

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay**  
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski  
12th Sunday after Pentecost. August 20, 2023

## Call to Worship

Here we can come together, people searching for healing and hope:  
**here we are met by the One who would bless us with abundant life.**

Here we are called to gather as the family of God:  
**we may find those who are strangers, yet are beloved siblings of ours.**

Here we discover the truth that God makes no distinctions among us:  
**here we are welcomed and embraced by the One whose arms are open to all.**

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## Hymn

*I come with joy*

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1. I come with joy, a child of God,  
forgiven, loved and free,  
the life of Jesus to recall,  
in love laid down for me,  
in love laid down for me.
2. I come with Christians far and near,  
to find, as all are fed,  
the new community of love  
in Christ's communion of bread,  
in Christ's communion of bread.
3. As Christ breaks bread and bids us share,  
each proud division ends.  
The love that made us, makes us one,  
and strangers now are friends,  
and strangers now are friends
4. The Spirit of the risen Christ,  
unseen, but ever near,  
is in such friendship better known,  
alive among us here,  
alive among us here.
5. Together met, together bound  
by all that God has done,  
we'll go with joy, to give the world  
the love that makes us one,  
the love that makes us one.

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## Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Welcoming God,  
you make all things new.  
You invite all people to receive your blessing.  
Justice and right relations have their source in you.  
We are filled with joy to be counted among your children.  
As we gather, make us one in witness and worship.  
Together, we lift our voices to proclaim your all-encompassing love.  
May our praise join with the praise of all your people, and reach the ends of the  
earth, for you are our Maker and the hope of the world you love.

**Merciful God,**

**we confess that we have not lived as you have taught us. Forgive us those times we have not welcomed others into our community; and those times we have avoided others because something about them made us uncomfortable. Forgive us the ways we have judged people unfairly. Reveal to us our own prejudices, and show us how to see your goodness in those who seem different from us. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.**

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. Second Sunday after Epiphany, January 15, 2023. Year A.

## **Assurance of Forgiveness**

While it is true that we have all sinned,  
it is a greater truth that we are forgiven through God's love in Jesus Christ.  
To all who humbly seek the mercy of God, I say,  
be at peace with God, with yourself and with one another.

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## **Scripture Reading Matthew 15:21-28**

<sup>21</sup> Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup>Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.' <sup>23</sup>But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.' <sup>24</sup>He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' <sup>25</sup>But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' <sup>26</sup>He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' <sup>27</sup>She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' <sup>28</sup>Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly.

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

## **Message Faith in Action**

I have someone in my life that is an Edmonton Elks fan. Now for those of you who do not follow the Canadian Football League or CFL for short, you would not be aware that up until Thursday of this past week the Elks had not won a game all season. On top of that, the Edmonton Elks set the all-time North American professional sports record with 21 consecutive home game losses. Now to be a fan of the Elks is to have faith, well that or hope. The comment I heard the morning after the win on Thursday was "Maybe they can win the next nine games and split the season with nine wins and nine losses." Now that is someone with both faith and hope!

Even if one is not a religious person you will hear of people putting their faith in someone or something. Someone who supports a particular political party or leader is putting their faith into the person or the platform they or the party represent. We will tell people to

have faith that everything will work out when they endeavour on a new path or are trying to work out a problem. Faith in this case is more in one-self or the workings of the universe than believing that God is with us.

The last couple of weeks of scripture readings has me wondering about faith as well. Last week the reading was about Jesus and Peter walking on water. Peter is doing pretty well until he gets distracted by the storm and winds around him and starts to sink. Jesus says to him “You of little faith why did you doubt?” In today’s reading Jesus responds to the persistent actions of a Canaanite woman with the words, “Woman, great is your faith!”

Peter was a disciple who went on to do much work in the name of Jesus while the woman disappears into her world, fortunate to have her story shared at all in this male dominated world and as an outsider to the Jewish faith on top of that. The two stories have me pondering a couple of things but let me start with the question of faith. Actually, I have a lot of questions about faith. Many of which I have to say came from reading a commentary by Karoline Lewis, a professor at Luther Seminary in Minneapolis.

In the article she poses many questions starting with “Little faith or great faith? How do we tell the difference? What are the criteria? Who gets to decide?”<sup>1</sup> Much of my reflection today comes from her writing about faith. Think about how vague the word faith is. It seems to cover a lot of ground and so when we tell someone to have faith, what are we saying? As we consider the concept of faith, hear Lewis’ questions again, “Little faith or great faith? How do we tell the difference? What are the criteria? Who gets to decide?”

We speak about faith as if we all should understand what that means, but faith is as individual as the person. One’s faith is based in their understanding of God and their lived experience, so none of us is likely to have the same faith. As Christians we have faith in God, but how that is expressed and lived out is different for each one of us.

I think back to Peter and the story of walking on water. Jesus may have said that he had little faith, but that faith was enough for him to continue to live his life as a follower of Jesus and move others to live out their faith. He was a leader in the early church, a trusted and wise advisor. Was his “little faith” greater than the woman’s “great faith?”

And thinking of the woman’s faith, I share again more questions from Karoline Lewis as she ponders this scripture about the Canaanite woman...

