mercy of Christ, your beloved,
and through the energy and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

God of compassion,

We are creatures who seek our own comfort.

We confess that we prefer our own plans to your purposes.

We shrink from costly discipleship and put our own interests first.

Forgive our fleeting commitment and the times we have indulged our own complaints. Have mercy on us. Inspire us with the energy to do your will and serve our neighbours in the example of Christ, your Son and our Lord.

God of wisdom, your Word brings light to show us the way you would have us follow. As the Scriptures are read and proclaimed this day, send us your Holy Spirit to aid our understanding and guide us in the ways we live out your truth. We worship you, O God, ever Three and ever One, world without end. Amen.

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Assurance of Forgiveness

When we reach in faith, God comes near in love.

When we strive to serve in Christ's name, God consecrates our efforts.

When we rely upon the Spirit's power, God fills us with a healthy trust.

Glory be to God.

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Scripture Reading Isaiah 43:1-19a

⁴³But now thus says the LORD,

he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.

²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;

and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,

and the flame shall not consume you.

³For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.

I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.

⁴Because you are precious in my sight, and honoured, and I love you,

I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life.

⁵Do not fear, for I am with you;

I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you;

⁶I will say to the north, 'Give them up', and to the south, 'Do not withhold;

bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth—

⁷everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory,

whom I formed and made.'

⁸Bring forth the people who are blind, yet have eyes, who are deaf, yet have ears!

⁹Let all the nations gather together, and let the peoples assemble.

Who among them declared this, and foretold to us the former things?

Let them bring their witnesses to justify them, and let them hear and say, 'It is true.'

¹⁰You are my witnesses, says the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen,

so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he.

Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.

¹¹I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no saviour.

¹²I declared and saved and proclaimed, when there was no strange god among you;

and you are my witnesses, says the LORD.

¹³I am God, and also henceforth I am He;

there is no one who can deliver from my hand; I work and who can hinder it?

¹⁴Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:

For your sake I will send to Babylon and break down all the bars,

and the shouting of the Chaldeans will be turned to lamentation.

¹⁵I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King.

- ¹⁶ Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters,
¹⁷ who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior
they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:
¹⁸ Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.
¹⁹ I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

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

Message Positioned for Transition

I am going to be straight up with you, it can be hard to imagine how God is working in all that we see going on in our world today and yet this day, Sunday March 13th church bells are ringing across the City of Thunder Bay in support of the people of Ukraine. It seems like a small gesture in the midst of the images of devastation and lives lost as we scroll through our social media feeds or check out the news channels. So why do we do it? Why ring church bells? We do it because is a reminder that God is present, is still powerful, and still God.

Verse 19 of our reading states, “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”

This statement comes in the second part of the Book of Isaiah. If you were to read the first 39 chapters of Isaiah, it is pretty doom and gloom. The people were in captivity with little to no hope that things would change or that God has remembered them. Theologian Paul Hanson puts the trouble succinctly when he writes, [The people of Israel] had the testimony of the prophets that it was their ingratitude and disobedience that had brought upon them the calamitous events that had robbed them of temple, land, and freedom.”¹

When looking at the events of the last two years, with politicians and people in sharp disagreement with each other, a pandemic taking its toll on lives, livelihoods and relationships, and people with extreme power taking their tanks of artillery, money, and their brand of crazy out to destroy without regard for human life, forget even considering the well-being of another, it may feel that the world is in captivity again with little to no sign that God is with us.

And then we read in Isaiah 43, “But now, this is what the Lord says, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel; Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.” What you might not realize is that these words are spoken by the prophet long before the people experienced the actual events that they were saved from the crazy they were living. This was the promise, but the promise to which they were to cling and trust did not come to pass until the Persian King Cyrus allowed the people to return to their homelands.

¹ Hanson, D. Paul. *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Isaiah 40-66. Editors James L. Mays, Patrick D. Miller and Paul J. Achtemeier. John Knox Press. Louisville. 1995. P62.

