

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay – Liturgy

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

19th Sunday after Pentecost – October 16, 2022

Words of Welcome

Whose words and wisdom influence your thinking? How do you determine if there is truth in what is being said, taught, or demonstrated? These are important questions that direct how we live our lives. As we look at this and more we begin with a call to worship.

Call to Worship

We have gathered in God's holy presence,
the One who etches grace on our hearts.

This is the place where God will transform us into disciples.

We glorify our God, who yearns for justice,
not just for a favored few, but for the least of our world.

This is the place where God will write compassion on our souls.

We give thanks to God for unceasing grace;
we remember God's persistence in saving us.

This is the place where God will breathe the Word into our lives.

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*Hymn

Deep in the shadows of the past

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1. Deep in the shadows of the past,
far out from settled lands,
some nomads traveled with their God
across the desert sands.
The dawning hope of humankind
by them was sensed and shown:
a promise calling them ahead,
a future yet unknown.
2. While others bowed to changeless gods
they met a mystery,
invisible, without a name:
"I AM WHAT I WILL BE";
and by their tents, around their fires
in story, song and law,
they praised, remembered, handed on
a past that promised more.
3. From Exodus to Pentecost
the promise changed and grew,
while some, remembering the past,
recorded what they knew,
or with their letters and laments,
their prophecy and praise,
recovered, kindled and expressed
new hope for changing days.
4. For all the writings that survived
for leaders, long ago,
who sifted, copied, and preserved
the Bible that we know,
give thanks, and find its story yet
our promise, strength and call,
the model of emerging faith,
alive with hope for all.

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Opening Prayer

Holy God:

with the precious jewel of holy scripture, you share with us treasure of your heart.

Engrave your covenant -

your hopes, your dreams, your vision, your peace –

upon our hearts, that they might beat as one with yours.

Holy Word:

ever clear, you keep us from wandering down the wrong paths;

ever longed for, you make us persistent

in bringing justice to the lost and to the least;

ever practical, you show us how not to misplace our hearts.

Holy Wisdom:

as you breathe the Word into our hearts, tutor us in faithfulness

so we are trained in using the tools of justice and hope;

so we are equipped to share the good news with all;

so we become skilled in compassion and grace.

God in Community, Holy in One, we lift our hearts to you.

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Call to Confession

Seeking to follow Jesus, we often wander down the wrong roads. Impatient with God's schedule, we rush off to do things our way. Let us confess our foolishness, that we might receive God's hope for our lives.

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Prayer of Confession

Your words are given to us, Author of Life, so we might be reformed, but we are intent on changing others. Your words are offered to us so we might be transformed, but we are focused on conforming to our culture. Your words are spoken to lead us into new life, but we hold our old ways tight to our chests.

Forgive us, God of Wonder. Do not remember our sins, but continue to touch us with your steadfast mercy. Show us how to be persistent in living out our faith, even as you were so tenacious in offering us your grace and life in Jesus Christ.

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Inspiring God, by your Spirit, open our minds and hearts to receive your Word for today, whether it challenges or comforts us, so that we may live more faithfully as we follow Jesus Christ, your Living Word. Amen.

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Assurance of Forgiveness

Jesus reminds us that we are to be resolute in our lives of faithfulness and service. The good news is that God is steadfast in filling us with love and grace.

We are forgiven people. May we live as sisters and brothers in Christ, God's children in word and deed, in hope and joy. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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Scripture Reading 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

⁴In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: ²proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. ³For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, ⁴and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. ⁵As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

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

Message Itching Ears

What does your Bible look like? Is the cover worn and tattered? Are the pages dirty from you touching and turning them? Maybe like me you have several Bibles that have served you over the years...one from your childhood, another in your adulthood, or you have picked up a new version and so, rather than reading from the New King James Version, you now read as we do in church the New International Version, The New Revised Standard Version or some modern English translation, meaning also that the pages have not had a chance to become worn and soiled.

It could also be that you wouldn't have a clue where to find a Bible in your house or that you don't own one. Maybe today will encourage you to either continue in your regular practice of reading scripture or encourage you to begin.

