

Call to Worship

God has invited us to come.

So we gather.

God has spoken to the world.

So we listen.

God has given us glimpses of grace and mercy.

So we wait, longing for healing, eager for hope.

God has been faithful to all generations.

So we offer our praise to God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

Presbyterian Church in Canada Worship Planner. 5th Sunday after the Epiphany. February 4, 2024. Year B.

Hymn

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

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1. Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, who rules all creation.
my soul, praise God who alone is your health and salvation.
Come, all who hear, sisters and brothers draw near,
joining in glad adoration.
2. Praise to the Lord, who in all things so wondrously reigning
hides you with sheltering wings, ever gently sustaining.
Have you not seen how your heart's wishes have been
granted through God's kind ordaining?
3. Praise to the Lord, who will prosper your work, who defends you;
surely God's merciful goodness here daily attends you;
ponder anew what the Almighty can do,
when in great love God befriends you.
4. Praise to the Lord, and with all that is in me adoring,
all who have life and breath, come with glad
praises outpouring! Let the Amen sound from God's people again:
now and forever adoring!

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Creator God, Source of all life,
in you all creatures are connected,
all creation redeemed and made new.
Day by day you reveal yourself to us.
In the beauty of the heavens we see your glory.
In the bounty of the earth we know your generosity.
In strength for our bodies and minds we experience your energy.
Delighting in all that we have seen, heard, and known,

we worship you, one God, Creator, Christ, and Spirit,
holy and loving, now and always.

**Creator God, Source of love and mercy,
We confess to you our sins of busy-ness.
Sometimes we're so busy we overlook those we love.
Sometimes we think we're so busy,
we make excuses and avoid important commitments.
Sometimes we make ourselves busy and neglect you.
Forgive us.
Calm our minds and hearts
so we can set priorities and honour them – and you. Amen.**

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Assurance of Forgiveness

Dear friends, while it is true that we have all sinned,
it is a greater truth that we are forgiven through God's love in Jesus Christ.
To all who humbly seek the mercy of God I say,
in Jesus Christ our sin is forgiven.
Be at peace with God, with yourself and with one another.

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Scripture Reading Isaiah 40:21-31

²¹Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? ²²It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in; ²³who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. ²⁴Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. ²⁵To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One. ²⁶Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing.

²⁷Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God"? ²⁸Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. ²⁹He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. ³⁰Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; ³¹but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

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Message Have you not known? Have you not heard?

I just got back from Hawaii in the past few days. For my husband and another couple who traveled with us, it took planning and saving, but it was worth it to see another place on the globe, experience the culture of not just one, but four of the islands, and learn more about history, both of people and the land itself. Hawaii is interesting because it is a series of islands created from the eruption of volcanoes in history, and that creation is continuing in the present time as in 2018 the volcano that erupted on the Big Island created more land mass. It is also a land where the older islands are slowly being eroded away and far into the future, not in our time, the oldest islands without any active volcanos will disappear.

The place was so very different from my experience as a person living with four seasons in a country that offers its own diversity of plants, animals, soil and land formations. Palm trees, all kinds of flowers blooming fragrant and colourful, the sun setting so quickly you can watch it dropping from the sky in a matter of minutes as it disappears against the horizon. I had the opportunity to go snorkeling for the first time and seeing the amazing colours, shapes, and sizes of schools of fish, just below the surface, was truly amazing. Then to reflect and realize that this was all created.

In Isaiah the writer speaks about the one who “sits above the circle of the earth...who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them [the stars] like a tent to live in.” We are then told to “Lift up our eyes on high and see. Who created these stars? Isaiah’s answer, God who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing.” God is creator of the earth that we experience as we walk on the land, look up into the heavens, and even when we peer beneath the surface of the waters.

This God, our God, knows the stars, and if we look at the Gospel of Luke 12:7 we read more affirmation of how important all of creation is to God. “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God’s sight. But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.” In the Gospel of Matthew 6:29-30 we asked to “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet [we are told] even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe [us].”

I share all this because it is crucial to understand that God cares about creation and about people when one reads this passage from Isaiah. You see the people to whom Isaiah wrote were in exile under the cruel rule of the Babylonians. They felt that God had abandoned them. God had seemed silent for years as they suffered, taken from their homeland, dispersed and scattered among people who did not care about the Hebrew peoples’ one God. The conquerors had done their worst and their gods had seemingly proven that they were more powerful than the God of the Hebrew people.

This passage at verse 21 comes on the heels of the questions about the idols of the Babylonians. These verses of 18-20 say,

“To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compares with him?

An idol? – A workman casts its, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold, and casts for it silver chains.

As a gift one chooses mulberry wood – wood that will not rot – then seeks out a skilled artisan to set up an image that will not topple.

In other words, these gods, these idols are all crafted by people, how then can they be the creator. So, Isaiah writes, “Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?” These are rhetorical questions, as of course the Hebrew people did know about God who is one, who created all things. They were being reminded to look at their history, to trust in the God who had always been, is now, and will always be.

Still, we all know how difficult it is to believe in God when everything around us seems to say there is no God. We find ourselves in ruin, disease taking its toll on our own or a loved one’s body, wars raging even in our own time, food and housing insecurity for many, racism, bigotry, unemployment all having an effect on people worldwide. And it is especially difficult to hold onto the thought that there is a god who cares when our lives are challenging and we are struggling. Even the church which we hold onto as a place for God is in a time of transition. This is challenging nearly every congregation to consider whether or not it can continue to exist and be viable and what choices need to be made in order for people to be faithful stewards of what God has given us.

