

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski
2nd Sunday in Lent - February 25, 2024

Call to Worship

We gather together, seeking life in all its fullness.

We gather in God's name, longing for truth and hope.

We are drawn by the words of our Creator and Redeemer.

We seek God's Spirit to guide us.

Come and worship the God who seeks us out.

We will worship God, the Source of our lives, who is worthy of all our praise.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 2nd Sunday in Lent. February 25, 2024. Year B.

Hymn

Open our eyes, Lord

445

1. Open our eyes, Lord,
we want to see Jesus,
to reach out and touch him,
and say that we love him.

2. Open our ears, Lord,
and help us to listen.
Open our eyes, Lord,
we want to see Jesus.

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God who is greater than the most powerful forces in this world,
enable us to be still and know that You are God.

Lord who answers out of the whirlwind of everyday life,
breathe in us Your Holy Spirit to strengthen, comfort,
and guide us in the midst of life's storms.

Still, small voice, speak to us this hour
that we might become makers of Your peace
in our homes, in our communities, in our world.

~ posted on My Redeemer Lives website. <http://www.myredeemerlives.com/prayers.html>

re-worship.blogspot.com

God of love and power, we listen to the stories of miracles and doubt that these things can happen today. We look at the waves of misfortune, distress, misery, distrust, and anger and wonder how we can still those waves. We feel the pressures of power and fear flooding into our lives, threatening to drown us and wonder where you are. Forgive us for the littleness of our faith. Forgive us for our doubts. Help us to place out trust in you, Lord Jesus. Help us to fix our eyes on you and on the ministries to which you have called us. For we ask these things in Jesus' Name.

— written by Nancy C. Townley, on the Worship Connection page of the Ministry Matters website.
<http://www.ministrymatters.com/re-worship:Prayer-of-Confession:Proper-7-B> (re-worship.blogspot.com)

Assurance of Forgiveness

With calming words, with a peaceful Spirit, with overflowing love and hope,
our God forgives us and fills us with faith.

**Our God affirms us for who we are - those whose brokenness is made whole,
whose sin is forgiven, whose lives overflow with faith. Thanks be to God!**

©2021 Thom M. Shuman. <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com> June 20.

Scripture Reading Mark 4:35-41

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.' ³⁶And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. ³⁷A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' ³⁹He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. ⁴⁰He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?' ⁴¹And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'

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Message Fear of Circumstances

Fear. Some fear is necessary as it keeps us out of harm's way. One should fear crossing a barrier into a lion's cage at a zoo or a barrier that keeps one from a steep rock face such as can be found at Kakabeka Falls unless you have the skills to deal with such things. Even then a healthy dose of respect for the challenges should be apparent. Those barriers are there for our safety.

And when we look at the world and what people are dealing with, most of us can't even begin to imagine the fear of those in the Ukraine or Gaza that are living in such dangerous and life-threatening times or those who face displacement or are food insecure. Even closer to home would be the fear that many live with in terms of not having enough money to cover their basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter and those who live with a constant threat of violence on the streets or behind the closed doors of their homes. There are also phobias and anxiety that one may not be able to deal with on their own and need to seek help.

I have been doing some reading about fear and Dr. Karl Albrecht writes that, "A simple and useful definition of fear is: An anxious feeling, caused by our anticipation of some imagined event or experience.¹ And then he boils down our fears to five basic things which need some unpacking, but suffice it to say that it pretty much all has to do with fears around how we exist in the world from our actual bodies to how people make us feel, like the fear of being shamed, which gets into our self worth.

We are in the middle of a series of sermons in which we look at times when Jesus spoke the words "Do not be afraid" or some version of that phrase. This scripture from Mark when Jesus says, "Do not be afraid" comes when the disciples experience fear during a storm in the boat as they crossed the Sea of Galilee. Now many of these men were experienced fishermen. They knew what to expect on those waters and how storms could come up at a moments notice. Their experience also gave them a healthy respect for the power of nature and this storm had them more than worried.

¹ [Karl Albrecht Ph.D. The \(Only\) 5 Fears We All Share | Psychology Today](#). Accessed February 6, 2024.

Their fear of the circumstances they found themselves in was overwhelming and yet somehow Jesus was able to sleep through it, well that was until he was abruptly woken up by those who couldn't believe that Jesus was not phased by what was happening around him. Their lives were in peril and this man that they had witnessed take control of other situations through teaching and healing was not showing an ounce of concern for their well-being in this moment.

However, even in their fear, it is likely that they had not anticipated what would happen next. Jesus took control of the circumstances; he silenced the storm! Well, if you think the followers were fearful before, now they were really fearful. Think about it. If Jesus could control nature itself, then what did that mean for their lives. They had chosen to follow someone who they realized could change the course of everything they had known and experienced.

Now this particular passage has been used to talk about how we are in a boat comparing the boat to our lives and Jesus being in there with us, and the boat itself gets a lot of attention. That is one take that has brought a lot of comfort, direction, and help to people in their journey of faith. And it is not incorrect, but what if the boat is just a boat, a vessel to get from one place to another. The boat was a way to get the men from one side of the lake to the other. And the other side of the lake held some pretty challenging moments, starting with the coming face to face with a demon possessed man.

Could the boat represent the travelling vessel that Jesus uses to get people from one place to another as quite frankly, most of us are happy to stay put and do what is comfortable for us. For some being comfortable may be doing dangerous things, but the uncomfortable come by not being able to be vulnerable in other ways. Still, I would hazard to say that most of us like status quo. Let Jesus take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to thee, as the old hymn goes, but we prefer that to really be on our own terms and in ways that we feel comfortable with rather than deal with any changes to our circumstances.

