

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski
16th Sunday after Pentecost - September 17, 2023

Call to Worship

We gather here, where God would teach us:
**so we may learn to be more compassionate,
so we may be taught how to be more loving.**

We gather here, where Jesus would teach us
**the wisdom to choose forgiveness over holding a grudge,
the language of hope so we may speak to all.**

We gather here, where the Spirit imparts wisdom,
**so we might know how to share grace,
so we would learn to welcome all to this Table.**

©2023 Thom M. Shuman. <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com> Sept 17.

Hymn

When we are living

630

1. When we are living, it is in Christ Jesus,
and when we're dying, it is in the Lord.
Both in our living and in our dying,
we belong to God; we belong to God.
2. Through all our living, we our fruits must give.
Good works of service are for offering.
When we are giving, or when receiving,
we belong to God; we belong to God.
3. 'Mid time of sorrow and in times of pain,
when sensing beauty or in love's embrace,
whether we suffer, or sing rejoicing,
we belong to God; we belong to God.
4. Across this wide world, we shall always find
those who are crying with no peace of mind,
but when we help them, or when we feed them,
we belong to God; we belong to God.

"When we are living," Words: Romans 14:8; paraphrase, v.1., anonymous; translation, EliseS. Eslinger, v.2-4, Roberto Escamilla;
translation, George Lockwood. Music Hispanic folk song. © The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989 All rights reserved.
All rights reserved. Annual License with podcasting OneLicense.net A-723877

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of might and mercy,
the heavens and the earth are full of your glory.
Your love transforms our lives.
You enter our confusion and give insight.
You bear our grief and bring healing.

You see our fatigue and renew strength.
You sense our fear and spark courage.
You know death and raise up new life.
So we come before you in worship, handing over to you all that weighs us down.
Renew us in this time of worship, we pray, so that we may serve you with joy.

**O God,
our lives do not always reflect your transforming power.
You are gracious, but we cling to judgment. You are kind, but we can be cruel.
You are forgiving, but we nurse grudges and old wounds.
Forgive us, O God. Fill us with your Holy Spirit,
and make us new through Christ, your Son and our Saviour.**

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 16th Sunday after Pentecost. September 17, 2023. Year A.

Assurance of Forgiveness

In any and all circumstances, God works with wondrous power to affirm life – reconciling divisions among us, resisting evil, restoring shaken faith, renewing our spirits. Glory be to God.

© Glen E. Rainsley. *Hear Our Prayer: Resource for Worship and Devotions*. United Church Press. Cleveland, Ohio. 1996. P104.

Scripture Reading Romans 14:1-11

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. ²Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. ³Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. ⁴Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. ⁶Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.

⁷We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. ⁸If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹For it is written,

“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,
and every tongue shall give praise to God.”

So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. <http://nrsvbibles.org>

Message In Honour of the Lord

How many times in the last week have you had conversation with people regarding inconsequential things? Did you get hot and bothered about any of those conversations? If not in the last week, I am pretty sure you could recall an incident where you got upset about something that, when you reflect on it, really didn't matter in the big scheme of things.

Well, this is kind of where Paul is coming from as he writes this part of the letter to the Christians in Rome. This was a young church trying to figure out how best to be the church in its own time. These were new converts who had diverse backgrounds. From those who had worshipped other gods, to those who had deep roots in the Jewish faith, and food seemed to be a topic in which they had gotten bogged down.

Now we can understand this to a certain extent. We likely all know people who are vegetarian or even vegan. We know about Kosher foods and that there are dietary rules for those who practice the Jewish faith or Islam. We know people who are celiac or lactose intolerant. Food is not such a big deal for us in terms of who eats what, but in that time, it appears to have been a conversation that sparked controversy. So, Paul uses this conversation, or controversy, to write about some important points regarding what it means to be a Christian.

