

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay**  
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski  
5th Sunday in Lent - March 17th, 2024

## Call to Worship

Come, all who desire to know God.

**We come, for we want to see Jesus.**

Come, all who thirst for the Spirit.

**We come, for God is in our midst this day.**

So let us praise God's holy name.

**We will worship God with heart, mind, strength and soul,  
and declare God's goodness to us.**

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 5th Sunday in Lent. March 17th, 2024. Year B.

## Hymn

*God of the sparrow, God of the whale*

307

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|---|---|
| 1. God of the sparrow, God of the whale<br>God of the swirling stars<br>How does the creature say Awe<br>How does the creature say Praise | 2. God of the earthquake, God of the storm<br>God of the trumpet blast<br>How does the creature cry Woe<br>How does the creature cry Save |
| 3. God of the rainbow, God of the cross<br>God of the empty grave<br>How does the creature say Grace<br>How does the creature say Thanks  | 4. God of the hungry, God of the sick<br>God of the prodigal<br>How does the creature say Care<br>How does the creature say Life          |
| 5. God of the neighbour, God of the foe<br>God of the pruning hook<br>How does the creature say Love<br>How does the creature say Peace.  | 6. God of the ages, God near at hand<br>God of the loving heart,<br>How do your children say Joy<br>How do your children say Home.        |

"God of the sparrow, God of the whale," words by Jaroslav J. Vajda © 1983  
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## Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Creating God, Loving Christ, Guiding Spirit,  
With the promise of spring and new life awakening,  
you wake us from our slumbers.

You are faithful to us through every season of the year  
and every season of life.

The hope you offer in Jesus Christ draws us together,  
as your Spirit rises within our hearts.

Even as the cross looms on the horizon,  
we praise you for Jesus' courage and compassion,  
which bring renewal to us in the midst of all our challenges.  
We praise you, O God, for such love that will never let us go.

**Gracious and Loving God,  
as we draw closer to the Cross,  
we recognize ways we fall short of your hope for us.  
We get lost in our own concerns  
and neglect to show love, even to those right beside us.  
We find some people too difficult to care for.  
We think others unworthy of your love and ours.  
Forgive us and renew a right spirit within us,  
so that we find the courage to go on  
and the compassion to reach out in your name. Amen.**

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## **Assurance of Forgiveness**

The God of all creation cares passionately for each and every one of us.  
God heals and forgives, orders and restores,  
all so we might experience the abundance of life.  
Glory be to God. © Glen E. Rainsley. *Hear Our Prayer: Resource for Worship and Devotions*. United Church Press. Cleveland, Ohio. 1996. P104.

## **Scripture Reading Luke 12:1-7**

Meanwhile, when the crowd gathered in thousands, so that they trampled on one another, he began to speak first to his disciples, ‘Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, that is, their hypocrisy. <sup>2</sup>Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. <sup>3</sup>Therefore whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed from the housetops.

<sup>4</sup> ‘I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more. <sup>5</sup>But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! <sup>6</sup>Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God’s sight. <sup>7</sup>But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

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## **Message Fear of Hell**

Our series throughout Lent have been sermon that consider the times Jesus said, “Do not be afraid.” And each one of the sermon titles has been about the fear of something or other. This week it is the *Fear of Hell*. Now I really considered whether or not I should delve into this topic on the fear of hell. My overactive imagination went into overdrive of images from movies and images I have conjured up in my own mind when thinking about novels I have read. And there are so many directions one could take this conversation. Not only that, the images and understanding of hell that you have could be starkly different from my own.

Now I am no expert on the history around cultural conceptions of hell and I am not sure I need to be. I do know that different names have been used to talk about hell from the Jewish Sheol, which hints at some afterlife, but is about the grave, to the Greek Hades, and thoughts about what is called Gehenna. The first part of a 14<sup>th</sup> century epic poem called *Dante's Inferno* has also infused our collective imagination about hell without most of us really knowing that is where many of our images about hell have come out of and stuck over centuries.

In the scripture reading for today Jesus is speaking to his disciples, but we are told that there was gathered a crowd of thousands. And Jesus starts in talking about hypocrisy, particularly religious hypocrisy, but the warning for all is that secrets don't stay secret, saying, "whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed from the housetops." When I was a young girl there was such a thing called party lines. Now this was not where you went to have a good time! These were shared phone lines and your neighbour could listen in your conversations or you could listen in on their conversations. It was not easy to keep secrets under those circumstances, should you choose to share gossip or private information.

Still today there is even more reason to heed Jesus' warning as he says, "Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. With the prolific use of cell phones, texting and the ability to share photos along with the use of social media, no one is immune to the dangers of secrets being exposed, and if not secret, just personal moments.

I know many families who never put pictures of their children up on Facebook or Instagram and if they do, they never disclose their names for fear of the harm that could come out of doing so. It is so easy to "proclaim" things from figurative housetops because of our connectivity around the globe.

This is in part how cancel culture has come to be a significant concern for celebrities, politicians, or anyone in the public eye. It can feel as if there is no safe space. Even the use of drones has made some people's backyards and homes places to target.

