

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

2nd Sunday after Pentecost/National Indigenous Peoples Sunday

June 19, 2022

Words of Welcome

What would it mean for you to be transformed? In what ways would you want to be transformed? The stories of Jesus are about how people were transformed each time they encountered him. Today is one such story. We begin with a call to worship.

Call to Worship

We come to worship God,

For God is just and compassionate. God is love.

Where will we find God?

**God is among the hungry and thirsty,
in the face of a stranger, reaching out to us.**

Let us seek God so that we can serve God.

Let us worship God and seek God's healing, reconciling grace.

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National Indigenous Peoples Sunday. June 19, 2022. Year C.

Hymn

This is my Father's world

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1. This is my Father's world,
and to my listening ears
all nature sings, and round me rings
the music of the spheres.
This is my Father's world:
I rest me in the thought;
of rocks and trees, of skies and seas
God's hands the wonders wrought.

2. This is my Maker's world;
the birds their carols raise;
the morning light, the lily white,
declare their Maker's praise.
This is my Maker's world;
God shines in all that's fair;
in the rustling grass God's footsteps pass,
God speaks to me everywhere.

3. This is my Saviour's world;
oh let me not forget
that though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.
This is my Saviour's world;
the battle is not done;
Jesus, who died, shall be satisfied,
and earth and heaven be one.

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Creator God,

You have made a world of such amazing diversity –
with unique living things we cannot number,

in an interdependent pattern on which all life depends.

We praise you for such wonder.

You have created such amazing diversity in humankind –
through culture and language, custom and community,
expressed in creativity and compassion over and over again.

We praise you for such wonder.

In Jesus Christ, you show us how much you love your creation
and how we can live by your love.

By the power of your Spirit,
give us new eyes to behold the wonders you have made
and teach us how to share in the praise your creation offers you day by day.

Creator God,

The diversity in your creation amazes us

but we confess we prefer what seems familiar.

We'd like everyone to speak our language.

We wish others held our values and shared our customs.

We don't understand discrimination that hurts others.

**We don't recognize how our own preferences
affect other people and the earth itself in harmful ways.**

**Forgive our familiar assumptions,
and open our minds and hearts to the stories of others
and the cries of suffering throughout the earth.**

God of wisdom and hope,
your Word has offered guidance and healing throughout many generations.
Send us your Spirit now, that, as we listen to the stories of your people,
we may find wisdom and hope, guidance and healing
through your Living Word, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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Assurance of Forgiveness

The prophet Micah declared that God requires only three things of us:
to do justice, to love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.

To all who truly repent,
who turn away from arrogance,
and seek reconciliation with God and neighbour in kindness and humility,
God offers forgiveness and peace.

The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

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Scripture Reading Luke 8:26-39

²⁶ Then they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. ²⁷ As he stepped out on land, a man of the city who had demons met him. For a long time

he had worn no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. ²⁸When he saw Jesus, he fell down before him and shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me'— ²⁹for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) ³⁰Jesus then asked him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Legion'; for many demons had entered him. ³¹They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss.

³² Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding; and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. ³³Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

³⁴ When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. ³⁵Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. ³⁶Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. ³⁷Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. ³⁸The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹'Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.' So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

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

Message Control Issues

Power. The power of nature. Water's ability to flood plains and whole areas. We see that played out over and over across Canada and other parts of the world as water encroaches the banks of rivers and shorelines. We want water to stay the course, to remain in the boundaries that are set, but when it downpours for days or threatens to creep over roads and into homes we are at a loss to control it.

The same with fire. Fire has power. Fire isn't to concerned about the boundaries we may set for it. It goes out of control easily and without regard for the forests and communities that are in its path. It doesn't care if you have made a firebreak. It will happily catch on the wings of a wind and move how it pleases.

We talk about power in the halls of government and business. One only need look at the power Russia is exerting over the Ukraine, or the hearing regarding the insurrection in

the US last year to know that power likes to dominate. Or pay attention to the way that refugees are being managed across the globe in order to know the dominance that one group can feel over another and crush the other with their boundaries of where they can go or not go.

