

## St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

19th Sunday after Pentecost - Thanksgiving Sunday - October 8, 2023

### Call to Worship

The heavens are telling the glory of God

**May our worship reflect God's glory.**

The firmament proclaims God's handiwork.

**May we see each other as the handiwork of God.**

Let our prayer and praise, our singing and proclamation project the love of God.

**We commune with Christians around the world,  
with Christians throughout time.**

With Christians across geography and across time,

**Let us worship!**

—from *Jesus Sets the Table*, resources by the United Church of Christ, posted on their [Worship Ways](#) website

### Hymn

*I'm gonna live so God can use me*

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1. I'm gonna live so live so God can use  
me anywhere, Lord, anytime!  
I'm gonna live so live so God can use me  
anywhere, Lord, my Lord anytime!
2. I'm gonna work so work so God can use  
me anywhere, Lord, anytime!  
I'm gonna work so work so God can use me  
anywhere, Lord, (my Lord) anytime!
3. I'm gonna pray so pray so God can use  
me anywhere, Lord, anytime!  
I'm gonna pray so pray so God can use me  
anywhere, Lord, my Lord anytime!
4. I'm gonna sing so sing so God can use  
me anywhere, Lord, anytime!  
I'm gonna sing so sing so God can use me  
anywhere, Lord, my Lord anytime!

Words and Music: African-American Spiritual

### Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of abundant love,

when we hunger for fulfillment, you offer us the Bread of Life.

When we thirst for your presence, you fill our cup to overflowing.

You draw near to us in every place, at any time.

Holy One, in you our deepest desires are fulfilled.

So to you, O God, Creator, Christ and Spirit,

we offer thanksgiving, honour and praise with all your people,

here and everywhere, now and always.

**God of abundant mercy, you see our failures to keep your law of love. We have not always loved our neighbours as you taught. We find it impossible to love our enemies as Jesus asked. Forgive us all the times we failed to live out your love. Renew in us the courage to offer others the generosity of heart you have shown us in Jesus. Amen**

### **Assurance of Forgiveness**

Persistently, patiently, lovingly, God pours out grace and joy into our lives, healing our brokenness, forgiving our sin.

**Loved, we are sent to love;**

**forgiven, we are freed to forgive;**

**graced, we can offer our gifts to everyone we meet.**

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

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### **Scripture Reading Matthew 21:33-46**

<sup>33</sup> 'Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watch-tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. <sup>34</sup>When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. <sup>35</sup>But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. <sup>36</sup>Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. <sup>37</sup>Finally he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." <sup>38</sup>But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance." <sup>39</sup>So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. <sup>40</sup>Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' <sup>41</sup>They said to him, 'He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.'

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures:  
"The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone;  
this was the Lord's doing,  
and it is amazing in our eyes"?'

<sup>43</sup>Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. <sup>44</sup>The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.'

<sup>45</sup> When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. <sup>46</sup>They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

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### **Message Sermon Producing Fruit**

Violence begets violence, and this parable of the landowner and the tenants in the vineyard appears violent from beginning to end. This is one of those pieces of scripture I would rather avoid than preach on. It makes me cringe. How can this story represent anything that is about the loving God that I prefer to speak about? Yet here it is. One of the stories that Jesus tells in order to teach people then and now about the kingdom of God.

Once again, as with most scripture, the location, the audience, and the circumstances are of importance to understanding what we are reading and hearing. Each Sunday we read a portion of scripture, but if we were to read this in context, we would know that Jesus is in the temple in Jerusalem and he is teaching.

Just the day before he had arrived in Jerusalem in a triumphal parade we know as Palm Sunday. He proceeded to cleanse the temple by driving out “all who were selling and buying in the temple and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves.” (Matthew 21:12). He leaves overnight and how the next day is back in the temple.

