

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

17th Sunday after Pentecost - September 24, 2023

Call to Worship

Come!

Come and worship,

you who woke early and you who slept late;

you who come often, and you who don't.

Whether we are first or last or somewhere in between,

there is room for all of us in God's kingdom,

and more than enough grace to go around.

Let's worship God together!

[re:Worship: Proper 20 A \(re-worship.blogspot.com\)](http://re:Worship: Proper 20 A (re-worship.blogspot.com))

Hymn

One more step along the world I go

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1. One more step along the world I go.

One more step along the world I go.

From the old things to the new

keep me traveling along with you.

Refrain

And it's from the old I travel to the new.

Keep me traveling along with you.

2. Round the corners of the world I turn.

More and more about the world I learn.

All the new things that I see

you'll be looking at along with me.

Refrain

3. As I travel through the bad and good

keep me traveling the way I should.

Where I see no way to go,

you'll be telling me the way, I know.

Refrain

4. Give me courage when the world is rough.

Keep me loving though the world is tough.

Leap and sing in all I do.

Keep me traveling along with you.

Refrain

And it's from the old I travel to the new.

Keep me traveling along with you.

5. You are older than the world can be.
You are younger than the life in me.
Ever old and ever new,
keep me traveling along with you.

Refrain

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of all creation,
you open the world around us and fill it with creatures of your love and purpose.
The wonder of each creature declares your praise –
the mountains state your majesty; the ripened field, your generosity;
the oceans your power and the skies your grandeur.
Birds flying aloft sing of your freedom; the tiny ant works with your persistence.
And what do we declare about you in our lives?
We pray that our work will honour your justice and mercy;
and our relationships speak of your love and compassion.
So may we praise you, O God,
not just in this hour of worship, but in all our waking and our working.
May we live your praise and promise through Christ, our Living Lord.

**God, you are the giver of all good gifts, yet our generosity is often limited.
We complain about our lot. We compare ourselves to others and see what they
have that we lack. We share some of what we have, but we worry about running
short. Forgive us our worries about tomorrow and give us generous hearts that
trust in you day by day. Amen**

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 17th Sunday after Pentecost. September 24, 2023. Year A.

Assurance of Forgiveness (based on Matthew 20: 1-16)

All who respond to God's call to repentance
are embraced in the generous mercy of God.
Whether you responded to God's call at the first opportunity,
or whether you are responding for the first time now,
God's gracious forgiveness is yours, in Jesus Christ.

Siblings in Christ,
.....your sins are forgiven;
.....be at peace.

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Scripture Reading Matthew 20:1-16

'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw

others standing idle in the market-place; ⁴and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. ⁵When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. ⁶And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" ⁷They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." ⁸When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." ⁹When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. ¹⁰Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹²saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." ¹³But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? ¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" ¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'

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Message Generous Grace

A frail mother needs care and rather than going into long term care, her son takes her in, cares for her needs, loves her. He is the one picking her up and getting her to the toilet. He is the one who lovingly bathes her and brushes her hair each night. He is the one who has fed her meals and given up other activities in order to care for her. Not because he has to, but because he loves her and has a sense of duty toward her. There are others in the family, they will call or stop by when it fits into their schedule, but he alone has given up many things to care for her on a daily basis.

The mother dies and everyone is present to help plan the funeral. Sometime later the last will and testament of the mother is read. Everyone is kind of waiting for it, especially the son who gave up so much to care for his mother. He will receive a greater amount of the will to make up for what he has done. Then the words, the estate is to be divided equally among the children. Hold on! What! The son's gut is wrenched, the others try not to display their joy that they are getting more than they thought. The son thinks, "This is so unfair" even though he really did do all of it out of the goodness of his own heart. And the others, knowing it is unfair, still cannot believe their good fortune.

We each have our own story of when life felt unfair. Times when others seemed to be rewarded when we were not. We were passed over for the job promotion, though we worked overtime to impress our bosses and moreover to do a good job of whatever was asked of us. Parents or teachers who just didn't seem to understand our gifts and so we were never put on the display as the good child or the most accomplished.