It is out of this conversation about hypocrisy and secrets or things whispered behind closed doors that Jesus talks about fear saying it is not those who can actually harm your physical body that one need fear but rather to fear God who has the power to cast one into hell. Jesus emphasizes not the hell part but says, "I tell you, fear the one who has the power to cast you into hell." Now these are difficult words to hear coming from Jesus. We often have the gentle Jesus meek and mild image in our heads or the suffering Jesus in our minds rather than the one recalling the one who turned over tables at the temple or this one that talks about hell.

Couple these words with the images we have of hell and we can understand how a few decades ago the practice of preaching fire and brimstone sermons. It was as if our

sinfulness was center stage and we better get our act together if we planned on getting into heaven and not go down to the fiery depths.

And many of us have a tendency to think that we are not worthy of God's love. Maybe it is because we know what hell on earth is. It may be abuse, it may be we have been victims of crime, have seen the devastation of war, famine, or refugee camps. It may be that our homes feel like war zones, or that we have gone through or are living through and with addiction or mental illness.

I think that sometimes it is hell on earth that makes us more fearful than any kind of hell that people come up with to scare us in a movie or thriller book.

What seems to be missed are the words that follow all Jesus' talk of being exposed, death, and hell. It is so easy to miss. Jesus goes from this stark and accusatory statement to speaking about sparrows. Birds that come a dime a dozen. Not stunningly beautiful, just ordinary and Jesus says, "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies?" In other words, they are almost worthless, "Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight." Hear that again, though seemingly worthless not one of these little birds is forgotten in God's sight. They have that much value to the Creator.

Jesus goes on to say, "even the hairs of your head are all counted." That is how much value we have to God. God has the power to do what God wills, but God's will is to value us. God's desire is for good not for harm. And then the statement that confirms that as Jesus says, "Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows."

Missionary Oswald Chambers said:

It is the most natural thing in the world to be scared, and the clearest evidence that God's grace is at work in our hearts is when we do not get into panics. The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.<sup>1</sup>

Fearing God is not about being afraid, but rather to have holy awe. To know that God is powerful but chooses love over and above all else. Jesus was the human expression of God's love for us, but even before that we were made to be image bearers of God. God's divine spark is in us. We need not fear anything not even hell itself because God's love for us is so deep, so broad, so high, and so wide.

We need not be afraid of hell. We need not be afraid of God. And though in our humanness we experience fear we need not be afraid for we are valuable in God sight, proven in the love of God displayed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Bring your fear what ever it is to God and experience the love, grace, and hope that is promised to and for you in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> [Oswald Chambers on Fear | Preaching Today](#). Accessed March 13, 2024.

## Prayers of the People

Steadfast God,  
amid many changes and challenges around us, we are grateful that you are with us.  
You understand our fears; you support and guide us;  
and you give us courage to face whatever lies ahead.  
Thank you for the gift of faith, a solid rock to support us, and so we trust that you  
keep working, in ways seen and unseen, for goodness to prevail.

Loving God,  
in this time of when there is much to be anxious about,  
we pray for the world you love.  
Send your healing Spirit to bring peace with justice to the troubled places.  
Bring care and comfort to those who have been hurt in conflict,  
wisdom to those who seek to end hostilities,  
and courage to those who advocate for the most vulnerable.

Send your healing Spirit to mend relationships between religious groups and cultural  
groups who find themselves in tension or turmoil.  
We pray for mutual respect to grow between people who look at each other with  
suspicion, and among people who have painful histories with each other.  
Open our hearts and minds to those whose situations and concerns we don't  
understand, and bring your gift of reconciliation to us all.

Send your healing Spirit to people we know and to the earth you love.  
We remember before you friends in grief... (pause)  
those suffering illness and all waiting for treatment... (pause)  
those facing difficulty at work or finding work... (pause)  
disagreements in our church or community... (pause)  
concerns about the environment we depend on... (pause)

We pray for the continuing ministry of the Church  
in our neighbourhoods and around the world.  
As we move toward our celebration of Christ's resurrection,  
send your healing Spirit to raise our hearts and our hopes  
with the promise of new life in Christ.

Restore to us the joy of your salvation and sustain in us all a willing spirit.  
We pray through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who taught us to pray, 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

We place our faith in God and we place our confidence in the Spirit's power.  
We place our hope in the ongoing work of Christ's church as we gather our gifts together and present them as an offering.

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

*We praise you, O God*

425

1. We praise you, O God, our Redeemer, Creator;  
in grateful devotion our tribute we bring.  
We lay it before you; we kneel and adore you;  
we bless your holy name; glad praises we sing.
2. We worship you; God ever-faithful, we bless you;  
through life's storm and tempest our guide you have been.  
When perils o'er take us, you will not forsake us,  
and with your help, O Lord, life battles we win.
3. With voices united our praises we offer,  
and gladly our songs of true worship we raise.  
Our sins now confessing, we pray for your blessing;  
to you, our great Redeemer, forever be praise.

Words and Music: public domain

## Benediction

Trust in the maker of all creation  
Honour God with an enormous faith  
And extend yourselves in love  
For no one lives beyond the Spirit's reach.  
Peace be with us. Amen.

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