This story comes in the middle of three such stories, and all cut to the chase about Jesus’ authority, which the chief priests and elders of the people were challenging. He was there teaching, but certainly not with their authority or permission. But challenging Jesus in public was dangerous. They couldn’t stir up the crowd and create a riot, but they were not going to stand idly by as this man led people in ways that threatened the leaders’ power and authority.

So, they have asked Jesus, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” (Matthew 21:23). Jesus follows up with the parable of the two sons, which we discussed last week, then this one about the parable of the wicked tenants and next week is the parable of the wedding banquet. Again, if we were reading this as a book, and not in a section each week, it would be easier to see the connections. This story is part of a larger narrative.

With all that in mind, we turn to this particular parable. Remember, though others were in ear shot, Jesus was speaking to rulers, to power and authority. This was not the everyday Jewish man or woman. These were people with power and privilege, tasked with leading people to God, and it would seem that things have gotten messed up. Rather than leading, loving, compassion and care...greed, prestige, and the love of power have taken hold among the leaders of the people. Sound familiar?

When reading this parable, one might come to think of the landowner as God, the tenants as the Jewish people, and slaves that were sent to collect the harvest as the prophets. Finally, the son as Jesus. That would be reasonable, but read without nuance it comes off as God being a violent God who judges harshly. And it has been interpreted at times

in history and even today with little grace. But as has been said by theologian Frederick Buechner, “The one who judges us most finally will be the one who loves us most fully.”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus was speaking against power and authority that was unjust, unfair, and in this case, rulers who cared more about their position than the well-being of the lost people of Israel who needed compassion, protection, and to know God present in their lives. Their lives revealed that they had ignored the authority of God. This story is about how we treat God and what we think of the God we serve.

This is bad behaviour called out big time. And even while Jesus is speaking, telling this story, the words of judgement are put on the lips of the rulers when he asks them. “Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?’ They said to him, ‘He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.’” (v40-41)

They have judged themselves and in that moment they “realized that he was speaking about them.” Of course, “They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded [Jesus] as a prophet.” (v48) They did not fear God, or God’s judgement on them. They were too inwardly focused to see outside of their own possible loss of power and authority. But God is focused on people and their needs. God’s focus is love and when love is not our response to others, that is what God judges.

I mean, the cross was all about love. God’s love for humankind. God took the ultimate moment of violence against his Son Jesus and turned it into grace, hope, compassion, and love outpoured. God did not retaliate, but said I love you this much that even though this act of violence was perpetrated against me, against Jesus, I will bring life from it.

What this parable does for us then is to say, look at yourself, take a look at this congregation, take a look at the one you have called to lead this congregation. Are we people who want safety, power, prestige? Do we like the status quo and so are unwilling to show the compassion and grace toward others that God requires of us? If that is the case, it says a lot about our relationship or lack there of with God.

Is our building more important than the people who gather in it or around it? Are we hoarding our time, talent, energy, and resources for our own good, or are we looking outward to the people who are lost, afraid, alone, hungry, cold, tired, and hurting?

These are difficult questions and we may not like the answers. How do we treat God? Are we ignoring the authority of God in our lives and in the church?

Being part of the kingdom of God is about what fruits we produce. What good have we brought into the world through our love and action? There are a lot of question here, but

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<sup>1</sup> Copenhaver Martin B. *Feasting on the Word: Year A Volume 4 Season after Pentecost 2*. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2010. P142.

worthy of our time to ponder. Is God ruler of our lives or just a figure head of the church? Do we prefer to make decisions for God or are we really listening to know the will of God for our lives?

I will say that I am very proud of this congregation. I am grateful for each congregation I am working with right now, because each is asking these questions. We are not going to get it all right. We are going to stumble and make mistakes together and as individuals. We cannot ignore the difficult questions and their answers that will speak volumes about us, yet, there is hope. The God who judges also looks with compassion on us because of God's great love that was made flesh in the life and death of Jesus who now lives and reigns with God and the Holy Spirit.

