

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski
5th Sunday After Pentecost / Pride Sunday - June 23th, 2024

Call to Worship

Give thanks to the LORD, for God is good;
God's steadfast love endures forever.

We see God's wondrous works all around us,
so we come to praise God's holy name.

Open wide your hearts in this time of worship!

We lift our hearts to God with thanks and praise.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 5th Sunday After Pentecost. June 23th, 2024. Year B.

Hymn

We cannot own the sunlit sky

717

1. We cannot own the sunlit sky,
the moon, the wild-flowers growing,
for we are part of all that is
within life's river flowing.
With open hands receive and share
the gifts of God's creation,
that all may have abundant life
in every earthly nation.
2. When bodies shiver in the night,
and, weary, wait for morning,
when children have no bread but tears,
and war horns sound their warning,
God calls humanity to wake,
to join in common labour,
that all may have abundant life
in oneness with their neighbour.
3. God calls humanity to join
as partners in creating a future
free from want or fear,
life's goodness celebrating.
That new world beckons from afar,
invites our shared endeavour,
that all may have abundant life
and peace endure forever.

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Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Creator God,
we gather in wonder this day,
astonished by the complexity of all you have made,
acknowledging how small each of us is in the midst of your world.
Yet your love gives us significance.
When we are overcome by forces beyond our control, you speak words of peace.
When trouble or sorrow sets in, you give us strength to persevere.
Source, Saviour and Spirit of life,
we offer you praise and honour, love and loyalty,

with our lips and with our lives, now and always.

**God, our hope and our help,
You call us to serve in the footsteps of Jesus,
but we confess we look to our own interests first.
You ask us to love our neighbours,
but we are good at finding fault in others.
You call us to do justice for the vulnerable,
but we hesitate to take a stand.
Forgive us.
Open our hearts to anyone in need,
and help us trust in your mercy – for them and for us.**

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Assurance of Pardon

The mercy of our God is from everlasting to everlasting. Friends, hear and believe the good news of the Gospel. In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven and made new. Give thanks for God's generosity and share it with your neighbours.

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Scripture Reading 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Companions as we are in this work with you, we beg you, please don't squander one bit of this marvelous life God has given us. God reminds us,
I heard your call in the nick of time;
The day you needed me, I was there to help.

Well, now is the right time to listen, the day to be helped. Don't put it off; don't frustrate God's work by showing up late, throwing a question mark over everything we're doing. Our work as God's servants gets validated—or not—in the details. People are watching us as we stay at our post, alertly, unswervingly . . . in hard times, tough times, bad times; when we're beaten up, jailed, and mobbed; working hard, working late, working without eating; with pure heart, clear head, steady hand; in gentleness, holiness, and honest love; when we're telling the truth, and when God's showing his power; when we're doing our best setting things right; when we're praised, and when we're blamed; slandered, and honored; true to our word, though distrusted; ignored by the world, but recognized by God; terrifically alive, though rumored to be dead; beaten within an inch of our lives, but refusing to die; immersed in tears, yet always filled with deep joy; living on handouts, yet enriching many; having nothing, having it all.

¹¹⁻¹³ Dear, dear Corinthians, I can't tell you how much I long for you to enter this wide-open, spacious life. We didn't fence you in. The smallness you feel comes from within you. Your lives aren't small, but you're living them in a small way. I'm speaking as plainly as I can and with great affection. Open up your lives. Live openly and expansively!

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The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message Living Openly and Expansively!

Here comes trouble! That is the thought, or one like it, that may go through your mind when you see or hear from someone with whom your relationship is not quite on the good terms that you might wish it to be. It might be the thought someone has when they see you coming! 😊

Each of us has a relationship or two, maybe more, that we just cannot seem to reconcile. With some of those relationships we conveniently forget about how we as Christians are called to act toward others. We come to church, listen to the sermon, enjoy the singing of hymns that talk about God's expansive love and then walk out the doors and within minutes find ourselves saying and doing things that we know are not all that Christ-like. We have all done it.

Call it human nature, but it is so easy to criticize, have unrealistic expectations of how others should be in the world and then either ignore or forget about what we are doing in our own lives that is creating challenges for others. Often, we feel and experience the way someone or a group of people has injured us, but we likely have done the same to others.

I still remember junior high...so glad I am not in junior high anymore...those were some of the roughest years of figuring out relationships. I remember a group of girls that I wanted to be with asked that I tell another girl, who had been my friend for some time, that she could no longer hang out with us. I can still feel the injustice of it all and saddest of all is that I did what was requested. I called my friend, who literally lived two houses from me and told her what the group had decided. I don't have to tell you what she was feeling... anger, hurt, broken-hearted, unworthy.

On top of that, not many weeks later the group cut ties with me. Talk about a life lesson. I wish I could say it was the last time I had to learn a life lesson about relationships, trust, compassion, and expectations, but it seems to be an ongoing learning. Over the years I have hurt people and people have hurt me. Just when I think I may have people figured out I get another surprise learning. Having said that, I have also learned and experienced what it looks like and feels like to have good and healthy relationships. Letting go of those relationships that cannot be salvaged for one reason or another, letting go with good-will and grace. This can happen even if the other person is unaware of that good-will toward them, as they are feeling angry with me and so reconciliation in the way I may hope cannot come to fruition.

