

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay**  
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski  
18th Sunday after Pentecost - October 1, 2023.

## Call to Worship

We come, so God can teach us goodness and love for each person  
**We will complete God's love by having the same compassion as God.**

We come, so Jesus can lead us into lives of service and obedience.  
**We will complete Jesus' hopes by putting others before ourselves.**

We come, so the Spirit can help us to empty ourselves for God and those around us.  
**We will complete the Spirit's peace by sharing our lives with others.**

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## Hymn

### *Seek ye first*

**625**

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| 1. Seek ye first the kingdom of God<br>and his righteousness,<br>and all these things shall be added<br>unto you.<br>Allelu, alleluia! | 2. Ask, and it shall be given unto you;<br>seek and ye shall find;<br>knock, and the door shall be opened<br>unto you.<br>Allelu, alleluia! |
|--|---|

3. We do not live by bread alone,  
but by every word  
that proceeds from the mouth of God.  
Allelu, alleluia!

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## Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Steadfast God,  
as the seasons change, we see that you are still at work in the world, transforming hearts and situations. You have shown us the true face of power in Jesus Christ, reaching out with healing and hope to touch desperate lives. We praise you for your love that works for reconciliation among neighbours and nations in this divided world. Renew our hope by the gift of your Spirit at work among us, so that we can live to praise you with the whole Church that bears Jesus' name.

**All-embracing God,  
we confess we don't like to feel uncomfortable.  
We often turn away from suffering or injustice,  
even when the evidence is right before our eyes.  
We don't like to feel responsible for reaching out, even when we could.  
Forgive us, O God. Give us courage to love others as you love us,  
and respond with the same mind we meet in Christ Jesus. Amen.**

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October 1, 2023. Year A.

## Assurance of Forgiveness

We come together to exalt our Creator, to renew ourselves for service, to share fellowship with Christ and one another.

In our gathering we receive the energizing assurance of God's presence and forgiveness and love. Glory be to God.

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## Scripture Reading Matthew 21:23-32

<sup>23</sup> When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?' <sup>24</sup> Jesus said to them, 'I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. <sup>25</sup> Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?' And they argued with one another, 'If we say, "From heaven", he will say to us, "Why then did you not believe him?" <sup>26</sup> But if we say, "Of human origin", we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet.' <sup>27</sup> So they answered Jesus, 'We do not know.' And he said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

<sup>28</sup> 'What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, "Son, go and work in the vineyard today." <sup>29</sup> He answered, "I will not"; but later he changed his mind and went. <sup>30</sup> The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, "I go, sir"; but he did not go. <sup>31</sup> Which of the two did the will of his father?' They said, 'The first.' Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, the tax-collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. <sup>32</sup> For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax-collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

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## Message It's in the doing

"By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" (21:23)

Whether you are conscious of it or not, there is a lot of talk about authority. Who has power? Who can decide? Who has the most authority?

We all submit to authority of some kind or another. There are hierarchies in our lives. As children, parents, teachers and care givers are the authorities in our lives. As adults we see police and the justice system as having the authority to keep order in our communities and society. Elected officials are given the authority to make decisions for us based on the fact they were voted into their positions. Your boss has authority over you, and if you live in apartments or seniors' home you have had to submit to the authority of those who run those places. Just recently the hospital reinstated a masking policy as cases of Covid and other respiratory diseases begin to rise as we head into the fall. The hospital has the authority to do so.

Many times we question authority, as we should. Power likes to be powerful and it needs to be kept in check. There is a balance between power and authority and our own lives that must be maintained in order for us to live together in community. This has always been the case, but as we have seen of late, living well together and particularly in countries like Canada which operates as a democracy, the questions of authority and power are held in a delicate balance that require we see the value in all people and places in order for us to feel safe, heard, and cared for.

It is with these thoughts on authority that we come to the opening of this scripture and the question of “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” What is pertinent here is the timing and the location of this event. If you were to look back in the scripture, Jesus had just the day before triumphantly entered Jerusalem and then headed into the temple and overturned tables of money changers and merchants. This was now the next day. Once again Jesus was in the temple and the authorities, the chief priests and the elders of the people as it were, came to him as Jesus was teaching.

So Jesus has the audacity of going back to the temple the day after he has ran roughshod over things much to the chagrin of those who see this temple as their abode, their place of authority. They also know that Jesus has a strong following and they have to be careful how they approach the situation. So they asked Jesus the question about his authority. It is obvious that he has not been given the authority by them to teach or do any of the things he was doing in the temple otherwise he would have been one of them.

Still, Jesus is a teacher, a rabbi, well versed in the practices of the Jewish people and so as a good rabbi is apt to do, he answers their question with another question. The trap they have set for him, to trip him up and give them reason to throw him out or worse, well now they find themselves in a catch because no matter how they answer it is not going to lead to a satisfactory outcome for them.

They can't answer Jesus' question, at least without having to admit something they don't want to admit, so he doesn't answer their question. However, that does not leave us off the hook.

A while back we heard the question from Jesus as he was with his disciples where he asked, “Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15) This is a central question for the Gospel of Matthew and one that we are required to think about. The question posed by Jesus to these authorities is basically asking them, “Who do you say that I am?”

It is also relevant to the very short parable that followed. The story of the two sons is straightforward and has an easy answer. The Pharisees and elders of the people have no difficulty with this question of which son did the will of the father. Of course, it was the one who though saying “no” first, on second thought went out to the vineyard. The one who said “yes”, and didn't get up from the television didn't make any difference in his father's day.

Now I could go on and make more comparisons about this story and the authorities, but I would rather take a look at our own response to Jesus' parable and relate that to our lives.

