

## St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

4th Sunday of Easter. Christian Family Sunday - May 8th, 2022

### Words of Welcome

One of the greatest gifts that we can have, in fact most of us desire in some way, is to know that we belong. Belonging gives us assurance that we don't go through the world alone. Sometimes it is hard to know where we belong, but scripture tells us that we never have to doubt that we belong to God. As we worship, may we discover how deep and powerful that belonging to God can be in our lives.

### Call to Worship

Day by day, God leads us:

**to the deep, deep pools of peace, to the green, lush lawns of grace.**

Day by day, Jesus calls us:

**to pour out ourselves in service, to anoint the stranger with hope.**

Day by day, the Holy Spirit shows us:

**the community we could be, the family we are called to become.**

— written by Thom Shuman on [Lectionary Liturgies](#).

### Hymn

*He's got the Whole World (traditional words)*

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1. He's got the whole world in his hands. (Sing three times.)  
He's got the whole world in his hands.
2. He's got the sun and the moon in his hands. (Sing three times.)  
He's got the whole world in his hands.
3. He's got the wind and the rain in his hands. (Sing three times.)  
He's got the whole world in his hands.
4. He's got the tiny little baby in his hands. (Sing three times.)  
He's got the whole world in his hands.
5. He's got you and me, brother, in his hands.  
He's got you and me, sister, in his hands.  
He's got you and me, brother, in his hands.  
He's got the whole world in his hands.
6. He's got the whole world in his hands. (Sing three times.)  
He's got the whole world in his hands.

Traditional African American Spiritual  
Words and Music: public domain

### Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of the ages, God of today,  
You are compassion; our cup overflows.  
You are hope; you lead us into green pastures.  
You are truth; you lead us beside quiet streams.

You are life; you restore our souls.  
Morning, noon and night, O God, you are the source of our joy.  
We gather to worship you as one family of your people,  
honoring you as our Creator, trusting you as our Saviour,  
celebrating you as the Spirit who gives us life.

**Merciful God,**  
**we confess we stray from your ways like lost sheep.**  
**We follow the desires of our own hearts, ignoring the needs of others.**  
**We judge ourselves more generously than others.**  
**We fail to offer others the forgiveness we seek from you.**  
**We nurse grudges and cling to our own opinions.**  
**Forgive the ways we betray your love,**  
**and return us to your paths of truth and mercy.**

God of wisdom,  
as we listen to your Word recorded by generations of your people,  
fill us with understanding by the power of your Holy Spirit.  
Reveal the mysteries of faith to us, so that we may grow in faithfulness,  
following Jesus, your Living Word. Amen.

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## **Assurance of Forgiveness**

The Letter to the Ephesians declares that Christ dwells in our hearts through faith,  
for we are being rooted and grounded in his love.  
The forgiveness he offers is a gift of this love.  
Receive God's forgiveness with faithful hearts,  
and be at peace with God, with yourself and with each other.

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## **Scripture Readings**

### Psalm 23

- <sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
- <sup>2</sup> The Lord makes me lie down in green pastures;  
leads me beside still waters;
- <sup>3</sup> restores my soul, and leads me in right paths  
for the sake of the Lord's name.
- <sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.
- <sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
- <sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD  
for the length of my days.

## John 10:22-30

<sup>22</sup>At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, <sup>23</sup>and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. <sup>24</sup>So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." <sup>25</sup>Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; <sup>26</sup>but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. <sup>27</sup>My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup>I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup>What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup>The Father and I are one."

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

### **Message** Belonging

Stories of belonging...it is amazing and a little overwhelming when one does an internet search to find stories of belonging. It is a huge point of interest for people, from university studies to stories of refugees who have come to Canada, from books to classroom lesson plans. Belonging is a big topic and a big deal. Now that is not really surprising. We have all had times when we longed to belong. At school you may have wanted to belong to a sports team, the student's union, the yearbook or chess club, or be a cheerleader. This would have come, not only in your interest in those things, but also in being with likeminded individuals who could relate to you.