We often forget that in this time of exile for the Jewish people that the temple had been destroyed and was in ruins for years, yet God brought back the people, slowly, and a new temple was created. It was not exactly like the first but it was still a place to worship. We tend to forget the challenges that the people faced, for starters, even though they were in exile, it was an exile they knew, things some two hundred years after the exile began, well, they were different in the land of Judah. Things were in ruin, it would take a lot of time, effort, knowledge, and courage to go back, especially knowing that things would be different, and not everyone was up for that.

We look at our own experiences in life and also find it difficult to remain certain or even hopeful that God is at work, still creating, still transforming our lives and working in the world. We get tired and weary. We lose hope and strength, strength both physically and mentally. We forget that God is the creator and God’s strength does not grow faint or weary.

We hear the words “Have you not known? Have you not heard?” in verse 21 in response to God’s creating and being greater than anything or anyone else. It is the big picture God. We hear the words again in verse 28 after the people wonder about God in their lives, when they express their feelings of being forgotten and disregarded. “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The answer this time,

The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Whatever is happening in your life, whatever is happening in the world, with our church, with anything, we are to wait on the Lord who is the Creator. The One who does not grow weary, who does not forget the people God created, who clothes us, who counts and names not only the stars of the sky, but knows us by name. Our God has not ever abandoned us or disregarded us.

Waiting on God is difficult. Sometime we don't understand how God is at work, but we can trust that God is at work. Waiting on the Lord does not mean that struggle is necessarily removed or all things will get better. It does not mean that everything we want or hoped for will happen. Yet waiting on the Lord gives strength in ways that are more subtle, harder to grasp and understand and yet when experienced, when our strength is renewed, we continue on our life journey being transformed, about to move with God, our spirits able to soar above the struggle like an eagle, with hearts able to run and not be weary, and walk and not faint.

May you know the creating, renewing God with you today as individuals and as people in community. Amen.

Prayers of the People

God the giver of life and Creator of the universe, your Holy Spirit wells up within your Church: we thank you for your Word which corrects us, rebukes us, teaches us, encourages us and challenges us. We admit that we have promoted divisions, injustice and inequalities, instead of the unity and love you have called us to. By the power of your Holy Spirit equip us with the fruit of the Spirit to live the gospel of Christ. Make us eager to do your will, that we may represent your nature in us and share with the whole creation the joys of eternal life.

God of love and compassion, you see all people as precious and valuable. Help us to always live that truth wherever we find ourselves and with whoever we encounter. If we have mistreated anyone of your children and racism was the author of that hurt, lead us to reconciliation. Lord, reveal to us our misconceptions and prejudices and help us to humbly repent and transform us into the loving beings we were created to be. Guide us to live in ways that portray true justice and righteousness. Help us to never lose sight of the Truth that you created all people in your image and likeness. May we always see hatred of any form – whether initiated or returned as Satan's tool of division in the Church and on the earth, depriving us from experiencing and sharing the richness of your unconditional love.

God of healing and reconciliation, you created all the world and breathed your nature within us. You call us to reflect your love, goodness and justice in the world. Remind us to always show kindness and compassion and to stand up for and speak out for justice, mercy and compassion when the opportunity arises. Teach us to respect and defend your image reflected in all humans and be your true representatives here on earth.

For those who have been on the other end of inequality and injustice, help them to find it in their hearts to forgive those who have been unkind to them. Create loving and peaceful opportunities for us to share how we can treat and accommodate each other respectfully.

For those who still struggle to accept others, give them a new heart and a new spirit.

God of eternity, we pray for all who have died or been injured by acts of violence, war and hatred. We pray for those who have been faithful in every generation to work for justice, peace and equality for all peoples.

We thank you Lord for your everlasting love and compassion. Help us to respond to your call for peace and justice; that we rest in the assurance that you are always with us to nudge us. And now we pray with the words our Lord taught us, saying:

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

The Bible reminds us that when we give generously abundant gifts will pour out upon us with overflowing measures. Let us give to God with hearts of thanksgiving and praise for God loves a cheerful giver.

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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

Those who wait on the Lord

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1. Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall rise up on wings as eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint:
help us Lord; help us, Lord, in your way.

2. Those who serve the suffering world shall renew their strength;
they shall rise up on wings as eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint:
help us Lord; help us, Lord, in your way.
3. Those who live the risen life shall renew their strength;
they shall rise up on wings as eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint:
help us Lord; help us, Lord, in your way.
4. Those who love the Mystery shall renew their strength;
they shall rise up on wings as eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint:
help us Lord; help us, Lord, in your way.
5. Those who die on the march shall renew their strength;
they shall rise up on wings as eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint:
help us Lord; help us, Lord, in your way.
6. Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall rise up on wings as eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint:
help us Lord; help us, Lord, in your way.

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Benediction (based on Isaiah 40: 21-31)

May you run and not be weary.
May you rise up on the wings of eagles.
May you know without doubt
that the everlasting God goes with you!

— written by Mary J. Scifres, and posted on the [Ministry Matters](#) website.