It comes out as envy when we see A-listers on the red carpets. Or we see children of celebrities who seem to have it made and we think, "If I had only been born to people of wealth." They have done nothing to deserve what they have and don't even seem to really appreciate it; it was all about where they were born and to whom they were born.

This is how this parable of the labourers in the vineyard comes off to us. We see the injustice of it all. We automatically seem to side with those who came out to work all day and then don't get rewarded with a greater pay than those who were brought out later in the day. Even those who came at noon and three o'clock would feel that they deserved more than those who were brought out with only one hour of daylight left.

And really, who wouldn't be frustrated. If a business owner actually ran a business in that way, giving the same pay to all, no one would show up on time or at all. Economically, this parable does not make sense. No business would be able to survive this kind of practice. So, what is this parable about?

As with much of Jesus' teaching, there are layers and various ways we could go with our take on what Jesus was trying to say, but let's start with the first words, "For the kingdom of heaven is like..." This parable, nor any one of the parables in scripture, gives us a full picture of what the kingdom of God looks like here on earth or in heaven. The kingdom of heaven is like the story of the labourers in the vineyard, or a mustard seed, or a treasure hidden in a field.

There is no one way to adequately describe heaven or the relationship of God to human beings. In this case, the kingdom of God is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. And the story continues as we have heard. I would hesitate to make direct comparisons between God and the landowner, this is a story to help us imagine something unexpected. The story builds up the tensions. There is mystery as the first workers agreed upon the usual daily wage. Then we hear that the next workers agreed to being paid whatever is right. We are not told what that amount will be. The later hires are not even given the assurance of being paid whatever is right, they just go to work.

Again, this is a parable. Picking apart details is not necessarily going to get you closer to the meaning of the story. We don't know why some were hired right away and others not. We are not told why someone would go to work for an hour, or even hang around to the end of the day and then not make sure they knew how much they were being paid for the work.

We wonder where Jesus, who is telling this story, is going with all this. Then the second half of the story unfolds. Those who were first to be hired wait at the end of the line while those who showed up last are paid. When they see those ahead of them in the line, those who only worked a part of the day are being paid, the same amount they had been

promised for the whole day, they must have begun to think, “Wow, we put in a whole day, I wonder how much that means for us? Gotta mean a bonus!”

The anticipation builds and then the shoe drops and that good old dollar that every one was paid ahead of them is what they also receive. Hold on! Wait a minute! That simply is not fair! I have been on job sites; the language would not be pretty. F-bombs would be more like the order of the day. There is no work site or work place, unionized or non-union that would put up with that kind of treatment of workers.

We tend to come to this story sympathizing with the workers who feel like they got shafted. Our sense of fair play and justice go into overdrive and one might even feel hot under the collar.

But hold on... What if instead you placed yourself in the line with those who received this gift. Think about your joy. Think about a time when you received something that you felt you didn't deserve. What about times when you finally felt heard, seen, appreciated.

I can't help but think of the protests and counter protests of this past week where some feel threatened because the voice of those who have been marginalized in the LGBTQ2S community are finally being heard. Or conversations of those who feel like people should have to earn their living and look down on people who need subsidized incomes or housing. There is talk of living wages, or basic income to just give people a hand up, a better starting place, and how often do we hear the voices of those who don't think their tax dollars should go to that. People get what they deserve, right?

Well turns out that God's economy is different. God's economy turns things upside down, where those who are on the margins, vulnerable, and struggling are seen and heard, are given what they need to survive. It runs against all our notions of fair play, that is until we are the ones that are seen or heard or benefit from the generous grace of others and that of God. And maybe that is what this parable is really about, God's generous grace to all, not just for some, but for all. Indiscriminately. Grace matters. Grace makes the difference. Grace is God's economy.

David Lose puts it this way, “When you're down and out, when you're the one at the bottom, when the world hasn't been fair to you, or when you're the one who screwed up and hurt yourself or someone else, then, suddenly, grace matters. Grace...is for the people who aren't okay and don't have it all together. It's [still] not pretty - in that it messes with our sense of order - but it is rather beautiful.”¹

Or as Rolf Jacobsen writes, “Grace...a noun that is more like a verb. It is the free gift in which God gives all – eternal life, forgiveness, purpose, meaning – to human beings.”²

¹ [David Lose: Grace Isn't Pretty | Day 1](#). Accessed September 21, 2023.