Why is her faith great? Is it because she is persistent? So, if I am more persistent — and about what, I might ask — will my faith be greater? Is her faith great because she names her plight, she is honest, she names her need? Is her faith great because she asks for help? Is her faith great because she gets Jesus to change his mind? Is her faith great because she recognizes who Jesus is? Is her faith great because she thinks Jesus can do something to help her daughter? Is

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<sup>1</sup> [Karoline Lewis "Getting" Great Faith - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#) Accessed August 18, 2023.

her faith great because she rebuts Jesus' proposed boundaries? And then is faith the willingness to go past these boundaries, set either by others or those we place on ourselves?<sup>2</sup>

These questions help one to recognize just how complex faith can be. There is no simple way to define faith. We talk about growing into our faith, and maybe it is because it takes lived experience to get a handle on what faith means to each of us as individuals. Being part of the church is in part the way we grow in faith as we learn, worship, and work together. Still, how each of us understands our faith is different even when we do these things together.

This is the struggle and the beauty of the Christian faith. Each of us can have faith, but how God works in and through that depends on you and your relationship with God. One of the gifts of faith is that God can take all of our unique ways of knowing and expressing faith and make a community of faith where our love and actions can grow others in faith and knowledge of God's work in the world.

It would seem that having little faith or great faith is not the question, but rather how we live out our faith that makes the difference. The story should also make us consider that faith is something that is open to everyone, from Peter, the trusted if impetuous disciple, to a woman outside the Jewish faith. A woman who was up against barriers of religious affiliation, culture, country, and gender.

There is much about this story that is truly disturbing. It portrays Jesus in a way that we can get downright angry about, from his choice to first ignore the woman shouting out at him to him basically calling her a dog. Addressing all of that would be another sermon or three. For Jesus, someone who saw the needs of thousands in a crowd and stopped to heal them and feed them to now have him ignore the cries of a mother searching for healing for her daughter, well it just doesn't jive. Still, in the end, her "great faith" as Jesus calls it... even if we can't define it...her great faith changes Jesus' response and the daughter was healed.

However, we define faith it appears that it is lived out in action rather than a static concept. Faith grows, deepens, moves people to try to get out of a boat and walk on water or shout to get the attention of a man who might be able to heal her daughter. We talk about stepping out in faith, growing in faith, living in faith. Faith is dynamic, changing, and experienced. It is for those in the church and for those who have never stepped foot in a church.

Faith is about relationship with God. Faith grows and fluctuates. At times it feels like a struggle and at others times it is the rock that we stand on. As you might have figured out by now, your faith is your faith and no one can judge it or measure it. Maybe the message today is to take the time to ponder your faith, where you are at, what you may like to do so that your faith continues to grow in ways that God can use you to make a

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

difference in your home, with family, friends, or co-workers, with care givers and in community.

If nothing else this story about the Canaanite woman tells us that life is messy. Questions come up, we face resistance and challenge. We can be ignored and frustrated. We live out our faith in the messiness of life. Whether you feel you have little faith or great faith, know that God can work with that, loves you and desires a deeper relationship with you. May your own questions guide you to a deeper faith and give you courage to live your faith in service to God and others. Through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Prayers of the People**

Living God,  
people of all places and times have reached out to you in times of desperation, with so many different needs. You have compassion for each one and so we thank you for the depth of your love. This day we set before you our many different hopes and concerns. Fill us with your compassion as we pray from the breadth and depth of our lives:

We pray for all that we are and all that we do,  
all we wish we could do and all we long for....

We pray for everything we work for in our church and community,  
and everything we hope for in the face of so much change.....

We pray for the choices we face in our country and community,  
in our homes and workplaces,  
and for all the responsibilities we bear in our different roles...

We pray for the troubles that weary us, the situations that puzzle us  
and the uncertainty that surrounds us...

We remember before you each situation that worries us  
and each person we care about....

Living Christ, you are the Source of peace and new possibility for us all.  
Help us trust in your grace for today and tomorrow.

Fill us with the strength and hope we need to walk with you, united in your love.  
For it is as your loyal followers we dare to pray the words you 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

With deep gratitude for the healing and freedom that Jesus offers,  
let us present our offerings to God.

Through our gifts, may that healing and freedom be shared  
in God's world in Christ's name.

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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

*Called as partners in Christ's service*

587

1. Called as partners in Christ's service,  
called to ministries of grace,  
we respond with deep commitment,  
fresh new lines of faith to trace.  
May we learn the art of sharing,  
side by side and friend with friend,  
equal partners in our caring  
to fulfil God's chosen end.
2. Christ's example, Christ's inspiring,  
Christ's clear call to work and worth,  
let us follow, never faltering,  
reconciling folk on earth.  
Men and women, richer, poorer,  
All God's people, young and old,  
Blending human skills together,  
Gracious gifts from God unfold.
3. Thus new patterns for Christ's mission,  
in a small or global sense,  
help us bear each other's burdens,  
breaking down each wall or fence.  
Words of comfort, words of vision,  
words of challenge, said with care,  
bring new power and strength for action,  
make us colleagues, free and fair.
4. So God grant us for tomorrow  
says to order human life  
that surround each person's sorrow  
with a calm that conquers strife.  
make us partners in our living,  
our compassion to increase,  
messengers of faith, thus giving  
hope and confidence and peace.

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## Benediction

We came together to worship.

**Now may we go to serve others with God's grace and love.**

We were called to this place as members of God's family.

**Now we head out to discover strangers are but siblings of Jesus, like us.**

We have been reminded that there are no differences between any of us.

**Now we journey with the Spirit to welcome each person into  
the embrace of hope and justice.**

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