

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

Baptism of the Lord/1st Sunday after the Epiphany - January 8, 2023

Call to Worship

We are called to serve in the name of Jesus, God's beloved Son,
God calls us by name because we are beloved.

God calls us to be a light to the nations.

We wait for God's teaching and to learn justice.

We are witnesses to God's goodness and grace who claims and loves us.

God's name be praised!

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Hymn

Like the murmur of the dove's song

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| 1. Like the murmur of the dove's song,
like the challenge of her flight,
like the vigour of the wind's rush,
like the new flame's eager might:
come, Holy Spirit, come. | 2. To the members of Christ's body,
to the branches of the Vine,
to the church in faith assembled,
to her midst as gift and sign:
come, Holy Spirit, come. |
| 3. With the healing of division
with the ceaseless voice of prayer,
with the power to love and witness,
with the peace beyond compare:
come, Holy Spirit, come. | |

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Creator God,
you formed the heavens and stretched them over us;
you spread out the earth and made it fruitful.
From your glory, you came to us in Jesus, your Son,
to touch the earth with healing and hope.
We praise you for all the gifts you have given us in Christ and in creation.
In the strength of the Spirit, we come to renew our commitment to you,
to serve in the name of Christ Jesus, who is one with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God now and always.

Merciful God,

in baptism you promise us forgiveness and new life. We confess that we often prefer our old ways. We resist the new opportunities you set before us. We cling to harmful habits and nurse grudges, failing to forgive one another. Have mercy

upon us, O God, and guide us to live with more grace and generosity through Christ our Lord.

Your Word, O God, comes to us in the translation of ancient scripture. Send your Holy Spirit to open our minds with understanding and our hearts with wisdom in the name of Jesus Christ, your Living Word. Amen.

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Assurance of Forgiveness

You are God's Beloved. You delight God's heart.
Believe this good news, my friends!

The Spirit of God rests upon us, anointing us with mercy and peace.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

©2023 Thom M. Shuman. <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com> January 8.

Scripture Reading Matthew 3:13-17

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' ¹⁵ But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.' Then he consented. ¹⁶ And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'

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

Message The Water's Fine

My husband Ken and I enjoy spending time camping especially where there are lakes to be explored and enjoyed. We both also always like to check out the water. As many of you are aware, lake water tends to be fairly cool and at times cold, this is especially known by those whose camps are along the shoreline of Lake Superior. Yet, that rarely stops Ken and I from donning our swimsuits and heading into the water. At times one of us heads in first and shouts back to the other, "The water's fine!" to encourage the other to brave the cold lake.

Water is a wonderful thing. It cleanses and renews us. Many people are aware that water is my element. At times I am encouraged to join an aqua fitness type class, but for me I just swim, the water becomes a place to let the concerns of life be swept away with each stroke. It is my happy place, my place of peace, a kind of meditation. The water restores me.

In many cultural stories of birthing or rebirth water plays an important role, so it is not surprising that water is the symbol or sign, the basic element that is used in baptism. Baptism represents us dying to an old way of living and being reborn so to speak.

Baptism indicates that we want our children to reject a way of life that separates them from God, the kind of life that is spiteful and self-centred...and instead live a life that is loving, giving, compassionate, and concerned for justice.”¹ Baptism and communion are both “opportunities for us to acknowledge the reality of God’s presence and love in our lives. We do so by responding to God’s claims and publicly committing ourselves [and our children] to God and God’s ways.”²

The scripture today was a retelling of the baptism of our Lord Jesus. We understand that Jesus did not need to be baptized, but it was a way for him to connect with the global human family. This baptism was for him a naming and a commissioning. God called Jesus the Beloved. It was only after this baptism that Jesus was sent out to face the wilderness temptation and then begin his public ministry. Though we are not Jesus, we know that we too are named God’s beloved.

You may be known by many names. As a child, my nickname was cadeaujte, meaning small gift in Dutch. I came five years after my older brother and sister and I guess my parents were ready for another child, hence the nickname. It was shortened to “teaut” and I loved that name. I always felt special within my family as that was my special name. Other names that make me feel special and loved are mom, sister, auntie, daughter, and now Grandma Joyce.

You may have names that made or make you feel special. Having said that, most of us know that school yard rhyme, “sticks and stones my break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” We also know that it’s not true. Stick and stones may break bones, but names can also scar us for life. Parents or others who are supposed to be caring and loving, who refer to their children as worthless, a problem, shameful, an embarrassment, often using expletives to embellish the name calling, can do a lifetime of damage regardless of our age from childhood right into adulthood.