² Jacobson, Rolf A., Editor. *Crazy Talk: A Not-So-Stuffy Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Augsburg Books. Minneapolis. 2008. P78.

Generous grace. It is hard to wrap our heads around it. We often feel that grace should be earned, not just given, that is until we are the ones in need of grace. There is no moral to the story here, only the lingering question of are we ready to live into the world of grace that God imagines? Grace that messes with our sense of right and wrong? Grace that feels like it invites instability, questions, hope, and a sense of justice that errs on the side of those seemingly most underserving of it? Grace that, if it is there for all, includes ourselves?

May we begin to see our conversations, our politics and policies in terms of grace. Yes, people need a fair wage for a day's work, but how do we begin to lift up those who, for whatever reason, do not have the same advantages. Those who have waited in the market place, or street corner, or wherever, hoping to get picked like the child who is picked last for the team. Those whose worth has been sucked from them because they cannot seem to find a way out of their situation or because of their gender, skin colour, place or family of birth and so start in a less than favourable position in life.

May we be bearers of generous grace knowing that we too have been the recipients of God's grace even when we did not deserve it. For all of us have done harm or been harmed. All of us know what it feels like to be last even though we seem to identify most closely with those who worked hard and appeared to get shafted by their employer.

May we humbly remember God's love and generous grace in our own lives and work to truly bring God's economy of grace practiced on earth, hoping that we get to create a world that is a little of what heaven is like.

We ask it in the name of Jesus who knows what it means to be human. Amen.

Prayers of the People

God of mystery and wonder,

We look around at the beauty of the world and sense that you have given each precious thing its place and a way of sustaining itself.

Thank you for your attention to the details of creation.

Yet we also see an aching world

and sense that many precious things are under threat.

Bless the work of faithful people everywhere to care for the climate and environment.

Show us how we can protect what is at risk for the health of your whole creation.

God our Maker, **make us a sharing people.**

God of energy and life,

We look around at the peoples of this world

and see your imagination and dignity in every variety of face and culture.

Thank you for the gifts you plant at the heart of humanity.

Yet we also see the aching of the hungry and hurting,
and hear the groans of parents whose children die in their arms
and the cries of children who fear tomorrow.
Bless the ministries of our church across our country and around the world
that bring healing and hope to lives at risk.
God our Maker, **make us a sharing people.**

God of promise and possibility,
We look around at the places where people collide with each other
and hear the grumbling of nations locked into old rivalries and new grievances.
We watch the jousting of leaders impressed more by polls than effective policies.
We worry about the future of our communities and our children.
Thank you for the ministries of advocacy our Church undertakes
and the witness for justice and peace we make together in Jesus' name.
God our Maker, **make us a sharing people.**

God of faithfulness and surprise,
We look at ourselves
and sometimes doubt we can make a difference or have an impact.
Challenge us to recognise the kinds of power we do have:
The love and compassion,
The courage and commitment,
The laughter and friendship,
The generosity and mercy.
In all of these gifts we know your power at work within us and among us.
Call us to keep serving together, trusting you can do more than we can ask or
imagine through our denomination, our congregation, and our own lives,
blessed by the grace of Jesus Christ who taught us to pray:

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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

This Sunday The Presbyterian Church in Canada celebrates the ministry and mission we accomplish together through Presbyterians Sharing. to our shared work in Jesus' name accomplish amazing things across Canada and in different parts of God's world. May we give with generous hearts.

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

To show by touch and word

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1. To show by touch and word devotion to the earth,
to hold in full regard all life that comes to birth
we need, O God, the will to find the good you had of old in mind.
2. Renew our minds to choose the things that matter most,
our hearts to long for truth till pride-of-self is lost.
For every challenge that we face, we need your guidance and your grace.
3. Let love from day to day be yardstick, rule and norm,
and let our lives portray your word in human form.
Now come with us that we may have your wits about us where we live.

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Benediction

May the love of God, sown in Christ, be known among us.
Uplift the weary, embrace the rejected.
Empower the oppressed, and so uphold the faith
through deeds of compassion and grace.

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