We have boundaries around our countries and around our cities. On this National Indigenous Sunday, we acknowledge and grieve the boundaries created for the Indigenous people of Turtle Island, or what we know as North America. These boundaries and lack of understanding of the gifts of Indigenous people have left decades of harm in their wake, and the harm continues to be perpetuated in attitudes and the unwillingness to let go of what has been experienced and known to have caused great pain and disruption in the lives of Indigenous people.

We also consider how our power and control has brought pain and harm to those in the LGBTQI2S+ community as we are coming to the end of Pride month that goes throughout the month of June.

Power, control, boundaries and let me add the word, chains. All of these name that in which we keep those we fear or don't understand, how it keeps all of this at a distance. We don't want to confront it or deal with it. We think out of sight out of mind.

The homeless on the streets don't really concern us until they are sitting intoxicated and messy on the steps of our churches or stand by our vehicle windows with their signs asking for "anything" that would help. We can't wait for the light to turn green so that we don't have to sit in our privilege and be confronted by the lack of opportunity and equity in our society.

Which leads me to the story of the man with the demon that Jesus goes to. Jesus literally crosses boundaries to be with the man, to heal him. To set him free from the burden he is living with. This man is so far gone that he is chained and shackled and yet so strong that he is feared by all in the community. He is out of control, naked, living in and among the tombs. As long as he stays there the people feel that they have some safety, some control over him. The chains make others feel safe.

Still, Jesus goes to him, heals him. Once Jesus has done his healing, we and those in the story, find the man clothed and in his right mind, sitting with Jesus. He is so thankful for the healing for the transformation of his life that he desires more than anything to travel with Jesus, to be with Jesus.

But those who have been witnesses to this transformation are fearful and terrified. Not knowing how to control the man, they are now faced with another power that is so strong

that they fear its control. That power was Jesus' power to heal, to make whole that which seemed beyond hope. The witnesses and then the people of the surrounding country ask Jesus to leave. He is too much for them. They have just seen or heard about an entire herd of swine going over a cliff...because of Jesus.

Writer and pastor, David Lose, shares this,

What causes such deep fear?

I suspect it is the way in which Jesus' presence and power disrupts the social order. While they were unable either to cure or to contain the demon-possessed man, the villagers at least were accustomed to him. He knew his place and they knew theirs – or more accurately, they knew his place, out in the wilds. Perhaps understandably, they are alarmed when the former demoniac comes once again among them, even though he has been cured, because the social order to which they have become accustomed is utterly upset.

Odd as it may sound, we often prefer the devil we know to the freedom we do not.¹

And that is the crux. We don't set people free; we fight and struggle against change because we know what we know and something different scares that heck out of us.

As St. Andrew's has been working on trying to figure out our future story, many who participated in the small groups are both excited and fearful about the discussions they had. We are so used to being this historical church with deep roots, of doing worship and work in a certain way, of knowing who to expect in our worship, that knowing that we will have to radically change to continue in a post Christian world is daunting and scary to say the least.

Even over the years, change in something, such as the tea and bazaar, has created panic and concern, angst and even some mild anger when the times and routines have been changed. It was especially evident when the date for the tea and bazaar was moved up one weekend in November to accommodate changes in patterns of shopping and behaviour as Christmas approached. If something such as this could cause angst, one can expect that more drastic changes will create tension and may cause some to become fearful and angry.

In another area of change, though this congregation has been wonderful at welcoming, and are working hard at becoming even more open to those we don't understand, who

¹ Lose, David J. *Feasting on the Word: Year C Volume 3 Pentecost and Season After Pentecost*. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2010. P169..

look and live differently from us, particularly the homeless that find a place to sit around our building, it is not without fear and some trepidation that we do this welcoming. It is much easier when our community members, as we call them out of respect, just move away from the building on Sunday morning, rather than us being confronted by the unknowns of their movements and behaviours.