Whether or not you feel worthy, in baptism we are given the name Beloved. You are a beloved child of God. Whether or not you are baptized you are a beloved child of God. That is the name you carry with you – Beloved – and with that name comes the identity that you are a child of God. Regardless of anything else in your life, you can claim this! Yet, being baptized means to be part of community. To be baptized means that you are intentionally in relationship with other believers, those who understand that this is the beginning of a lifelong journey of faith. Baptism is like the commissioning moment of Jesus, where we too begin our work as part of a community of faith that longs to live in relationship with God and others. To be part of a family that loves, shows compassion, seeks redeeming justice, not just for ourselves but for the world.

Baptism is a beginning. It is not one and done. How often have I had people come to me and ask if they can get their child’s baptism done, or just get it done. This is not a moment

¹ What happens in Baptism? a pamphlet for parents of infants. The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

² Ibid.

of done. This is an inaugural moment for a lifetime of relationships, mission, growth, transformation, and turning to God.

In baptism we say, “the water’s fine”. And it is fine because the water of baptism gives witness to God’s love for God’s people. The water is fine because in and through it we find community and love, meaning and purpose.

I would be remiss if I didn’t also acknowledge that the church can be a place where people get hurt. Sadly, we are imperfect. Sometimes individuals hurt other individuals in the church. Gossip and power mongering can be rampant in communities of faith as we put up with a lot due to our understanding of what it should mean to be a Christian.

In 1994 The Presbyterian Church in Canada made confession for the treatment of Indigenous people in its historical work. Just last year a confession to God and LGBTQI people was prepared and presented to the General Assembly. Right now the PCC is looking at how racism has and continues to be a challenge in our policies and work with congregations and the church at large.

Still, we, the church, aspire to be a place where the sacraments are visible signs of an invisible grace. Where baptism is a new beginning, a commissioning, and a place where relationships with each other and with God thrive and grow. Where we reach out to walk along side others, asking what their need is and finding ways to help them also know the love of God through our words and actions. Welcoming all into our family of faith with much love, grace, and compassion.

If you are not baptized and you have questions, please connect with me or another pastor. If this is something you feel called to in your life now, that is wonderful. Regardless of how you experience this, baptized or not, know that God loves you, loves your children, loves those we think are not loveable. Has named you Beloved.

The waters of baptism are an invitation to go deeper, whether you are parent of a baptized child, a baptized adult, or not baptized. The water’s fine. It is a place of beginnings, of healing, of wholeness, of commissioning, and of community.

Here Jesus says to you, I’ve been there, I’ve done this, come on in “the water’s fine!”

Prayers of the People

Loving God,
you invite us to bring to God our doubts and fears,
our joys and concerns, our petitions and our praise.

We thank you that you are with us in every circumstance,
and that you walk with us through times of celebration and sorrow.
This day, we open our hearts to you,
knowing your Spirit prays in us with sighs too deep for words.

Where people are tired from work or weary with responsibility;
where time and resources feel inadequate and costs overwhelming,
send your Spirit with strength and renewal...

Where people are facing danger or living under duress;
where people are persecuted for who they are or what they believe,
send your Spirit with courage and comfort...

Where people have suffered the loss of love or purpose;
and where love seems complicated and challenging,
send your Spirit to bind up the brokenhearted...

Where people are ill and worry for their future;
where people suffer pain or disability and long for healing;
and where people face the limits to life and options have run out,
send your Spirit with healing and hope...

Where people seek a reliable friend, a true comforter or wise adviser;
where the lonely long for company to cheer them,
and where isolation makes people doubt their value to others,
send your Spirit of wisdom and companionship...

Where new life is beginning and hope dawns;
where there is laughter and joy, healing and positive change,
where there is good news to celebrate
and opportunities open up for the year ahead,
send your Spirit with rejoicing and gratitude...

These things we pray in Jesus' name, gathering our prayers into one voice in the words he taught us:

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 has commissioned us to spread the Good News that God is at work in the world and that we are loved and blessed in Jesus' name.

We offer our gifts to God in thanksgiving for all this Good News.

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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

O love, how deep, how broad, how high

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1. O love, how deep, how broad, how high,
how passing thought and fantasy,
that God, the Son of God, should take
our mortal form for mortals' sake.
2. For us baptized, for us he bore
his holy fast and hungered sore;
for us temptations sharp he knew,
for us the tempter overthrew.
3. For us he prayed; for us he taught;
for us his daily works he wrought:
by words and signs and actions, thus
still seeking not himself, but us.
4. For us to wicked hands betrayed,
scourged, mocked, in purple robe arrayed,
he bore the shameful cross and death,
for us gave up his dying breath.
5. For us he rose from death again;
for us he went on high to reign;
for us he sent his Spirit here
to guide, to strengthen and to cheer.
6. All glory to our Lord and God
for love so deep, so high, so broad,
the Trinity whom we adore
forever and forevermore.

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Benediction

You are God's beloved.
Go in the assurance of this love,
to engage the challenges God
sets before us with confidence.

And may God who is the Source,
Saviour and Spirit of life go with you,
and give you joy and peace, now and always.

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