

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski
4th Sunday in Lent - March 10th, 2024

Call to Worship

It is good to be here in this sacred space,
in the shelter of God's love and hope.

It is good to be here with folks we know well, as well as with new friends,
joining with all of God's beloved, siblings of Jesus.

It is good to be here, where we can hear God's voice,
calling us to be eyewitnesses to the Spirit's presence.

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Hymn

O love, how deep, how broad, how high

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1. O love, how deep, how broad, how high,
how passing thought and fantasy,
that God, the Son of God, should take
our mortal form for mortals' sake.
2. For us baptized, for us he bore
his holy fast and hungered sore;
for us temptations sharp he knew,
for us the tempter overthrew.
3. For us he prayed; for us he taught;
for us his daily works he wrought:
by words and signs and actions, thus
still seeking not himself, but us.
4. For us to wicked hands betrayed,
scourged, mocked, in purple robe arrayed,
he bore the shameful cross and death,
for us gave up his dying breath.
5. For us he rose from death again;
for us he went on high to reign;
for us he sent his Spirit here
to guide, to strengthen and to cheer.
6. All glory to our Lord and God
for love so deep, so high, so broad,
the Trinity whom we adore
forever and forevermore.

Words and Music: public domain

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Gracious God,
Great and wonderful are your works!
Your steadfast love is everlasting.
Where there is darkness, you bring light.
Where there is sadness, you speak words of hope.
Where there is despair, you bring new possibilities.
You have come among us in Christ Jesus to save us,
bringing healing for the sick, and forgiveness for the sinner.
In this time of worship, stir us with your Spirit, O God.
Awaken our joy and reverence
in our songs and our silence, in our prayers and praises,
for you are our God, here and everywhere, now and always.

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Holy God, we confess that we do not trust You fully.

**We put our hope in worldly gain and in human promises,
and find ourselves defeated and lost when things fall apart.**

**You have given us a love more fully
than anything we could experience in this world
but we do not seek it, we do not hold on to it,
and we look to our own means of assurance and security.**

Forgive us.

Call us back to You that we may put our trust in You and not be afraid.

**May we hear the words so clearly as the disciples did on the day of the
Transfiguration; may we rise up, and not be afraid. In the name of Jesus,
who loves us and offers us forgiveness, we pray. Amen.**

~ written by Rev. Mindi, and posted on **Rev-o-lution**. <http://rev-o-lution.org/>

Assurance of Forgiveness

Though the glory of the Lord is a devouring fire,
before which we tremble in awe,
Jesus comes to us touching us with mercy
and saying, "Get up, and do not be afraid."
Children of God, your sins are forgiven; be at peace.

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Scripture Reading Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' ⁵While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!' ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Get up and do not be afraid.' ⁸And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, 'Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.'

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Message Fear of the Unexplainable

The unexplainable and mysterious. It confronts us daily. It is part of our folklore and part of our history. One need only think about the Bermuda Triangle and all sorts of stories may come up for you. Do some channel surfing and see how many titles of shows begin with the word mystery or unexplainable. Everything from stories of aliens to ghosts, to wondering about what happened to entire civilizations of people.

There are people who thrive on reading or watching murder mysteries. Heck, we have had our own murder mystery themed plays as part of our fun here at church. Now we tend to like it when all gets resolved, we figure out “who done it” but there are many mysteries that never get figured out. What is interesting is that we just accept them as mysteries. Unless you are researching these things, most people are just fine to sit with the unknowns, that is until it is about something in the Bible and then people what proof, they want to explain away miracles and moments, such as what is referred to as the transfiguration of Jesus, the story we heard read today.

This story is a mystery. It is unexplainable, especially in the moment. It makes a little more sense to the disciples in light of the resurrection but at the time it is more than a little terrifying. Let me remind you that these stories were not written in the moment. Sometimes we think of them more like “play by play” rather than reflection on experiences. But this was not written as it was happening. The writer of Matthew has heard this story after the fact. It would not have been written down until after Jesus’ death as communities of faith were trying to find their way in the new reality of Jesus death and resurrection. And this story is one that has been shared and considered important by Christians through the centuries. In many ways it is one of the reasons those first follower and us can see Jesus as both fully human and fully divine.

