

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

First Sunday of Lent - March 6th, 2022

Words of Welcome

Just as the seasons change, everyone goes through transitions in life, and with every transition comes at least a little bit of fear. We fear the unknown. We fear change. We may fear the possibility of failure.

Bouwkamp, Rachel. [Transitions in Life | Reformed Worship](#). Accessed March 3, 2022.

As we look at the story of Noah, we consider fear and faith, and God. We begin with a call to worship.

Call to Worship

We step into the season of Lent as persons always in transition. May we have the wisdom to equip ourselves well – with a sturdy trust in the forgiveness and lovingkindness of our Creator, with a firm reliance upon the guidance of Christ, and with a complete confidence in the Holy Spirit to provide sustenance throughout the journey. May we move forward with the alertness demanded by discipleship, with the humility and honesty of maturing faith. May we walk well together, extending to one another, comfort, encouragement, and good company.

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*Hymn

Who made the earth and the heaven

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1. Who made the earth and the heaven? Mighty hands!
Who made the man and the woman? Awesome hands!
Who made the tree and the garden? Loving hands!
Who's got the world in mighty hands?
2. Who made the stars and the children? Mighty hands!
Who made the stream and the salmon? Awesome hands!
Who made the lamb and the lion? Loving hands!
Who's got the world in mighty hands?
3. Who made the swan and the swallow? Mighty hands!
Who made the wind and the willow? Awesome hands!
Who makes today and tomorrow? Loving hands!
Who's got the world in mighty hands?
4. Who sent the storm and the thunder? Mighty hands!
Who sent the flood and the fire? Awesome hands!
Who sent the dove and the rainbow? Loving hands!
Who's got the world in mighty hands?

5. Who loves the man and the woman? Mighty hands!
Who sent the Lamb and the Lion? Awesome hands!
Who makes a new earth and heaven? Loving hands!
Who's got the world in mighty hands?
6. You've got the world – Mighty hands!
You've got the world – Awesome hands!
You've got the world – Loving hands!
You've got the whole world in your hands!

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of our living and our loving,
we rejoice in your grace and mercy which has called creation into being,
and makes all life complete.
We praise you for Jesus Christ who reveals your loving purposes for all people;
in his face we glimpse your love; in his life we see the pattern for our lives.
We bless you for the Holy Spirit who guides us and strengthens us,
drawing us into the embrace of your tender love.
And so we praise you, O God, our eternal, creating father who loves us with
motherly care, united with Christ, our savior, and your Holy Spirit, the breath of life,
Three in One, now and always.

**Almighty and most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you in things we have done,
and things we have neglected to do. We have held back from giving
to protect what we have. We have not trusted in your goodness
and relied on the world's empty promises instead.
Forgive what we have done and direct who we shall become.
Help us to serve you by serving your world with generous spirits.**

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Bring your word near to us, O God. May it rest not only on our lips, *Rom. 10:8b*
but also reside in our hearts. By the power of your Holy Spirit, help us to respond to
your word with our whole lives until you become our dwelling place; *Ps. 91:9*
through Jesus Christ, we pray. **Amen.**

Feasting on the Word Worship Companion: Liturgies for Year C, Volume 1 © 2012 Westminster John Knox Press. P104.

Assurance of Pardon

Scripture declares, *Rom. 10:12, 13*
The Lord is generous to all who call on God's name.
Friends, believe the good news:
God does not turn away from us,
but desires to bring us into the glorious freedom

offered in Jesus Christ.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Thanks be to God!

Feasting on the Word Worship Companion: Liturgies for Year C, Volume 1 © 2012 Westminster John Knox Press. P103.

Scripture Readings Genesis 8

But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided; ²the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, ³and the waters gradually receded from the earth. At the end of one hundred and fifty days the waters had abated; ⁴and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. ⁵The waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains appeared.

⁶ At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made ⁷and sent out the raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. ⁸Then he sent out the dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; ⁹but the dove found no place to set its foot, and it returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took it and brought it into the ark with him. ¹⁰He waited another seven days, and again he sent out the dove from the ark; ¹¹and the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. ¹²Then he waited another seven days, and sent out the dove; and it did not return to him any more.

