

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay**  
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski  
5th Sunday of Easter - April 28th, 2024

## Call to Worship

Jesus offers a new-old commandment,  
that we should love each other.

With the incredible power  
and the unfathomable depth  
of God's love for us  
we can...we must...love one another.

And it is in this  
our love for one another  
that the world will know  
whom and what we worship.

Come, children of God,  
let us love one another.

~ written by Katherine Hawker, and posted on **Outside the Box**. <http://liturgyoutside.net/>

## Hymn

### *O God beyond all praising*

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1. O God beyond all praising,  
we worship you today  
and sing the love amazing  
that songs cannot repay,  
for we can only wonder  
at every gift you send,  
at blessings without number  
and mercies without end.  
We lift our hearts before you  
and wait upon your word;  
we honour and adore you,  
our great and mighty Lord.
2. Then hear, O gracious Saviour;  
accept the love we bring,  
that we who know your favour  
may serve you as our king,  
and whether our tomorrows  
be filled with good or ill,  
we'll triumph through our sorrows  
and rise to bless you still:  
to marvel at your beauty  
and glory in your ways,  
and make a joyful duty  
our sacrifice of praise.

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## Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Holy God, Creator of all things;  
you are our hope and the source of all wisdom.  
Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord, you are truth and you are love.  
We abide in you and you in us.  
Your love is our strength. Your energy is our joy.  
Holy Spirit, you nourish our faith so that we can bear fruit in many different ways.  
We gather to offer our worship and praise you as  
Holy God, Loving Son and Holy Spirit, ever Three and ever One.

**God of Love,  
we fail to love and one another fully.  
Forgive us for ignoring to love and worship you,  
for ignoring the needs of others, and not following your ways.  
Forgive us for seeking praise from others,  
yet failing to encourage them in their endeavours.  
Forgive who we have been, O God,  
and root our lives more deeply in your love.  
through Jesus Christ, Amen.**

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 5th Sunday of Easter. April 28th, 2024. Year B. Adapted.

## **Assurance of Forgiveness**

The writer of the Gospel of John records that God is love, and that God's perfect love casts out fear. Those who abide in love abide in God and God abides in them. Claim your hope in this Good News: God's perfect love abides in you through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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## **Scripture Reading 1 John 4:7-21**

<sup>7</sup> Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup>God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup>In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup>Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup>No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. <sup>13</sup>By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup>And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world. <sup>15</sup>God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. <sup>16</sup>So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. <sup>17</sup>Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so are we in this world. <sup>18</sup>There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. <sup>19</sup>We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup>Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. <sup>21</sup>The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

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## Message By Our Love

In his book *Enjoying God*, Lloyd Ogilvie writes:

My formative years ingrained the quid pro quo into my attitude toward myself: *do and you'll receive; perform and you'll be loved*. When I got good grades, achieved, and was a success, I felt acceptance from my parents. My dad taught me to fish and hunt and worked hard to provide for us, but I rarely heard him say, "Lloyd, I love you." He tried to show it in actions, and sometimes I caught a twinkle of affirmation in his eyes. But I still felt empty.

When I became a Christian I immediately became so involved in discipleship activities that I did not experience the profound healing of the grace I talked about theoretically...

I'll never forget as long as I live the first time I really experienced healing grace. I was a postgraduate student at the University of Edinburgh. Because of financial pressures I had to accordion my studies into a shorter than usual period. Carrying a double load of classes was very demanding, and I was exhausted by the constant feeling of never quite measuring up. No matter how good my grades were, I thought they could be better. Sadly, I was not living the very truths I was studying. Although I could have told you that the Greek words for grace and joy are *charis* and *chara*, I was not experiencing them.

My beloved professor, Dr. James Stewart, that slightly built dynamo of a saint, saw into my soul with x-ray vision. One day in the corridor of New College he stopped me. He looked me in the eye intensely. Then he smiled warmly, took my coat lapels in his hands, drew me down to a few inches from his face, and said, "Dear boy, you are loved now!"

God loves us now, not when we get better. God loves us now, as we are. <sup>1</sup>

You may be able to relate to Mr. Ogilvie's story. So many people walk the face of the earth feeling like they don't measure up, that for some reason they are not lovable. And in truth I think that all of us have times when we feel like there is something that is not lovable about us, and that can make us fearful. It makes us fearful to be in relationship with others and fearful for others to be in relationship with us. When we feel or fear that someone has an agenda, that somehow their appearance or their way is off-putting or even scary, we find it difficult to love them.

Sometimes fear can make people down right ugly in how they treat others. They fear someone getting the best of them, or they have been hurt so badly by another that they lash out at everyone around them. This fear can extend to groups. There is more than

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<sup>1</sup> Larson, Craig Brian. *Leadership Journal. 750 Engaging Illustrations for Preacher, Teachers, and Writers*. Baker Books. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1993, 1996, 1998. 2002. Page 329-330.

enough hatred going around on the internet, on the news, and in lived experience, but hate comes from a place of fear. Fear of the other, fear that we will be hurt.

At times it can be change or transitions that make people fearful, and so they dig in, hold their position and try to force others to follow suit. It is done through coercion and manipulation. Their fear becomes the basis for break down in communication and trust.