So what brought them hope in the midst of chaos, pain, estrangement? It was a word from God through the prophets. For us the hope comes through the assurances of the words of scripture such as can be found in the Book of Isaiah. Words that were spoken and found to be true. In that time of captivity, the prophet spoke words of God that reminded the people of Israel of what they had already lived through and the faithfulness of God in the time of Exodus from Egypt, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.” (v2) And this because God is God, and the people were precious in God’s sight, and honoured, and loved. (v4)

Those are words for all people, God created all people; people of different cultures, different faiths, different sexual orientations, different countries. We are precious in God’s sight and honoured and loved. This is a word for all not just for Israel alone, and we know this through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ who lived and died for not just one nation but for all who would believe that God wants to be in relationship with them, who believe that God is present even now.

A good portion of this reading from Isaiah depicts a judicial trial where witnesses are called to attest to God as above all gods. The witnesses are the very people who have been blind and deaf to God for sometime. This is a moment of remembering all the people know to be true about their lived experience and relationship with God as part of their history. Then abruptly after recalling that relationship the people are told, “Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old.” (v18).

This does not mean to forget all of that, but when we live in the past, holding on to the nostalgia of the way things used to be, holding on to buildings, relationships, memories we can miss that God is still at work, that God is still present. God said to them, “I am about to do a new thing, now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (v19).

The past is a great place to spend some time, to honour, to remember what was good, but also what didn’t work. To discern what is nostalgia, what is helpful, and what one must let go of. But God is about to do a new thing! If we spend our time only reminiscing about the good old days of church, of society, or relationships, or our lives, we can miss what God is doing right now.

God is about to do a new thing! We pray and hope for it in our world, we declare it in the ringing of bells, in our words, in our hope, our generosity of time and money. We declare it in our compassion and care of others. We declare it when we step out in faith to see where God is leading our church, our country, our lives, and ultimately the world. God is about to do a new thing where people live in gratitude and obedience to God, our God who declares to us we are precious in God sight, honoured, and loved. This is God with us – present, powerful, and about to do a new thing. Now it springs forth, may we be community and people who perceive it.

Prayers of the People

God of strength and comfort, in the quiet calm of your presence,
we pause in the whirlwind of concerns around us, and set aside our own interests
and distractions to pray for the world you love.

Today we remember before you:

All people in their daily life and work...our families, friends and neighbours,
those we work with, and those whose faces we recognize regularly but do not know.
Be with all who find these times stressful or exhausting:

We remember before you this congregation, our presbytery, and congregations of
other traditions near us, as well as those who serve in church leadership and all who
nurture faith in others. Help us support each other and look to the future with hope.

We pray for this community, our country, and governments throughout the world,
as well as all those who work for justice, freedom and peace.
Send your Spirit, the Advocate, to speak for the voiceless and challenge injustice.

We pray for victims of hunger, fear, injustice and oppression,
for all who struggle to rebuild their communities
after natural disaster and the effects of the pandemic,
and for all who are in danger, sorrow, or any kind of trouble.
Bring them comfort and courage, and the support of their neighbours.

And we pray for those people and situations on our hearts and minds this day:

Hear us as we pray in the words that your Son 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

We present our offerings, placing our faith in God, placing our confidence in the Spirit's
power, and placing our hope in the ongoing work of Christ's church. May God accept
our gifts and our gratitude.

Adapted from © Glen E. Rainsley. *Hear Our Prayer: Resource for Worship and
Devotions*. United Church Press. Cleveland, Ohio. 1996. P144.

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

Come sing, O Church, in joy!

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1. Come sing, O church, in joy! Come join, O church, in song!
For Christ the Lord has led us through the ages long!
In bold accord, come celebrate the journey now and praise the Lord!
2. Long years have come and gone, and still God reigns supreme,
empowering us to catch the vision, dream the dream!
In bold accord, Come celebrate the journey now and praise the Lord!
3. Let courage be our friend, let wisdom be our guide,
as we in mission magnify the Crucified!
In bold accord, come celebrate the journey now and praise the Lord!
4. Come sing, O church, in joy! Come join, O church, in song!
For Christ the Lord has triumphed o'er the ages long!
In bold accord, come celebrate the journey now and praise the Lord!

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Benediction

Lean upon God to be strong. Learn from God to be wise.
Seek out Christ to be found. Serve with Christ to be free.
Trust in the Spirit to be healthy. Live by the Spirit to be whole.

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