However, we all know that change is inevitable. We age, children leave home, we retire, we go to school, we lose friends, we make friends, we move, we lose a job or get a job, our partner leaves or dies and at times someone new is brought into our lives. Change happens even when we don't choose it. In the church we like things to stay the same, but the decline in churches speak pretty loudly to the fact that the way things were are not the way things are and so we are looking at the changes that need to happen for us to continue to be the hands and feet of God in an ever-changing world.

Recently I was reading an article by professor Karoline Lewis from Luther Seminary in Minneapolis in which she shared her thoughts regarding this scripture. She writes,

The promise of this text is...that there is something on the other side that Jesus knows about — and needs to get us to. Of course, the reality for the disciples, and for us, is that the other side is not all that rosy. It has its own set of challenges

— the disciples have to see Jesus differently, themselves differently. It means living into a new reality. And that takes some getting used to. Because when your location changes so does your perspective and others' perspective of you. When your location changes, so do you. That's pretty much how change works.²

Now location does not have to be only physical, it can be how you locate yourself in the world spiritually, mentally, and socially as well. But changing how you locate yourself does change perspective and it takes some amount of courage. Years ago I read a particular book and the only thing that stuck with me from that were the words, "there can be no courage without fear." Change in our location or our perceptions generates fear, especially before they happen because unknowns are things we fear. As Karl Albrecht said, fear is an anxious feeling, caused by our anticipation of some imagined event or experience.³

This whole passage from Mark regarding this scene in the boat and the calming of the storm can be seen from a very individual perspective and there is much value in that, but let's note that in this story not one disciples is singled out. They are in the boat together getting from one side of the water to the other and Jesus is right there with them. It is also a way to imagine the church. We are together in this time of change, of finding that our location in the world has changed, but God is still with us. Jesus did not leave the boat and God has not left us. Still, just as the disciples had no idea what would greet them on the other side of the water, we are not sure of what we will experience in our own time.

Our world is experiencing tumultuous times, our church faces an unsure future, what has not changed is that God is still present and says to the storms around us, "Peace! Be still! And then turns to us to say, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" I could go on for quite some time delving into the story, but for now, can we trust that God is still capable of calming the wind and the sea of our circumstances and trust that God is with us. God knows that we will still have fear, God knows our humanity, but can the knowledge that God is with us give us courage to cross over to some new way of being in the world? To experience a new location, a new perspective?

This sermon cannot end with a certainty. It ends with questions as we consider as individuals and as a church how God might be using some kind of vessel to bring us to new places of experience, understanding, and perspective. The vessel is whatever your boat or our boat is. It may be a person, place, or something else. Regardless, it will change you, you may fear it, yet it will transform you...us... in ways that we could not have imagined. And because it is God at work through the power of the Holy Spirit and the compassion of Christ, it will be worth it.

I speak to you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

² [Karoline Lewis. The Other Side - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary.](#) Accessed February 23, 2024

³ [Karl Albrecht Ph.D. The \(Only\) 5 Fears We All Share | Psychology Today.](#) Accessed February 6, 2024.

Prayers of the People

Loving God, we thank you for the vision you have for our lives,
the promises you have made to us,
and the journey you open before us.

Today we remember with gratitude:

The ways our lives are held secure in uncertain times by our trust in you;

Moments that made us laugh or smile;

Moments when we felt your gifts of courage and patience supporting us;

Times when you helped us overcome temptation;

The people who love us and give us encouragement;

Gracious God, we are grateful for all these signs of your love in our lives.

Thank you for the hope they brings us.

Show us how to share this hope and love with those who face struggles.

Faithful God, we pray for healing and restoration in the world that is our home.

We name before you in silence

people, places, and situations deeply in need of your grace,
especially where violence or destruction makes living precarious:

all who are struggling in these uncertain economic times,
especially those who worry about the future for their children and grandchildren;

those who are weak or vulnerable for any reason,
and those who lack dignity and respect in our community;

We pray for the earth and its well-being,
that areas and species under threat will be cared for;
and places in conflict will find ways to build peace with justice;
and we pray for those in leadership, facing complex problems and increasing
demands, that they will show both wisdom and courage.

By the power of your Spirit, O God, work in us and through us.

Receive our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ who taught us to pray together:

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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

Sometimes we fear that if we give too much we will fall short for ourselves. So be encouraged to give, not out of fear and scarcity, but out of the joy that comes when one gives until it feels good. In this way we gather our gifts together and present them as an offering of gratitude and praise. (Joyce)

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

The love of God comes close

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1. The love of God comes close
where stands an open door,
to let the stranger in,
to mingle rich and poor.
The love of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk the Way;
the love of God is here to stay.
2. The peace of God comes close
to those caught in the storm,
forgoing lives of ease
to ease the lives forlorn.
The peace of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk the Way;
the peace of God is here to stay.
3. The joy of God comes close
where faith encounters fears,
where heights and depths of life
are found through smiles and tears.
The joy of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk the Way;
the joy of God is here to stay.
4. The grace of God comes close
to those whose grace is spent,
when hearts are tired or sore
and hope is bruised and bent.
The grace of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk the Way;
the grace of God is here to stay.
5. The Son of God comes close
where people praise his name,
where bread and wine are blest
and shared as when he came.
The Son of God is here to stay
embracing those who walk the Way;
the Son of God is here to stay.

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Benediction

May you go with courage knowing
that the One who has the power to calm storms goes with you.

And may the peace of Christ, the love of God,
and the abounding and abundant power of the Holy Spirit,
be with you now and in the days to come.

Postlude