Some people fear that they are not loving enough, even for God. They strive to be the best people they can be so that they are lovable enough for God and for others. But the writer of 1 John has this to say about any and all fear, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love cast out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love." (v18)

Even that is a difficult statement to understand, so let's unpack it a little. We heard that line about being perfected also in verse 12. "No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us."

Now we already know that human beings are not perfect, yet what this is saying, well this and all the rest of the scripture that was read, is that because God loved us first...loved us with all our imperfections, troubles, challenges, and yes, sin, God love is perfected in us. This perfection comes in how we love others. You see our response to God's love is to love others. The more we love, the more we live our lives in the Spirit of Jesus and his example of love. The more we are perfected.

Something to note about this epistle of 1 John is that it was written to Christian community. It is about how we as Christians understand God's love and how to love one another. If you are getting a sense of déjà vu that is a good thing, it means that you recognize much of what I am saying you heard from me last week. The challenge of doing a series on 1 John is that the writer repeats himself, but that is also likely the point. We need to be reminded over and over again about God's love for us and how that love is perfected in our loving our neighbour.

The mark of Christian community is how we love one another. How we demonstrate our love for each other speaks volumes about what it means to be Christian. In the reading we also heard, "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love." (v7-8). To love means you know your value as a child of God, imperfections and all. God loves you right now. Not in some future time when you get it all together, not when you accomplish this thing or that. God loves you now and because of that we can love others just as they are, right now.

But how can we trust God's love for us? Again, this is a specifically Christian question. I will not try to answer it for everyone, but as Christians we know God's love for us in that, "God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him." God sent Jesus, to live a fully human life, so that we could trust that God knows what we are experiencing.

We know God's love through the Son whom God sent, Jesus. We know Jesus' story through scripture, and through Jesus we learn of how much we are loved by God.

Jesus was the gift that proved God's love for us once and for all time. We can trust it, live into it, and be perfected by God's love shown in how we love others. This is something we do as individuals but as the church it is imperative.

I remember many years ago sharing a story with an acquaintance about how I had hoped to see her mother after the passing of the husband, I never did it. The daughter said, well it's the thought that counts. That never sat well with me. I thought to myself, but if I never act on the thought how will anyone know that I really cared, that I wanted to show compassion and love?

The writer of 1 John is all about action, about following through with the thought by demonstrating our love. We make the invisible God known to others by our love. God makes himself visible in Christian love. As the church of St. Andrew's, as the broader call of being a follower of Christ in the world-wide church, we are to love one another because "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them." (v16b). Those who love God are to love others. This is how the world will know God. The world will know God by our love. In community, in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen.

### **Prayers of the People**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
we draw near to you in prayer this day,  
trusting that your love changes lives  
and your resurrection brings hope into the world God loves.  
You walk with us through every challenging time,  
and we give you thanks for every sign of hope  
in a world that is often on edge and the future seems uncertain.  
May we abide in your love.

We ask you to bless the ministries and mission activity  
undertaken through staff and funding  
provided by The Presbyterian Church in Canada.  
Thank you for each faithful servant serving in these challenging days,  
whether in Canada or in international ministries.  
Bless them with good health and courageous commitment,  
and equip them well to reach out in love and respect.  
May they abide in your love.

Loving and Listening God, we bring you now our prayers for others,  
friends and enemies, neighbours and strangers alike.  
We pray for people who are struggling with illness, loneliness, grief or sadness:  
May they abide in your love.

We pray for people in countries and communities where it is not safe to live out their faith or express their views openly. May they abide in your love.

We pray for victims of discrimination and acts of hatred, and those who fear violence day by day. May they abide in your love.

We pray for journalists and advocates for justice who live under threat for telling the truth. May they abide in your love.

We pray for churches, local organizations and businesses struggling under the pressure of economic challenges. May they abide in your love.

We pray for our families, friends and for ourselves, as well as those in the news whose situations tug at our hearts. May we all abide in your love.

Lord Jesus, we believe that you hear our prayers and will be faithful to our requests and concerns. And so we pray together the words you taught us:

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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

While the season of Easter is unfolding, the gifts of spring emerge around us to remind us of God's generosity in Christ and in creation. As we present our gifts to God, may our generosity reflect God's goodness to us and our hope for abundant life in Christ Jesus.

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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

### *We are one in the Spirit*

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1. We are One in The Spirit, we are One in the Lord,  
we are One in The Spirit, we are One in the Lord,  
and we pray that all unity will one day be restored,  
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our Love,  
and they'll know we are Christians by our love.
2. We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,  
we will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,  
and together we'll spread the news that God is in our land,  
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our Love,  
and they'll know we are Christians by our love.
3. We will work with each other, we will work side by side,  
we will work with each other, we will work side by side,  
and we'll guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride,  
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our Love,  
and they'll know we are Christians by our love.
4. All praise to the Father, from whom all things come,  
and all praise to Christ Jesus, who is God's only Son,  
and all praise to the Spirit, who makes us one,  
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our Love,  
and they'll know we are Christians by our love.

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## Benediction

Go in the peace of Christ,  
to witness to his love in truth and action each day.  
And may God's resurrecting love open the future for you,  
empowered by the Spirit,  
and embraced by the presence of Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord.

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