

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay
Welcome Back Sunday/Presbyterian Sharing Sunday
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski
16th Sunday after Pentecost - September 25, 2022

Words of Welcome

Gaps between rich and poor have long been a part of the economic and social structures of our human experience, but have you considered that this may also be a matter of the heart? If you are curious, stay with me a while. We begin with a call to worship.

Call to Worship

Here God speaks to us words of challenge and comfort.

Here Jesus stands among us, calling us to acts of mercy.

Even now, the Holy Spirit is moving in our midst,
filling us with hope and inspiring us to faithfulness.

Let us worship God, ever Three and ever One.

Let us praise God's holy name together!

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Hymn

When we are living

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1. When we are living, it is in Christ Jesus,
and when we're dying, it is in the Lord.
Both in our living and in our dying,
we belong to God; we belong to God.
2. Through all our living, we our fruits must give.
Good works of service are for offering.
When we are giving, or when receiving,
we belong to God; we belong to God.
3. 'Mid time of sorrow and in times of pain,
when sensing beauty or in love's embrace,
whether we suffer, or sing rejoicing,
we belong to God; we belong to God.
4. Across this wide world, we shall always find
those who are crying with no peace of mind,
but when we help them, or when we feed them,
we belong to God; we belong to God.

"When we are living," Words: Romans 14:8; paraphrase, v.1., anonymous; translation, Elise S. Eslinger, v.2-4, Roberto Escamilla; translation, George Lockwood. Music Hispanic folk song.
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Prayer of Adoration

Creating God,

beauty and harmony mark your creation.
As the seasons change,
we see you are still at work in the world,
transforming hearts and situations.
We praise you for all you do to repair injustice,
to bring peace to places of war,
working for goodness to prevail in all nations.
You offer us new possibilities day by day,
and so we place our trust in your redeeming power.
Renew our energy for mission this autumn
and open our eyes to new opportunities to reach out in Jesus' name.
Through the power of the Spirit, make us participants in your work,
bringing justice and joy into the world you love.

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Prayer of Confession

**Compassionate God,
you open your heart to those in need, and to your aching creation.
We confess we often turn away so that we do not have to see pain,
suffering or injustice, right before our eyes.
We don't like to feel uncomfortable or pressed into service.
Forgive us, and give us courage to love others as you love us
and reach out with the care we have witnessed in Jesus.**

Give us your Spirit of wisdom, O God, so that we may hear your Word speaking
through the Scriptures with ears that understand and hearts moved to love. Amen

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Assurance of Forgiveness

The prophet Micah declared that God requires of us three things:
to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.
To all who repent,
who act for justice and seek to serve God and neighbour in kindness,
God offers forgiveness and peace.
The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

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Scripture Reading Luke 16:19-31

¹⁹ 'There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ He called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send

Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.”²⁵ But Abraham said, “Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony.”²⁶ Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.”²⁷ He said, “Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house—²⁸for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.”²⁹ Abraham replied, “They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.”³⁰ He said, “No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.”³¹ He said to him, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.” ’

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Message What does the Lord Require of You

"Oh, Lord, you made many, many poor people
I realize, of course, it's no shame to be poor
But it's no great honor either!
So, what would have been so terrible if I had a small fortune?"
If I were a rich man...

For a certain generation of people if I had sung the line “If I were a rich man” you would immediately have thought of the play made movie, *Fiddler on the Roof*.

It seems to be a theme in our world. Who of us has not dreamt of winning a lottery and what we would do with the money? And most of us would not be disappointed if we had more money with each passing day. Still, we live in a world where that old adage is affirmed, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

Jesus did not shy away from conversations about rich and poor, as much as many people think it inappropriate to talk about money in a sermon. The story just ahead of this one in the Gospel of Luke was about a rich man and his dishonest manager. After Jesus told that story, the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, ridiculed Jesus. It may have been that they thought him ridiculous as everyone knew that those who were pious, faithful and righteous were rewarded with the blessings of power, money, and prestige. Even today there is a sense in some Christian churches that God blesses with material wealth those who are good and faithful Christians. It is known as the prosperity gospel.

