

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski
11th Sunday after Pentecost - August 13, 2023

Call to Worship

Here, in this place, God welcomes all the dreamers, as well as the doubters:
here, the worriers and wanderers can call on God by name.

Here, in this time, we can remember all the ways God has graced us:
here, in these moments, we are reminded that God is with us, always!

Here are gathered those daring enough to step out of comfort into the unknown:
**here, in this faith space, we will find the courage to cry out,
'God, save us!' in every situation.**

©2023 Thom M. Shuman. <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com> August 13.

Hymn

I, the Lord of sea and sky

592

1. I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin my hand will save.
I who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?

Refrain

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night; I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

2. I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my people's pain.
I have wept for love of them: they turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone, give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them. Whom shall I send?

Refrain

3. I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them; my hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send?

Refrain

"Here I am Lord," words by Daniel L. Shutte © Text: Based on Isaiah 6. Text and music © 1981, OCP.
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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Surprising and mysterious God,
you come to us when we least expect it,
calling us out of our routines and plans,
inviting us to follow Christ into new opportunities.
We praise you for the many ways you come to us.

In moments of fear, you speak with words of reassurance.
In moments of doubt, you reach out your hand to hold.
In moments of turmoil, you bring calm to the storm.
You are faithful to us through everything life can bring.

**Merciful and patient God,
we confess that we still experience fear and doubt,
even though you reach out to us with saving grace.
You call us to live with courage and perseverance,
yet we can give up too easily and opt for the safer route.
You encourage us to be bold in our struggles for justice,
yet we remain silent in the face of unfairness.
Forgive us all the times we let you down.
Renew our lives through your mercy and grace.
And so we place our trust in you this day and every day,
and honour you as our Redeemer and Saviour,
in the name of Christ, our Lord and friend. Amen**

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Assurance of Pardon

Rest assured, God offers forgiveness and saving grace to everyone. Accept these gifts for yourselves and offer forgiveness to others in the name of Christ our Lord.

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Scripture Reading Matthew 14:22-33

²² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. ²⁵ And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'

²⁸ Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' ²⁹ He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. ³⁰ But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' ³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

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Message Fear and Faith

I recently learned that there are bridges in which people can request a service to have someone else drive their vehicle over. One such case is the Mackinac Bridge. The following is taken from an article about the service.

"It's a daily routine for some, but for others crossing the Mighty Mack can cause serious anxiety, especially when you add a high wind warning with speeds up to 40 miles per hour.

All they need to do is call the Mackinac Bridge Authority and ask for a ride, and they will send someone within minutes to come and drive your car across for you.

For some people it's the height and for others it's the fear of bridges in general.

About 100,000 people cross the Mackinac Bridge every month, but according to the Mackinac Bridge Authority, about five people a day need to be driven across by one of their employees.

"Some people don't know it until they get out on the bridge actually, or they'll drive and get really close then it sets it," said Todd Mayer, a steeple jack for the bridge authority who helps people get across.

The bridge is just under five miles long and its highest point is 155 feet tall, making it understandable why some would get nervous.

It's part of Todd Mayer's job to help escort weary drivers across the bridge, and he had seen some pretty extreme cases.

"I've seen people that curled up in the fetal position laying on the back seat of their vehicle or hiding their heads or shielding their eyes, covering up with a jacket, because, you know it was that traumatic of a deal for them," Mayer said.

Todd says he feels for the people who are unable to cross the bridge on their own.¹

Fear can be debilitating as many of us are likely aware. If you don't have a fear of something in particular you likely know someone who does. Personally, I have a fear of heights and of enclosed places, along with not being impressed by snakes, spiders, and moths. For the most part those fears do not impact my daily living, so I am fortunate, but I have met people whose fears have stopped them from enjoying life or moments in life. I know people who have not been able to leave their homes, or for whom dogs make it near impossible for them to take a walk.

Then there are the fears associated with physical and mental health. You or a loved one get a diagnosis and your lives are turned upside down. Death of a spouse sets you on a path of navigating unknowns without your sidekick. You lose your job or are simply trying to find work and nothing seems to be happening. The concerns of how one supports

¹ [Drivers have option to be driven across Mackinac Bridge | WPBN \(upnorthlive.com\)](#) Accessed August 11, 2023.

themselves and family, or just finding meaning and purpose through work seems always out of reach.

Fear is one of those deep emotions that sometimes expresses itself as anger. Fear can be isolating. It can be paralyzing. There are many doctors and psychologists who work to help people overcome their fears. Fear is real.

This may be why the words about fear were what drew my attention this week in the reading about Jesus and Peter walking on water. You can find this story of Jesus walking on water in the gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John, but only in Matthew do we get the addition of Peter.

And you have to love Peter. Throughout the gospel stories, Peter represents humanity as no other. He fumbles and falls, blurts out stuff, praises Jesus, recognizes Jesus' as Lord, and then in another moment wants to protect Jesus, not realizing the full extent to which Jesus has got this ministry thing and more.

In this story, Jesus, who has been trying to get off by himself to pray because he has heard of the death of John the Baptizer, been rejected by his hometown, and on his way to pray sees the need of a multitude of people and so meets that need in what is known as the story of the feeding of the five thousand, finally Jesus sees his opportunity and sends the disciples in a boat to go on ahead to the other side of the lake while he dismissed the crowds. Then you know how the story goes, Jesus went up the mountain by himself to pray. Something to note is that through it all Jesus does not forget that he needs time to be with God.

The story continues. Picture the scene...