It was a story of witness from Peter, James, and John. Trust me, even they were trying to make sense of it as they stood there. Peter wants to do something. “Let’s make dwellings” he says. It can be like that for many of us. Let get busy and do something to make sense of whatever is going on in our lives...especially when it doesn’t make sense or we don’t know what to do. Often it feels like doing something, anything, is better than just staying in the moment. We do it with grief all the time. We fear grief, we fear being alone, we fear unknowns, so rather than sitting with that, we start doing something...anything that might distract us.

When we do that, we miss out on the fullness of the moment. It can happen with joy as well. I don’t know how many wonderful joyful moments I missed out on in my lifetime, especially when my children were young and in their teens, because I was distracted by what I thought I needed to do rather than sit in the moment with them.

So, let’s get back to the story. What did this unexplainable event look like? We are told that [Jesus’] “face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. [Then] suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.” (v2-3) Think about that...Imagine it...It must have been breathtaking and beautiful. His face shone like the sun and his clothes became dazzling white. It makes me think about the beauty of the Aurora Borealis, or what is more commonly known as Northern Lights. If you have seen them, you have seen how they dance and light up the sky. They dazzle us and we sit in the wonder and beauty of it all. Now take that same awe and wonder and imagine Jesus, his face shining like the sun and his clothes dazzling white.

Now, not only is this *thing* happening, but then “suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!’” (v5-6) Okay, if you were in the sandals of Peter, James or John, you, like them, would likely be overcome with fear as well! They were in the midst of an overwhelmingly awesome, mysterious, and unexplainable moment. They may have found some relief in the fact that Jesus said to them as they were heading back down the mountain, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.” Not that they had any idea what that meant. The days in Jerusalem with the palm parade, the trial, crucifixion, and resurrection were still to be experienced. But for now, they just knew they could keep it to themselves. They could sit with the mystery of the whole thing. You can bet they had many conversations about it as they tried to explain away what they had experienced, but it would remain a mystery.

We though have the whole story, just as the followers of Jesus had in the time that the Gospel of Matthew was written. They had the advantage of some time to reflect on the experience in light of the cross and resurrection, as well as the ascension of Jesus. We can sit in the mystery of the cross, the resurrection, and the transfiguration and see them as a gift to us. Not all things need to be explained. Somethings are just to be experienced. Much about Jesus is to be experienced, not explained. Why we can sit with the unexplainable in our own lives and let that be, but have to prove everything about scripture, I am not sure, but it is a challenge to and for us.

Marcus Roskamp, a pastor who developed the theme for this series of services on fear writes, “We like explanations for what happens in our lives. Explanations give us a sense of control, a sense that we are directing the events of our days. When confronted with things that have no explanation, we get scared! We make up explanations, we try to fit them into categories so we don’t have to simply live with the mystery.”¹

I think Pastor Roskamp hit on something when he said, explanations give us a sense of control. If we can’t explain something it means we can’t control it. If we can’t explain the transfiguration then it means we can’t control Jesus or God, or the Holy Spirit. It means that God can go about doing whatever God wants with our lives. And that is enough to strike fear into us! However, God does give us minds to think and use, it is not that we are to go about with blind trust, but rather to use our minds to also experience the world and God at work in the world. To be open to the mystery of the Holy Spirit and how God moves in the world and in our own lives.

The transfiguration was a moment that Jesus’ was revealed as both human and divine. He was transformed in front of the three men and they were given a glimpse of God’s glory. What is absolutely amazing about this is that it can also give us a glimpse of how Christ can transform us. Jesus is in the business of transforming lives. Sometimes it is

¹ Roskamp, Marcus. [Reformed Worship 122 © December 2016](#) Worship Ministries of the Christian Reformed Church. Used by permission.

gradual, and sometimes it is mind blowing, but as we deepen and grow in faith and understanding and yes, even in our questioning, fear, and disbelief, if we are willing to step into the mystery and unexplainable presence of God then we too can become more Christ like, more the people God created us to be.