¹³ In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and saw that the face of the ground was drying. ¹⁴In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. ¹⁵Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶'Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁷Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.' ¹⁸So Noah went out with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. ¹⁹And every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out of the ark by families

²⁰ Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar. ²¹And when the LORD smelt the pleasing odour, the LORD said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

²² As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.'

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Message – Seasons and Transitions in Our Lives

In the last weeks I have spoken with people going through transitions or what may become transitions. Seasons of change. Some are facing imminent death, either their own or that of a loved one. Some are struggling in their relationships with parents, children, spouse or partner. Some people are moving or have just moved, are starting a new job or retiring from a job. Business owners, teachers, students, and parents have spent the last two years in constant states of transition.

As Rachel Bouwkamp writes in the introduction to this sermon series that I using for the next few weeks, “Transitions close one chapter of our lives and open a new one. Transition means change, and with change always comes some element of fear. Our natural reaction is to resist change to our normal routines. Transitions, especially large ones, challenge us by moving us away from the familiarity of life to a place or people that are unknown.”¹

We cannot escape transitions and change. Our bodies alone simply remind us daily that we are changing. Aging and life experience constantly transition us from who we were and are to who we are becoming, certainly physically, but emotionally, socially, economically, mentally, and spiritually as well. And yet we often fight this ongoing transition rather than living and embracing change in ways that create new opportunities for living as fully as we can.

When looking to scripture to help us through transitions, the story of Noah is one that hits on many themes. Though Noah doesn't actually speak through the story of the flood we can imagine some of what he may have been thinking and feeling. Like, who takes on a challenge that goes against not only what the majority are doing, but also invites taunts, bullying, and being singled out as nuts. There is no indication that a flood is imminent, at least not to most people, but God has spoken to Noah and Noah has obeyed. Noah trusted God. There was going to be a great flood and in that there would be no sign of hope. Waters would rise, living things, plant, animal, and human would die. Rain for forty days would mean nothing but darkness for that period of time as well. Even with all that, Noah accepted the words of God, trusting that God would be present whatever would be experienced, and that God would bring Noah, his family, and all the animals through safely.

In Hebrews 11:7(NRSV) we read, “By faith Noah, warned by God about events as yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark to save his household, by this he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith.”

By faith and with faith, Noah moved through the transition, really a judgement on the whole earth, where God essentially started over with people and the creation. Now Noah wasn't chosen because he was perfect but because he had a heart for God where no

¹ Bouwkamp, Rachel. [Transitions in Life | Reformed Worship](#). Accessed March 3, 2022.

one else did. God started over and then realized that people would not change. In verse 21 of the scripture after the flood was over and the waters had receded, we read, “²¹And when the LORD smelt the pleasing odour [of the burnt offering of Noah], the LORD said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.’”

People didn’t change, but God’s heart did. And it might be worth noting a few more things about the story. One, this is a flood story such as can be found in a number of ancient cultures. Two, as I mentioned already, the flood wasn’t because God was angry, it was because God was grieving human sinfulness. Genesis 6:5-6 says, “⁵The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. ⁶And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.” And third, whether you believe the story or not, it is an example both of God’s heart for people and the desire that people live full, beautiful lives in the midst of a full and beautiful creation. The intent of the story is to show the faithfulness of God and, that people’s faith in God is valuable and life changing.

Like Noah, when we go through times of transition, of change, we may be mocked, questioned, teased, or even bullied. We might be ignored completely and left to figure it out ourselves. The changes might bring times that we question ourselves or feel like the unknowns are just like darkness that hinder our hope and imaginations. Fear present. Fear of the unknowns really intimidating. This can happen as individuals, but it can affect our families and all those closest to us. It doesn’t mean stop, or fight the transitions, it just means that change is difficult, sometimes down right hard and heartbreaking, but we cannot stay static. Nature does not allow it, nor do relationships.