For starters, do we see Jesus as an authority in our lives? Do his words and life have an impact on us? You see Jesus had an impact on those who were seen as the bottom of the rung in society, but he only made angry those who had authority. Those whose structures and influence would be shaken or transformed if Jesus was truly the Messiah. But it may be that we are more like the Pharisees and rulers than we like to think. We like to come on Sunday mornings to sit and hear about Jesus, but how much harder it is for us to walk out these doors and actually live the life of a Christian. It is also hard on us when people come into this space and for goodness' sake want to change anything. We certainly like status quo. It is more manageable, less threatening.

However, Jesus was a destabilizing figure in his time and really should be in our time. To be a Christian means to be a follower of Christ. In fact, many people are leaving behind the term "Christian" because it has come to mean power, authority, status quo. But to be a follower of Christ means to follow Jesus, to embody, to live out daily what Jesus did. In Matthew chapter 4:18-22 Jesus calls the first disciples and his words were not "believe me", but "follow me."

To follow meant times of teaching and learning, but it was also in their doing that they followed Jesus as they went out into the countryside with Jesus and particularly in their ministry following the resurrection of Christ. Jesus spent his time with the least likely and most helpless. He was accused of dining with sinners and tax collectors. Yet, if we are followers of Christ then we too will find ourselves not only at the dinner table with those one might consider respectable, but also, and maybe more so, in the places and with the people that are the least favored in our society.

So often our churches become our temples and we don't like any one playing around with that. Don't change the music, or the way we say the Lord's prayer. Let's not mess with the décor or make things more functional. We spent time protecting the building rather than spending our time here and seeing it as part of our work. The worship service is the work of the people done in preparation for what we are called to with others throughout the week. It does not mean that our building is not important, but is it important only to the extent that it allows us to be strengthened for our journey with Christ and how the building is used to serve others, not just ourselves.

Followers of Christ, are we prepared to go and do the work that is asked of us, even if at first we are reluctant? Or are we more apt to sit here and agree with all that is being said, only to walk out these doors and sit back in front of the television, so to speak?

This time of worship, this sermon, any sermon, is only as good as it moves us to become followers of Christ who embody, who live out our lives as people who are transformed by Christ, who live in grace and offer that grace to others. Christian faith is active. It is a faith in motion. Yes, time for stillness is important to the extent that it gives us time to be

with God, to be renewed, and restored. Yet, we cannot stay still. We answer the question of “Who do people say Jesus is?” as we go out like Jesus and minister to people’s needs. As followers of Christ, we can do no less.

We do it with the authority of Jesus who gave himself to death so that we might know life, full and abundant life, in the power of the Holy Spirit, steeped in the love and grace of God. Amen.

## **Prayers of the People**

God, You are a God of compassion and love.

Time after time we have experienced your care and provision.

Time after time You’ve answered our prayers and met our needs—  
often in ways we could never have dreamed possible.

We praise You for Your faithful love toward us.

Because we have known Your love, we come to You with confidence,  
offering our prayers for the world that You love.

We see so much pain and suffering; so much anger and frustration and despair.

It’s easy to feel overwhelmed by the needs around us. But we continue to bring our  
prayers to You in faith, because we know that nothing is impossible for You.

You are the God who rained down bread from heaven, and made water flow from a  
rock in the desert; the God who resurrected Jesus Christ from the dead, and who  
brings new life and hope to all who believe. For You, all things are possible.

We pray for those suffering the effects of recent natural disasters....

Because nothing is impossible for You, O God,  
**hear our prayer, and in Your love, answer.**

We pray for the regions of our world caught up in violence and threats of violence:

Because nothing is impossible for You, O God,  
**hear our prayer, and in Your love, answer.**

We pray for those who live with serious illness,  
those with chronic pain,  
those without access to proper medical care,  
those for whom treatment is no longer an option.

Because nothing is impossible for You, O God,  
**hear our prayer, and in Your love, answer.**

Merciful God,

You sent Your Son, Jesus Christ, to show us a different way to live—  
the way of deep humility and obedience.

You’ve called us to love one another,  
and to work together with one heart and mind,  
balancing our needs with the needs of those around us.

Give us courage to follow faithfully, and with integrity—  
with actions that bear witness to the words we speak,  
and worship that overflows into our daily tasks and relationships—  
so that our lives will bring glory and honour to You,  
our Redeemer and Lord who taught us to pray...

[re:Worship: Prayers of the People: Proper 21 A \(re-worship.blogspot.com\)](http://re-worship.blogspot.com)

## 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

Our offering is a response to God's work in our lives and in the world.  
With grateful hearts we offer our gifts, trusting in God's goodness.

Should you wish to support this ministry and/or 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

*Lift up your hearts/Sing Hallelujah*

**526**

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| 1. Lift up your hearts unto the Lord;<br>lift up your hearts unto the Lord.<br>Sing hallelujah, sing hallelujah;<br>lift up your hearts unto the Lord! | 2. In Christ the world has been redeemed;<br>in Christ the world has been redeemed.<br>Sing hallelujah, sing hallelujah,<br>in Christ the world has been redeemed. |
| 3. His resurrection sets us free;<br>his resurrection sets us free.<br>Sing hallelujah, sing hallelujah;<br>his resurrection sets us free.             | 4. Therefore, we celebrate the feast;<br>therefore, we celebrate the feast.<br>Sing hallelujah, sing hallelujah;<br>therefore, we celebrate the feast.             |
| 5. Sing hallelujah to the Lord!<br>sing hallelujah to the Lord!<br>Sing hallelujah, sing hallelujah,<br>sing hallelujah to the Lord!                   |  |

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## Benediction

As apprentices of the servant Christ,  
Learn the essential skills of faith –  
Devoted prayer and determined action,  
Persistent hope and practiced love.  
May your deeds reflect the wondrous grace of God.

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