To put it mildly there was a lot of judgement going on. People thinking their way was the "right" way of living out their faith. And believe that Paul would not have been writing about this if it hadn't gotten out of control. It turns out that when you bring diverse people together it is challenging work! Here we have people of different casts and class coming together because they believe in this one Lord, Jesus Christ. But no one easily drops all of who they are because of their faith. This transformation is something that is worked out over time and in community.

In the case of Romans, there were people who were freemen of privilege and those who were enslaved. These groups would not normally have been together. As well, there were people who differed in theological expressions of their faith, bringing with them their lived experience as Jewish or those who had previously worshiped, or may still were worshiping other Roman Gods. This was not some homogenous group of people who had it all figured out.

So often we think that the early and ancient church community lived in peace and harmony and that just was not the case. Over and over again, Paul in writing to different fledging Christian communities was trying to teach people how to live in Christ and work out the tenants of the Christian faith.

This particular writing hits on a few important points in just a few verses. The first word we read is "welcome". That word comes to us again when Paul talks about passing judgement on each other when God has welcomed all regardless of what the individual or groups have to say about each other(v3). One's first and continuing experience of

community is that it should be welcoming. Today's reading from the letter to the Romans is about how Christians relate to one another. This part of the letter is not about how the church relates to those who do not call one another Christian. Yet, how we treat each other has a bearing on how the world views the church and how we witness to our faith in Christ.

If we are not welcoming of one another, how in the world are we going to be honest and real in our welcome of those who enter into our homes, workplaces, and especially our churches. And not passing judgement on each other when we live out our faith differently is a way of welcome. Here I am talking about those things that are really inconsequential to how we live out our faith. It may not be about food, maybe it is about the time and date of the bazaar, or when we do one activity or another. We may feel the need to pass judgement on whether or not someone's regular attendance, or lack thereof, at Sunday worship is a reflection of the strength of their faith. Do they participate by volunteering of their time and money to support the church? But these things are really inconsequential to our faith.

We attend worship, volunteer, give of our resources, in response to God's love and forgiveness and God's grace and work in our own lives, but this is not something to be judged by any one of us. The important piece here is that whatever we do we do in honour of the Lord. If we give of our time, energy, money, or talent, we do it in honour of the Lord. We give cheerfully and don't worry about what the other is doing. Maybe our example and our joy will be a witness to another about what God's work in our own lives has done. It will certainly do more to attract people to the faith than judgement and dissension.

All of this does not mean that there is no place for difficult conversations about what is important in our church, but we must still be cautious about judging another. The recent decision to affirm the marriage and ordination of people of different sexual orientation is and has been an important and difficult conversation in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. There still is no real unity in this decision within the church across the nation. So how are we called to not judge each other, but rather love one another even with those difference in opinion? How we respond to that question is important as we navigate being Christians in a denomination that is struggling with the impulse to pass judgement on people whose views differ from their own.

Paul says, do what you do, but in all of it honour the Lord and give thanks to God for "We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then...we are the Lord's." (v7,8). More importantly he continues, "Why do you pass judgment on your [siblings in Christ]? Or you, why do you despise your sibling?" For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

So often we forget that God will be the final judge of our lives. This is not to strike fear into you. Jesus died so that we could be forgiven for not getting it right all the time, but that does not mean that we have now no responsibilities for our thoughts, words, and

actions. Will you get to be with God in the end? I believe so. You are forgiven. We say that every time we do the prayer of adoration and confession followed by the assurance of pardon.

God is a God of love. But that also means that if we believe that Jesus Christ is Lord over our lives...Lord over all...then we should take seriously how we behave, how we love, and how we live. In other words, we live and do all our living in honour of the Lord. We are the hands and feet of Christ.

If we are judgmental, unwelcoming, believe our way to be the “right” way or the only way, then we face not only God’s judgement, but also run the risk of being a broken community of faith. And I will not be the first to tell you that living in community and particularly Christian community is hard work. I wish I could count on one hand the number of times I have had to be forgiven for what I messed up in my last ten years here. And yet I have been forgiven, over and over. This congregation, and individuals within it have no doubt been frustrated by me at times, as you may have been with others or others with you. We have all judged. Still there has also been much working together, planning, and changes.