And this is not just for individuals but for the whole community of faith. I have found myself in more than one conversation this past week talking about what it means to live into our mission statement, and into our desire to be people of God. I have described it as when someone walks into our building or encounters us that, even if they can't describe it or really don't know what it is about us, that they feel or experience our love as followers of Christ. That this love is so much a part of our welcome and being that people feel it emanating from us, from this place, transforming, transcending, and transfiguring love. Maybe it could be like the transfiguration of Jesus where God's love and light shines bright as the sun through us.

One last thing of note. You may not remember hearing it or even noticed it in the scripture reading. After all was experienced, "Jesus came and touched [the men] saying, 'Get up and do not be afraid.'" Jesus knows experiencing the holy can strike fear into us, really, just living out our days can make us fearful at times, yet we can trust that Jesus is present. Is with us. We may not be able to explain all things, including how Jesus is with us today in the power of the Holy Spirit, but we can experience it and not be afraid. In fact, it may embolden and empower us to love more fully, joyfully, and with grace.

Thanks be to God for Holy unexplainable moments that fill us with awe and wonder. In Christ, with Christ, and through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Gracious God, mysterious and holy,
you have called together a people to be the church of Jesus Christ.
Keep our minds and hearts open to your Word and your ways,
so that the world may see in us compassion and wisdom in action.
May our lives lead others to believe you are love and live by your truth.

Creator God,
you made all things and called them good.
Thank you for the wonders of the world that surround us
and the promise of new life stirring
in burrows and seed beds around us.
We pray for the earth in its vulnerability,
staggering under the demands of human needs and expectations.
May your planet earth be held in reverence by all peoples.
Guide us in our country and our community
to use its resources wisely
and respect its fragile balance between life and death.

Christ, Prince of peace,
thank you for your commitment to mercy and forgiveness
which overcome our desires for revenge.
Speak to the hearts of peoples everywhere
and to those who occupy places of power and influence in every land.
Teach us how to seek peace on earth together.
Especially this week we remember the regions in conflict
(here name regions in the recent news)
and pray that a just resolution to conflict will soon prevail
for the sake of the vulnerable.
Overcome the fear, greed, violence or vanity
that turn neighbour against neighbour and nation against nation.
May all who claim your name be known as makers of the peace.

Christ, healer of hearts and hopes,
you desire health and wholeness for each one of us,
thank you for times of wellbeing,
whether measured in minutes or months.
We pray that lives caught up in the economic pressures of these times
may find enough to sustain them day by day
and hope for more generous future.
Grant rest and renewal to all who are broken in body or spirit
and bring comfort to those who ache with loss or anxiety.
In silence we lift before you the names of those on our hearts today.....
(Keep silence for 15-20 seconds)

Holy Spirit, source of wisdom and courage,
embrace your church with hope this day that we may live faithfully,
encouraging each other by the commitment we have witnessed in Jesus Christ who
taught us to pray together, saying

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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

The season of Lent leads us closer and closer to the Cross. As we contemplate Jesus lifted up for our sakes, consider what the gift of his mercy and grace means for you. Let your offering express your thanksgiving for such an amazing gift from God.

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If you are someone who watches all or part of this service regularly or are with us for the first time, may I encourage you to support the work at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Thunder Bay ON. visit our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>

Hymn

Lord, the light of your love is shining

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1. Lord, the light of your love is shining
in the midst of the darkness, shining;
Jesus, Light of the World, shine upon us.
Set us free by the truth you now bring us.
Shine on me; shine on me.

Refrain

*Shine, Jesus, shine; fill this land with the Father's glory;
blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow; flood the nations with grace and mercy;
send forth your word, Lord, and let there be light!*

2. Lord, I come to your awesome presence,
from the shadows into your radiance;
by your blood I may enter your brightness.
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness.
Shine on me; shine on me.

Refrain

3. As we gaze on your kingly brightness,
so our faces display your likeness,
ever changing from glory to glory;
mirrored here may our lives tell your story.
Shine on me; shine on me.

Refrain

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Benediction

Come down from the mountain with mountain-like faith.
Walk on God's paths as bright, shining lights.
Live in God's ways with faith, hope, and love.
Go into the world transformed and renewed!

~ from the *Abingdon Worship Annual*. Posted on the *Cokesbury* website. <http://www.cokesbury.com/forms/DynamicContent.aspx?pageid=830&id=198>