Money, whether it be the ability to barter or have coin in ancient Israel or have money in our time, is necessary and the more you have of it the more power you have to control what happens in your own life. Of course, all of us want to be able to control our own situations so money is a conversation we cannot steer away from even as Christians.

In this part of Luke’s writing, Jesus is getting at a couple of points. One is that money has the power to take your focus off of God. It can move you from the things of God and

the heart to honouring instead your power and prestige, considering yourself above others.

This story of the rich man and Lazarus continues in that vein, it goes also to the heart of the matter. Who do we see? Who do we ignore? Now I of course am not privy to what is in your bank accounts. I don't know if you are comfortably situated financially or if you are struggling to make ends meet. But I can wonder with you about how we might use what we have, our resources of time, energy, talent, and money, to meet the needs of and protect those who are more vulnerable than ourselves.

You see, the stories of Jesus show that he had a deep concern for those who were sick, hungry, poor, and imprisoned. This story is just one of many that were either directed at helping others less fortunate or were instances where Jesus himself took care of those who were in need of restoration to healing and wholeness. In the Old Testament, or for the Hebrew people, the Torah, of which these Pharisees would have been experts, they seemed to have only read and remembered the promises about blessings for themselves, but neglected words of protection and help for others.

Deuteronomy 15 verses 7-11 state, "If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open you hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be...Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open you hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.'" (NRSV)

In the story Jesus told about the rich man and Lazarus, we are led to understand that the rich man had more than just enough. He dressed in purple and fine linen. Purple was definitely the colour of opulence. It was a colour that only the richest could afford as it was such a difficult dye to produce. The rich man also feasted sumptuously every day. This wasn't like a once in a while good meal like we might think of for Christmas, Easter, or Thanksgiving, this was a sumptuous feast everyday.

Outside the gate of his home was this "poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table." It would seem that he was never offered a thing. It was as if the rich man didn't even see Lazarus let alone remember the words of scripture that stated that one was to help those in need. The rich man must have known Lazarus' name as when they both died and the rich man found himself across a gulf that could not be bridged, shut out of heaven and Lazarus was with Father Abraham, he asked Abraham to send Lazarus to help him and when that was denied, he wanted Lazarus to warn the rich man's still living brothers who were living the same life of not seeing or caring of another's need.

Interesting that even in death the rich man feels that he can ask that Lazarus do his bidding. He doesn't even direct his inquiries at Lazarus. It feels like he still doesn't "see" Lazarus. Lazarus is just a means to an end for the rich man.

Now before you think that this story is only about heaven and hell and where we might spend our eternal home, let me redirect you. Might I suggest that this has more to do with how we live today and the choices we make in this lifetime. Jesus is about hearts. This is a story about who we see and don't see, who we care for and those we ignore. It is a story about love, not romantic love, but God's love shown through us to those around us.

If we were to situate this story in our own time it would not be difficult for those of us at St. Andrew's to do so. Every day we have those examples of Lazarus sitting and laying on the steps of the church. Everyday those of us who work and live in this downtown core are confronted with the story of Lazarus. On Sunday mornings, in order to make every one feel safe and also for safety should we need to exit the building, those who have spent the night or early morning hours on the steps are gently asked to move until after worship. Though you may see people still around, staff are careful to consider the needs of those who are entering the building, especially the elderly.

I am not suggesting that making sure the steps are safe and clean for entry and exit is not important and a necessary task, but it also takes away our being confronted with the poverty, homelessness, and hopelessness that is prevalent particularly in Thunder Bay.

We are happy to bring in food for the food bank remaining arms length from the problems that face so many. But to actually look a homeless indigenous man or woman in the eye and show loving kindness, that is difficult. When we do so we are faced with the inequity between rich and poor, between our blessing and the lack of blessing for others. We are smack dab in the story of the rich man and Lazarus.

One of the lines from the Bible that is a reminder to me, stitched into the stole gifted to me at my ordination, is from Micah 6:8, "...what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." To live this out we must first see people, all people, the poor, the lost, the lonely, the angry, the grieving, those who are sick whether mentally or physically. We need to see the homeless, the hungry, and those in prison.