When evening came, Jesus was there alone,²⁴ but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.²⁵ And early in the morning Jesus came walking towards them on the lake.²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear.²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'

They were terrified. Now some of these men were fishermen. They knew what to do and how to handle the storm, what they were all terrified of was the person walking on the lake. For Jewish readers water had meaning. In Genesis the world was first covered by water. Life came when God swept away the waters and said, "Let there be light." How can one forget Noah and the flood. Then there was the parting of the Red Sea that allowed the Hebrew people to leave Egypt. Significant historical events that impacted the faith and understanding of the Jewish people had many water stories.

So, Matthew writing about Jesus' walking on water means something to his readers. But the water itself was not what terrified the men, it was that someone could walk on water

that got them. It meant that the person, real or not, had power over the water. In just a couple of sentences we heard that the men were terrified and cried out in fear.

Jesus' words to them... "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Take heart. What compassionate and loving words to say. Reassuring words, followed by "It is I." They knew the one coming to them. They had trusted him with their very lives just by choosing to follow Jesus. They had participated with him in feeding the multitude. And now he was there before them in a way they did not recognize in their minds, but certainly his words would have spoken to their hearts. And in the face of their fears he says, "Do not be afraid. "

Still, this was not enough for our impetuous Peter as he answers, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." And Jesus says, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened." There is that fear word again. "And beginning to sink Peter cried out "Lord, save me!" ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him."

Peter got distracted and that distraction made him afraid. But Jesus was right there. And though the words said by Jesus, can be heard with various tones of voice, I believe, given Jesus' care of people, the tone was one of compassion. "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Fear and faith. They go together. We all fear. It may be a phobia; it may be fearing a change. Yet, fear can also be a motivator. We can choose to fear and have faith anyway. Faith in our own abilities, faith in the help one can received from friends, family, or professions, and certainly faith that Jesus has got you. Just as Jesus reached out to Peter as he began to sink, Jesus saves him. He saves him, not expecting that he will never fear again, but rather so that Peter can once again move from that and with courage step out in faith that God's got this.

And remember, Peter was not alone. He was the one who got out of the boat, but there were witnesses who all were empowered by that experience. They too were strengthened in their faith. And when all calmed down, their breathing and the breath of the winds, they were able to say, "Truly Jesus is the Son of God."

In our own lives fear and faith reside together, just as joy and sorrow, hope and despair reside together. We feel and experience these emotions not as polar opposite, rather as things that can be jumbled up, mixed together. Welcome to being human. Whatever you face this day or in the days to come may the phrase you hear looping through your head be the voice of Jesus saying, "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid." Know that Jesus is aware that doesn't take away fear, but may it be enough to calm you, bring peace, courage and motivation to live fully as a person of God, and at the same time those who witness your example of living may too be empowered in faith and through fear.

In Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen

Prayers of the People

Astonishing God, you can always surprise us.
You come to us in unforeseen circumstances and in unexpected people.
We give you thanks for help offered by a stranger,
kindness in an anxious moment,
good news that changed expected outcomes,
relief in the midst of ongoing crises
and signs of hope when things seemed bleak.
We pray for all who face upheaval and uncertainty, whatever the cause.
Fill our hearts with compassion and understanding for the fearful.

Steadying God,

Reach out to us in the storms of life.

God of peace, you reassure us.
You remind us not to be afraid when troubles arise.
We pray for those who struggle with illness or grief, anxiety or depression.
We remember those who feel worthless or ashamed, whatever the reason.
May they know your peace and strength.
Equip us to reach out in every way we can
to embody your love in our words and actions.

Steadying God,

Reach out to us in the storms of life.

God of hope, you challenge us.
You come to us in the midst of the world's troubles
and invite us to stand for truth and work for justice.
We pray for all those people crying out for fair treatment,
working against racism and discrimination, telling painful stories of their lives.
Open our hearts with understanding
and motivate us to act for change.
We pray for those who resist the stories of injustice and defend inequality.
Open their minds to the truths they deny,
and show them new possibilities for relationships that bridge divides.
Send your Spirit to work in our communities to create mutual respect
and new ways to live as neighbours.

Steadying God,

Reach out to us in the storms of life.

Faithful God, we place our trust in you and your purposes.
Answer our prayers according to your wisdom and will,
for we offer them humbly in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray 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

In grateful response for the times we've known the assurance of the presence of the Holy, we bring our tithes, gifts and offerings. This is our opportunity to acknowledge the ways in which our lives are lifted from fear because of our faith.

We joyfully share what we've brought, rejoicing as we're set free to live fully in hope and promise of God with us.

Adapted from [August 13, 2023 - Center for Faith and Giving](#)

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

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

321

1. Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, who rules all creation.
my soul, praise God who alone is your health and salvation.
Come, all who hear, sisters and brothers draw near,
joining in glad adoration.
2. Praise to the Lord, who in all things so wondrously reigning
hides you with sheltering wings, ever gently sustaining.
Have you not seen how your heart's wishes have been
granted through God's kind ordaining?
3. Praise to the Lord, who will prosper your work, who defends you;
surely God's merciful goodness here daily attends you;
ponder anew what the Almighty can do,
when in great love God befriends you.
4. Praise to the Lord, and with all that is in me adoring,
all who have life and breath, come with glad
praises outpouring! Let the Amen sound from God's people again:
now and forever adoring!

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Benediction

Whether the week ahead brings storms or calm for you,
take heart. God is with us. Do not be afraid.

And may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, now and always. Amen.

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