There was also the group of young people that you may have wanted to hang out with, sometimes becoming a part of those groups, sometimes always longing for what would never be. As an adult at work, maybe you wanted or want to belong to a particular part of the organization or profession, doing work that stimulates and brings a sense of adventure and gratification, while working alongside other.

Those who move to a new community or country, even a new apartment or senior's home are often fearful of how they will be received, how they will belong in their new surroundings and setting. And of course, there are our families. We belong to them, but for many it is an unhappy belonging. For others their full sense of who they are comes mainly from their experience of belonging and being loved by their family.

As Christians, we look for community and belongin in the church. Here we know and trust that others are also here to worship, but it is also about being part of a community of faith. A place where we can learn, grow, and believe, without fear of rejection. At least that is what the church is supposed to be, but even the church falls short more often than we care to admit.

The one place that we can fully trust that we belong is in God's hands. We can rest in the knowledge of that understanding, even if it doesn't always fully make sense.

In response to a question posed to Jesus by other Jews, where they asked, “How long will you keep us in suspense? ‘If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.’ Jesus answered, ‘I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name testify to me, but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep.’” (vv24-26)

Now this scripture is not easy to follow. Some background may also be helpful. We are in the season of Easter in the church but this story comes from a time before Jesus’ death. Chapter 10 of the Gospel of John is titled, *Jesus the Good Shepherd*. The first verses of the chapter are familiar to us, “Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.”

This whole chapter has been about belonging, and here in the conversation in the portico of Solomon at the temple, a significant time after the first part of this story, Jesus is again in conversation with others about who he is. But they don’t get it. Yes, people are curious, but what do you do with a man that speaks this way? Do you believe him, or think he has a few screws loose? I wouldn’t judge too quickly. Putting yourself in their sandals, at that time, without all the witnesses to the death, resurrection appearances, and more witnesses over centuries of Christians, we too might wonder. In fact, if you don’t question, you are likely not thinking too hard about it.

Being a Christian is not a straightforward, unthinking, unquestioning, way of being in the world. We have the capacity to wonder and be curious. Much of what we know as Christians has come through the words of scripture and trusting that these words have continued to impact lives for over 2000 years because there is power in the promises, witness, and lives lived. There is belonging and trust of Christians that goes back to those first disciples.

Much of what we understand is also about using our gifts of imagination, wonder, and curiosity. The ability to accept and live into the mysteries of faith that are beyond our comprehension, because if God really is God than we should not be able to understand it all. We have to be okay with mystery while still asking questions, seeking knowledge and wisdom.

Now back to the conversation at hand. What does Jesus mean when he says, “you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand. The Father and I are one.”

This whole passage is about how we belong to Jesus and to God. This is not a kind of belonging that is like slave and master, or someone having power over us. And though these are images of people following the shepherd like sheep, it is not because the sheep

don't know any better, it is because there is a relationship of trust. We can trust that in Jesus we are protected and loved, cared for, and searched for when we lose our way. How Jesus cared for those closest to him and those who were in need was how he demonstrated that he and God were one in this sense. Jesus' character and actions revealed something of God's character and actions – God's love for people and creation.

Also remember that stories and images only take us so far. Rich stories can have multiple meanings, and take us to deeper understanding of ourselves and our relationships, but stories rarely offer a full explanation. We are left to discover meaning and purpose in stories that impact how we live in the world and with one another.

In part, at least the part that we might get our minds around, is that when we live in the safety and love of Jesus, we are able to have a relationship with Jesus in which we can trust that we are compassionately and lovingly held in God's hands. We are protected. It also means that we have to experience Jesus.

Theologian Gary Jones writes, "It seems that Jesus' role and identity cannot be reduced to a title; instead, his role and identity must be experienced. This becomes clear in the analogy of the sheep and shepherd. The sheep know and trust the shepherd, not because they have gone through any sort of rational, intellectual discernment, but because they have experienced the shepherd and his 'works.' In the same way, a child knows and trust his or her mother because of experience, not reason, and it is not an accident that Jesus elsewhere says, 'whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.'" (Mark 10:15)

No one can convince you to believe in Jesus, in God. It is the experience and the sharing of experience that brings people to trust that we belong, that we are in God's hands.