In the words from Micah 6:8, Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God. If we do this, if we live with this intent, surely we will produce the fruits of the kingdom here on earth in ways that will, by word and action, bring hope to the hopeless, love to the lonely, and joy to those mourn. May we be known as those, as a church, whose love breaks barriers, responds and restores those captive in body, mind and spirit, and celebrates with rejoicing all that God has done now and always, in love and powerful witness to God's love for all. Amen.

### **Prayers of the People**

Leader: We give you thanks, O God, for all things that make life good, and pray that all people will share in the blessings we know.

For the world,

for the wonders of earth, sea and sky;  
for beauty in nature and wildlife;  
and for the rhythm of the days and seasons;

**All: we give you thanks, O God, and ask that all may share such blessings.**

Leader: For waters that refresh and sustain life;

for soil that is fertile and rich;  
for those who tend crops and care for harvests;  
for those who produce, deliver and market our food;  
and for those who make sure the hungry are fed;

**All: we give you thanks, O God, and ask that all may share such blessings.**

Leader: For days to work and strength to do it;

for the many different gifts and talents you have given us;  
for those whose work is dangerous and demanding,  
for those whose positions are necessary for communities to flourish;  
and for moments of leisure and rest when you restore us;

**All: we give you thanks, O God, and ask that all may share such blessings.**

Leader: For human life;

for talking and thinking together, working on problems and plans;  
for burdens and joys shared;  
for relationships that give life meaning;  
and for the wisdom exchanged between old and young in mutual support:

**All: we give you thanks, O God, and ask that all may share such blessings.**

Leader: For our circle of family and friends;  
for children and their curiosity and joy;  
for the insight that comes with patience and experience;  
and for events shared and memories cherished;

**All: we give you thanks, O God, and ask that all may share such blessings.**

Leader: For your grace in times of anxiety, doubt and grief;  
for healing in times of illness, confusion, and distress;  
for rejuvenating strength and renewed purpose;  
for scientific knowledge and discovery to confront disease and improve health;

**All: we give you thanks, O God, and ask that all may share such blessings.**

Leader: For the trust that you hear each prayer and know every need;  
that you love and care for each soul and body;  
and that you walk with us through all our days and seasons;

**All: we give you thanks, O God, and ask that all may share such blessings.**

Leader: We offer our prayers, spoken and unspoken, in Jesus' name,  
saying together the words he taught us:

### **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 thanksgiving to God comes during complicated times.  
There have been many losses through fire, storm and flood.  
Many harvests are diminished by drought.  
Some days it is hard to feel thankful.  
Yet we trust God can turn what we share into an abundance we cannot imagine.  
So we offer what we can and trust God will bless our gifts  
and our good intention for it.

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>

1. The church's one foundation  
is Jesus Christ our Lord;  
we are his new creation  
by water and the word;  
from heaven he came and sought us  
that we might ever be  
his living servant people,  
by his own death set free.
2. Called forth from every nation,  
yet one o'er all the earth,  
our charter of salvation,  
one Lord, one faith, one birth,  
one holy name professing  
and at one table fed,  
to one hope we are pressing,  
by Christ's own Spirit led.
3. Though with a scornful wonder  
the world sees us oppressed,  
by schisms rent asunder,  
by heresies distressed,  
yet saints their watch are keeping;  
their cry goes up, "How long?"  
But soon the night of weeping  
shall be the morn of song.
4. 'Mid toil and tribulation,  
and tumult of our war,  
we wait the consummation  
of peace forevermore,  
till with the vision glorious  
our longing eyes are blest,  
and the great church victorious  
shall be the church at rest.
5. We now on earth have union  
with God the Three- in – One,  
and share, through faith, communion  
with those whose rest is won, -  
O happy ones and holy!  
Lord, give us grace that we,  
Like them, the meek and lowly,  
On high may dwell with thee.

**Benediction**

May the grace of Christ, which daily renews us,  
and the love of God, which enables us to love all,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, which unites us in one body,  
make us eager to obey the will of God until we meet again,  
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

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