In the letter to Timothy the writer has been sharing about his lived experience of scripture, of studying it and living by the truths of God that were to be learned through the stories contained within its pages. What we must remember is that the scriptures that

the writer was referring to were the Hebrew scriptures or what we call the Old Testament. This letter and many like it, along with the four Gospel accounts now form the New Testament, but at the time of writing Paul and Timothy had the Hebrew scriptures and possibly a few other writings that were considered God breathed.

Let me get to that for just a moment. In verse 16 we hear, “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for ever good work.” So often the word “inspired” becomes a mantra for saying that the words we find in the scripture were literally written as if by the hand of God, without error. But the Greek word for inspired more accurately is understood as “God breathed”. Just as God breathed life into human beings in the Genesis creation account, God put the breath into the writing of all of scripture through humans. Peter Holmes writes, “...God breathes life into his word. We must not smother it. We have to let it breathe. It is the word of God, and it is not only inspired but inspiring - it can breathe new life into us.”¹

So, holding that thought we continue looking at the writing. This was a letter written by Timothy’s mentor. We have already learned in an earlier part of the letter to Timothy that Paul was a teacher and a father figure for Timothy, that Timothy’s mother and grandmother had also been strong teachers and examples of living faith for Timothy. Timothy himself, though a younger leader than some may have expected, had been learning throughout the years about God and living that out in his work of ministry, in teaching, preaching, and leading others in faith to an understanding of God and God’s work with human beings and in the world. And things had become difficult for Timothy. There were people sharing false narratives, impostors as the writer calls them, wicked people who “will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived.” (v12).

Sounds like words for a time like ours. The voices of those who would deceive are strong whether in our families or on social media. For those of us of certain generations that grew up with the evening news and feeling that we could trust the new anchors, even that seems to have disappeared with many news outlets claiming that they have the corner on the truth. And it doesn’t help that our ears are itching for news, for the latest thing to attract our attention. We are bored with traditions, with the world not changing fast enough or changing too much to suit our individual preferences. We are targets for gossip and misinformation.

We cannot trust all that clamours for our attention in our world. It is hard to know, to discern, what is truth even when it comes from trusted sources. The one source of truth that has not changed though is the word of God that has come to us through the

¹ Holmes, J. Peter. *Feasting on the Word: Year C Volume 4 Season After Pentecost 2*. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2010. P185.

scriptures and what we have witness from those people in our lives whose motives and love were pure. This is where we are to go for guidance in how to live.

If you were to read the few verses that came just before verse 14 in the reading today you would see and hear that living in the truth of God, being inspired by scripture and taught by scripture does not mean that you will not suffer. In fact, we are to expect suffering. Paul writes, "Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions, and my suffering the things that happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. What persecutions I endured!" (v10-11).

What so many who have gone before us have learned, and what Paul was saying to Timothy was, suffering is a part of living. Yet, when we are living in the understanding of God's love, hope, and grace, we will be strengthened in our living, in our understanding of human suffering, and our faith will be emboldened. Scripture, read and studied alone will not grow us into mature adults. Suffering alone is just suffering. But God's word, read and studied, spoken about and pondered, along with the challenges of suffering that bring us into God's presence and hopefully into the presence of compassionate people will mold us, strengthen us, and give us peace, even when circumstance would suggest that we should throw our hands up in despair, anger, or indifference to suffering, our own and that of others.

When we don't go to scripture for our help in times of trouble or seek the counsel of wise, compassionate people, then our itching ears will look for that which will satisfy our passions, our desires. It will be difficult to discern what is truth. And to be sure even Christians disagree on how the Bible is to be understood and interpreted. It is then that to go back to God's grace, love, and forgiveness for everyone, you and me included, can be an anchor when the world feels like it will overwhelm us with its false messages.

The only way you can know the story of God's grace and love is to know what the Bible says. Yes, there is war and factions, stories of anger, of turning from God and God seemingly turning from God's people, but when read, knowing that the story finds its fulfilment in Christ, seeing the overarching theme of God desiring that people live lives full of love, grace, joy and peace, then you can find that all along we haven't needed another something new. The story of God is ours now, we are called to live it and share it with others. To do this we need to spend time in the scriptures, talking about it with those who have wisdom, not being afraid to question, and even to have times of not being able to understand.