If we didn’t change we would not deepen our relationship with our spouse, our children or our own parents as they age. If we didn’t allow for transitions we would not grow and mature as people and in faith. Our lived experience would be very narrow in scope. The grounding factor in all of this is God as God does not change. Not that God cannot change God’s own mind, but what does not change is God’s steadfast presence with people and creation and God’s deep love.

We know and trust that God wants the best for us even if we cannot see or understand it in our times of greatest turmoil and uncertainty. God is with us even if things around us feel as dark as storm clouds. God is present and goes ahead of us in events as yet unseen. It is by faith and with faith that we look fear in the face and move on anyway because we do not go this way alone. In seasons of transitions in our lives we trust...we live by faith...we live in faith.

This is the way for individuals. It is also the way for the church. In this time of great turmoil in our world with war and the long lingering effects of a pandemic, we live in hope for what God is doing in, through, and with us. Our transitions may be from life to death,

from one place to another, from one path to another, but God is faithful, present, and will not let us go. We live in this hope, in faith and by faith, knowing that our hope is not in vain, but has been proven in the lives of the faithful since the time of Noah. May God go with us into our transitions so that we can become more fully people of God and beacons of hope and light to those around us.

Prayers of the People

God of grace,

You are our Judge and our Hope.

Transform us with your love and harness our energy for your purposes in the world into which Christ came and for which he died.

Hear us as we pray for the world, the church and our community:

We pray for the earth as your creation,

staggering under the demands of human activity and expectation.

May this planet, our home, be held in reverence in every culture.

Where we are tempted to use resources carelessly, where human lifestyles endanger homes and habitats of other peoples or other species, where immediate gain tempts people to give no thought for the future, send your wisdom to guide citizens and decision makers to act responsibly.

We pray for the Church facing the challenges of rebuilding ministry and mission amid the uncertainties created by the pandemic.

Where congregations are tempted to guard traditions and resist new possibilities, where members magnify differences instead of celebrating our unity in Christ, where energy for leadership and community life has grown weaker, send your healing and transforming grace.

We pray for relationships suffering under the stress of prolonged pandemic restrictions.

Where families are tempted to nurse grudges and harbour complaints, where friendships have been wounded by misunderstanding or neglect, where workplace tensions have arisen over clashing opinions or exhausting demands, send your reconciling and restoring mercy.

We pray for the world filled with increasing threats and conflicts.

Where countries are torn by unrest and persecution, where communities are diminished by prejudice and discrimination, where those with power and authority degrade or dismiss their critics, empower those who work for just solutions and advocate for the powerless.

Amid the continuing war crisis in the Ukraine we pray for peace, for safety, for the country as people flee for their lives and others stay back to resist and fight for freedom. We pray that leaders would be courageous and wise. We pray for your presence and your help in this very great time of hostility and aggression.

We pray for all who are troubled and find it hard to face these uncertain times,
we pray for those who face illness or loss of any kind,
for those challenged by economic hardship,
and for those faced with the reality of death, their own or of someone dear.
In silence, we name those on our hearts this day:

Embrace each one with your compassion and courage.

Even as we remember the many challenges around us,
we give you thanks for the blessings we know,
for moments of pleasure, for laughter shared,
for conversations that brightened a day,
for times of transition and change knowing and trusting
that your unwavering presence can handle all that we may fear.

Thank you for your steadfast love and the comfort we draw from your presence with us in all things. And now we offer together the prayer Jesus taught;

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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

As we offer gifts to God, we place our faith in God. We place our confidence in the Spirit's power, and we place our hope in the ongoing work of Christ.

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.

1. Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not; thy compassions, they fail not;
as thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.

Refrain

*Great is thy faithfulness;
great is thy faithfulness;
morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided;
great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.*

2. Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above
join with all nature in eloquent witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

Refrain

3. Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow:
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Refrain

"Great is thy faithfulness," words by Thomas O. Chisholm
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Benediction

Let go the fears that hinder trust,
the hesitations that stifle hope,
the denials that block forgiveness.
Open yourself to grace and growth.
Let God form faith within you.

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