It is akin to trying to describe your experience of a trip you took or a "mountain top" experience and all that you saw and felt. Until another goes there, they will not fully understand what you have shared, but in sharing, there is a longing to understand, to be able to experience what you have experienced and sometimes someone actually goes where you have been based in your sharing of the stories, emotions, and images.

For our faith it means trusting the stories of others and the lived experience of ourselves and others. God's got you. God's got you in his hands. It doesn't mean that life will be easy or without pain, it doesn't mean that you will fully understand all that you go through, but it does mean that the shepherd will lead you through it. You don't have to go into whatever your face alone, or without hope, wisdom, and love. And through your example of faith just maybe you will bring the love of God, the hope and the promise of abundant life to another. Through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ, belonging to Christ. Amen.

## **Prayers of the People**

Lord Jesus Christ, you came to us bearing God's love,  
to walk with us as our Good Shepherd, showing us how to love each other.  
You pray with us and for us day by day.

Today we turn to you with our hopes and concerns in these uncertain times.  
Draw near to us and to all those for whom we pray,  
so that your love will be known in our world this day.

Lord Jesus, on this Christian Family Sunday,  
we pray for the families we belong to.

We thank you for parents, grandparents and great-parents,  
for the generations who started our families and all they gave to us.

Today we thank you for all those who mothered us,  
grateful for their care and guidance.

We pray for mothers throughout the world,  
thinking especially of mothers in Ukraine and other places of conflict,  
worried for their children and the future.

Strengthen every care-giver's hope and courage by the power of your Spirit,  
and create peace in the world so children can grow up in safety.

Lord Jesus, we pray for families in our community and around the world  
in these uncertain times. We remember families in need:

- those struggling with economic upheaval and the high cost of living,
- those who know sorrow because someone has died or gone away,
- those who live in pain or fear, or face some kind of discrimination.

Surround these families with your love and courage;  
bring them support from their neighbours,  
and guide each child and young person into the future.

Lord Jesus,

We pray for the family of nations in this time of threat and conflict.

Change the hearts of leaders bent on destruction or conquest.

Give wisdom and courage to those who seek justice through negotiation,  
and protect all those who offer themselves in aid and advocacy work.

Bring peace with justice to this troubled world.

Lord Jesus,

We pray for each other and for our church family.

We give you thanks for the friendship and fellowship we share  
and the unique gifts each one brings to our life together.

Rekindle our energy for ministry and mission and show us our path into the future.

Make us a beacon of hope in your name.

Lord Jesus, you are our Good Shepherd,  
guiding us through dark valleys and green pastures.

We thank you for your presence with us in all times and situations  
as we offer together the prayer you gave us as one family of followers:

## 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

In the Easter season, we celebrate God's most precious gift to us in Christ's dying and his rising. As we present our offering, may our generosity reflect God's goodness to us, and the hope we have in Christ Jesus, even in these troubled times.

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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>

## Hymn

### *Saviour like a shepherd lead us*

**485**

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|---|--|
| 1. Saviour, like a shepherd lead us:<br>much we need your tender care;<br>in your pleasant pastures feed us;<br>for our use your folds prepare:<br>blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!<br>you have bought us; yours we are.<br>Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!<br>you have bought us, yours we are. | 2. We are yours; in love befriend us;<br>be the guardian of our way;<br>keep your flock from sin, defend us;<br>seek us when we go astray:<br>blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!<br>hear your children when we pray.<br>Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!<br>hear your children when we pray. |
| 3. Let us always seek your favour;<br>let us always do your will.<br>Jesus Christ our only Saviour,<br>with yourself our spirits fill:<br>blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!<br>you have loved us; love us still.<br>Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!<br>you have loved us; love us still.          |  |

Words and music: public domain

## Benediction

Gathered for worship, we are now sent to work,  
**to find God in all the broken places and serve with healing and hope.**

Having gathered in silence, we are now sent to speak,  
**to share the words of Jesus about justice and inclusion of all.**

Gathered for prayer, we are now sent to live,  
**to take goodness and mercy and anoint everyone with these gifts of the Spirit.**

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