It is not that you are required to give up all your possessions or give away all your money...but do you see and heed the call to love your neighbour? Not just the one next door but the one who is another human being. Are you able to bridge the divide in between rich and poor, whether that be wealth, health, hope, or love, and see the one in need.

This story is about our hearts. It is about compassion and care for others. Not just the ones we think are worthy, but maybe even more so those who we judge to be unworthy.

It is about hardened hearts softening through love. It is about God's love for us and for every human life.

So rather than trying to change things later, let's start seeing all people today. Start with a smile and a hello, but don't let yourself off the hook too easily. Examine your thoughts, your reactions, and continue to grow in compassion and care for other human beings who we know God loves, particularly the lost and those who lay at the gates whether real or imagined. This is God's call on our lives and it is the mission of the church, that all may know God's love and provision through our love and provision.

In Christ, with Christ, and through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers of the People

God of mystery and wonder,
We look around at the beauty of this world
and the worlds beyond us,
and sense that you have given each precious thing its place
and a way to sustain itself.
Thank you for the care you hold for your whole creation.
We also look around at the aching of the world
and sense that many precious things are under threat.
Too many pieces of your creation have fallen out of balance with each other.
Show us how we can help restore that balance
and protect what is at risk for the health of your whole creation.
God of all creatures great and small,
Make us stewards of what is precious to you.

God of energy and life,
We look around at the peoples of this world
and see your image and dignity in every variety of face and culture.
Thank you for the care you hold for all humankind.
Yet we look around at the people of this world
and see the aching of the hungry and hurting;
we hear the groans of parents whose children die in their arms
and feel the tears of children whose parents die too soon.
We know neighbours who are suffering
and hear of strangers who can't imagine how to make it through tomorrow.
Awaken our generosity to offer what healing and hope we can
to the lives you cherish in every neighbourhood and nation.
God of all creatures great and small,
Make us stewards of what is precious to you.

God of promise and possibility,
We look around at places where people collide with each other
We hear the grumbling of nations locked into old rivalries and grievances.

We watch the jousting of leaders impressed more by polls than effective policies.
We worry about the future of our communities and our children.
We hear your call to do justice and live generously.
Guide us as citizens to act for justice that brings peace and well being
to communities near and far.
Bless the ministries supported by Presbyterians Sharing
across Canada and around the world,
and grow in us the interest and intention to contribute to this outreach .
God of all creatures great and small,
Make us stewards of what is precious to you.

God of faithfulness and surprise,
We look at ourselves
and sometimes doubt we can make a difference or have an impact.
Challenge us to recognise the kinds of power we do have:
The love and compassion,
The courage and commitment,
The laughter and friendship,
The generosity and mercy
You inspire within us.
In all these gifts we know your power.
Through all these gifts, our lives have been changed.
Using these gifts in our lives,
bring Christ's love and mercy to the world you love,
And so we pray the words he 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

Prophets and parables remind us again and again to share our wealth with those living on the margins. Your contributions to the life and mission of this congregation help change the world by bringing God's love and goodness to those standing outside the gate. Let us bless God with our offering.

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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>

1. When the poor ones who have nothing share with strangers,
when the thirsty water give unto us all,
when the crippled in their weakness strengthen others,

Refrain

*then we know that God still goes that road with us,
then we know that God still goes that road with us.*

2. When at last all those who suffer find their comfort,
when they hope though even hope seems hopelessness
when we love though hate at times seems all around us,

Refrain

3. When our joy fills up our cup to overflowing,
when our lips can speak no words other than true,
when we know that love for simple things is better,

Refrain

4. When our homes are filled with goodness in abundance,
when we learn how to make peace instead of war,
when each stranger that we meet is called a neighbour,

Refrain

"When the poor ones," words by Miguel Manzano, J.A. Olivar,
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Benediction

Go from our gathering with confidence in your hearts,
for God's Spirit goes with you to give you strength,
God's Son walks beside you to see you through each day,
and God's holy presence will bless you with grace and mercy
now and evermore. Amen.

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