Into all of this, in the church, in our personal lives, in our places of work and worship, onto our streets, and into our houses of government, comes the power of Jesus to transform, not just in little ways but in monumental ways, how we perceive and interact with others. Hope we live and care for all.

Jesus isn't too worried about our reactions. We may be like the man who was fully restored in body, mind, and spirit, and want to stay with Jesus. We may be more like the people who just wanted Jesus to get going and leave them to their familiar ways. And we may be anywhere on that continuum. But Jesus' presence changes things.

Even though the people wanted Jesus to go, and he did, they would never be able to forget that encounter. On top of that, the now healed man would forever be a witness to that encounter, that power.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are now that witness in our families and community. We can choose to be a healing, restoring presence that embraces the fear and the chaos, the changes that Jesus brings when we let the power of love and hope, justice and transformation be a part of our experience and way in the world, or we can choose to ignore that power, stay fearful and protected, allowing the chains of despair, power, dominance and superiority to hold people captive, not for their sakes and protection, but for our own.

Be encouraged to face the fear of lack of control and boundaries in ways that restore everyone to wholeness, in ways that allows the transforming power of Jesus to change us, our churches, our communities, our governments, and world. In Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen.

Prayers of the People

God of the earth and all its peoples,
in Jesus Christ, you proclaimed the good news
that true life and peace are found in you.
Guide your church to proclaim this good news
not in ways that merely please people or don't ruffle feathers,
but in ways that bring Christ's reconciling love to divided communities
and lives out of joint with each other.

Shine your light into the world's hidden corners,
exposing violence, exploitation, bigotry.
Reveal what dehumanizes the vulnerable and degrades your creation.
God of the earth and all its peoples,

Let your light shine!

God of healing and hope,
We pray for all those who are ill or in pain,
for the anxious and discouraged,
for those facing death or the loss of someone dearly beloved,
and for those struggling to make ends meet in these uncertain times.

On this National Indigenous Sunday,
We pray for indigenous communities across this land.
Grant them wisdom and healing as they address the needs of their people.
Bring healing to those who remember painful experiences
and build bridges of understanding among us all.

We pray for Presbyterian World Service & Development and its partners
as they work to bring healing and hope to places of strife and deprivation.

May the mission we share in Jesus' name shine the light of your love into desperate
lives.

God of the earth and all its peoples,

Let your light shine!

God of the faithful future,
bless this community of faith
and guide us as we plan for the future in changing times.
Bless students and teachers as another challenging school year ends
and lift the stress from their lives this summer.

Give us a time of rest and enjoyment in the summer months
and restore our hope and our energy to serve in your world.

God of the earth and all its peoples,

Let your light shine!

We offer all our prayers, spoken and unspoken,
through Jesus Christ our Lord who taught us to say 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's Spirit equips Jesus' followers to bring healing and hope to the world God loves. The gifts we offer God are tangible signs of that healing and hope at work in us and through us, for the sake of Christ our Lord.

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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

We cannot own the sunlit sky

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1. We cannot own the sunlit sky,
the moon, the wild-flowers growing,
for we are part of all that is
within life's river flowing.
With open hands receive and share
the gifts of God's creation,
that all may have abundant life
in every earthly nation.
2. When bodies shiver in the night,
and, weary, wait for morning,
when children have no bread but tears,
and war horns sound their warning,
God calls humanity to wake,
to join in common labour,
that all may have abundant life
in oneness with their neighbour.
3. God calls humanity to join
as partners in creating a future
free from want or fear,
life's goodness celebrating.
That new world beckons from afar,
invites our shared endeavour,
that all may have abundant life
and peace endure forever.

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Benediction

In the spirit of God's unchanging love,
live the stories of faith we have heard this day.
In the melody of God's song within us,
sing the faith we have received this day.
In the hope of God's unfailing help,
share the grace we have touched this day.
Go and tell the world how much God has done for us!

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