We have a lot of work to do in the coming months, regardless of what church you belong to or what is going on in your own life. It is tough work living out our faith; it always has been in communities of faith. We are diverse people, with diverse experiences. We come from different places in the world, have different languages, maybe even have come from different faith or religious traditions.

What Paul is saying is, let’s get past judging others in the church and I would add outside of the church. Let’s get on with being the church together, loving one another, accepting one another as Christ accepted us. For as Paul writes in another verse later in chapter 14, the kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The one who serves Christ with these guiding principles is acceptable to God and has human approval. Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. (v17-19).

We do all our living, our community, our work and our worship in honour of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Prayers of the People

God of authority and authenticity,
we come before you today,
glad to know you give us the chance to change our lives
when we have wandered away from your purposes.
We give you thanks for the encouragement and support
we receive from friends in Christ,
here in our church and wherever we meet them.
We thank you for relationships that have grown stronger
through the courage to forgive which you inspire in us.

Use us as signs and servants of the new possibilities you create.

God of changed hearts,

Renew the future for us all.

Christ our Companion,

make our community one that lives out your grace and mercy.

Today we pray for those among us and around us who are struggling to live wisely and well, who seek a way of integrity for the future.

We pray for those who are confronting addictions or trying to change old habits that are harmful to health: give them persistence and support

We pray for those who want to end violence and anger in their lives:

give them courage and wisdom to walk a new way

God of changed hearts,

Renew the future for us all.

We pray for those who have broken the law and now seek to make amends:

teach them good judgement in action and relationships.

We pray for those who have broken their word and want to rebuild trust and integrity: show them how to take responsibility and live it out.

God of changed hearts,

Renew the future for us all.

We pray for those who are seeking new work, learning new skills, or changing employment: open new opportunities for them.

We pray for all of us who seek new ways to live out our faith in this church and in this community: help us communicate God's love in fresh ways so others catch the vision of your love.

God of changed hearts,

Renew the future for us all.

And we pray in silence for all those for whom the week ahead will hold deep challenges, and who need your support and ours, to face what the days will bring

Spirit of transforming power, work in us and in all for whom we pray, as we sum up our prayers in the words Jesus taught us:

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 16th Sunday after Pentecost. September 17, 2023. Year A.

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

Romans 14:7 tells us, “We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves.”
We are in covenant with God and joined in community with one another.
We give of our resources as those who live for the good and well-being of all.

[After Pentecost 16A - September 17 - United Church of Christ \(ucc.org\)](https://ucc.org)

We gather our gifts together and present them as an offering of gratitude and praise.

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

Help us accept each other

632

1. Help us accept each other
as Christ accepted us;
teach us as sister, brother,
each person to embrace.
Be present, Lord, among us
and bring us to believe
we are ourselves accepted
and meant to love and live.
2. Teach us, O Lord, your lessons,
as in our daily life
we struggle to be human
and search for hope and faith.
Teach us to care for people,
For all—not just for some,
To love them as we find them
Or as they may become.
3. Let your acceptance change us,
so that we may be moved
in living situations
to do the truth in love;
to practice your acceptance
until we know by heart
the table of forgiveness
and laughter’s healing art.
4. Lord, for today’s encounters
with all who are in need,
who hunger for acceptance,
for righteousness and bread,
we need new eyes for seeing,
new hands for holding on:
renew us with your Spirit;
Lord, free us, make us one!

Words: Fred Kaan. Music: Doreen Potter. ©1975 Hope Publishing Company
All rights reserved. Annual License with podcasting OneLicense.net A-723877

Benediction

Go in peace into God’s world to serve and help others.
Go in confidence of God’s presence with you.
Go into this world with messages of hope and reconciliation.
Go in love. [Ministry Matters™ | Worship Connection: September 17, 2023](https://www.ministrymatters.com)