And yet, when we read scripture, it is like it reads us back. How many stories have been heard of someone picking up the Bible and it was as if the words spoke to their very circumstances. The scriptures read over time, brought into our lives regularly have the

ability to lead us into understanding, into a life that is filled with hope and promise regardless of what we are facing. It is like the words breathe new life into us.

Timothy in Chapter 4 was urged to “proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.” (v1) Did you catch that, “with the utmost patience in teaching.” For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.” (v-4)

We are living in such a time as this. Don't let the teachers of, the sharers of misinformation and myths be the ones who dictate the way of your life or the way of our world. God's peace is for everyone. God's love is for everyone. God's hope is for a world where all have life and life abundant. We are the bearers of that news. If we don't proclaim it, who will?!

Let your words be a balm to itching ears. As the old hymns says,

Sing them over again to me, wonderful words of life;
Let me more of their beauty see, wonderful words of life.²

Prayers of the People

God of life,
You open our eyes on the world you love
and show us your presence and your purpose.
We see the beauty and wonder throughout creation
and feel the love and compassion you offer through friend and stranger.
For all these gifts we give you thanks.
We pray for those who cannot recognize these gifts in their lives.
Open their eyes to your presence and our companionship
so that they may know your steadfast love.

God of justice,
You open our eyes on the world and its anxiety
and show us struggle and conflict.
We see the burdens many carry in these stressful times.
Today we pray for those whose businesses are struggling;
for producers unsure they will receive a fair return;
for workers uncertain about their jobs prospect;
and for families weighed down by rising costs.
Open their eyes to new possibilities
and open our eyes to ways we can support them,

² Sing them over again to me. Words and Music: Philip Bliss. Words Public domain.

God of compassion,
You open our eyes on the world in pain
and show us suffering and despair.
We see all the challenges in health care
and tired professionals stretched beyond their limits.
Renew their strength of purpose.
We pray for communities struggling with chronic hunger
as well as the shifting reality of the pandemic,
and for all who face difficult diagnoses, painful illness, or delays in treatment.

Keep silence for 15 seconds.

Open their eyes to your mercy
and open our eyes to ways we can offer support.

God of wisdom,
You open our eyes on the world out of balance
and show us its many complexities.
We see old animosities and fresh upheavals
that put innocent lives at risk.
We pray for the millions displaced by current conflicts and natural disasters,
and pray that leaders in every country and community
will attend to the suffering of their people with mercy and justice.
Equip all those who prepare for ministry in our Colleges
with the knowledge and commitment needed to serve in complicated times.
Open all our eyes to creative solutions
for situations which break your heart and ours.
God who listens, hear our prayer, and in your mercy, answer.

And so we pray that your kingdom will come among us, in the words Jesus 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

The writer of Second Timothy calls us to “carry out your ministry fully.”
Our ministry is most fully carried out when our hearts are full—
full of love, justice, and generosity in sharing what we have with others.
Equipped for every good work,
we now present ourselves and our offerings before God.

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Hymn

Lord, speak to me

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| 1. Lord speak to me, that I may speak
in living echoes of your tone;
as you have sought, so let me seek
your erring children lost and lone. | 2. Oh lead me, Lord, that I may lead
the wandering and the wavering feet;
oh feed me, Lord, that I may feed
your hungering ones with manna sweet. |
| 3. Oh teach me, Lord, that I may teach
the precious truths that you impart,
and wing my words, that they may reach
the hidden depths of many a heart. | 4. Oh fill me with your fullness, Lord,
until my heart shall overflow
in kindling thought and glowing word,
your love to tell, your praise to show. |
| 5. Oh use me, Lord, use even me
just as you will, and when, and where,
until at last your face I see,
your rest, your joy, your glory share. | |

Words and Music: public domain

Benediction

May the love of God dwell in your heart;
may the grace of Christ uphold you in faith;
may the Holy Spirit equip you for ministry;
until Christ's kingdom, already in view,
comes in fullness among us.

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