I have also learned that many relationships can be reconciled when I learn to be curious about the other's reasons for how they think and behave. When I learn more about who they are and also for taking responsibility for my part in a break in a relationship and saying, "I'm sorry for..." adding whatever I is that I am sorry for.

I share all of this to help make sense of what is up with this reading from 2 Corinthians. This letter is about heartbreak and relationships. The relationship that was broken was

that between the Apostle Paul and this church in Corinth. This was a church that Paul had established and then left to go on to the next work that God was leading Paul to do. But Paul did not let go of them. He wrote to them and they wrote back. At some point he came to realize that others have come and are tearing apart the work that Paul had done in Corinth to teach the truth about Jesus and God's work in the world through Christ. The truth being that God in Christ was reconciling Godself to the world, to the people that God had created, and that was then the basis for how we are to be with one another in the world, whether that be with family, friends, in community with those we know or in community with those we don't know and yet are called to care for.

There is always a caveat. Do not reconcile at the expense of your safety if you have come out of or are in an abusive relationship. Part of growing in wisdom is realizing that in some cases the only things you can do are to walk away from that relationship and then pray for wellbeing for the other and yourself. That God will take care of what you cannot.

God has given us a marvelous life and as Paul wrote, please don't squander one bit of it. We squander our lives when we make our wants come before another's needs. We squander our lives when we hold on to grudges or past mistakes, those we have made and those mistake or grievances others have about us. God is saying, I am here to help. God demonstrated God's deep love and desire to be reconciled to people when God's son, Jesus came to live among us, then through the work of the cross took away all barriers in this life to be in relationship with God, and through that, in a new way be in relationship with others as well as reconciling ourselves to ourselves.

This is about living life in the kingdom of God, this kingdom that is already on earth, not just in a heaven that is out there somewhere. This is about living a wide-open, spacious life. Living in this way comes from the freedom that we experience when grace, forgiveness, hope, compassion, and love are part of every equation, every interaction, every conversation...every relationship whether momentary or life long. And the example of this kind of living is what God did in and through Jesus. God loves us so much that he gave his one and only Son that we might have life and have it in abundance.

This life is not about how much stuff we can acquire or how much money, power, and prestige we have. This life is about living in a way that is open and expansive when it comes to our relationship with God, with others, with creation, and with ourselves. It is a kind of living that is open to loving and being loved, to forgiving and being forgiven, to experience heart break but willing to go on living because that is what we are designed for. We are designed for a wide-open, spacious kind of life. We were never meant to live small, to feel small, to have reservations about who we are and who others are. We are not to feel fenced in because our lives are small and we are certainly not to feel fenced because of our faith.

Living as followers of Christ means expansive living. Living in a way that expects that no matter what we face we can live well through it and at the very least come to see daily the grace and gifts of God that is evident all around us.

This is no Polly Anna living, where we go about with rose coloured glasses, denying the pain and indignity that is around us. This is especially important in the month of June which has lenses on both our relationships with Indigenous People and is Pride month where we acknowledge and celebrate the expansive love of God in creating a spectrum of people who go beyond the fenced in and small focus of seeing people as only male and female. This is about living into the love and grace that is freely given to us when we believe that God is at work in us, in others, and in the world. The brokenness of the world will always be with us. Yet we are called to live like we actually trust and believe that God is at work in the world despite what it looks like.

We live as people who actually believe God is at works in the world and are called to show up and live our faith as a witness to others.

Paul went through a whole litany of struggles he and those he traveled with had faced. He wrote,

People are watching us as we stay at our post, alertly, unswervingly . . . in hard times, tough times, bad times; when we're beaten up, jailed, and mobbed; working hard, working late, working without eating; with pure heart, clear head, steady hand; in gentleness, holiness, and honest love; when we're telling the truth, and when God's showing his power; when we're doing our best setting things right; when we're praised, and when we're blamed; slandered, and honored; true to our word, though distrusted; ignored by the world, but recognized by God; terrifically alive, though rumored to be dead; beaten within an inch of our lives, but refusing to die; immersed in tears, yet always filled with deep joy; living on handouts, yet enriching many; having nothing, having it all.

Most of us, who call this church their home, actually most of us in churches across Canada, never have to deal with the hardships that Paul and his companions faced, still we have our own life and times. We are acutely aware of our need for forgiveness, the ways we have hurt others and the ways we have been hurt. We cannot help but see the brokenness in the world in the way people desire power over others whether nation to nation or person to person. As Christians we are called to live lives that are not confined or fenced in but open and expansive. Lives that see need and respond to it. See brokenness and restore relationships, people, and creation to wholeness. And then we rejoice in community for what has been accomplished, even if those moments are brief and incomplete.

Today may you look at your life and see where you can live openly and expansively. Where you can restore relationships in your life and in a larger sense of community and not miss or squander on bit of this marvelous life God has given each of us. Be

courageous, wise, loving, and grace filled as you walk in the world knowing that God goes with you in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers of the People

God in whom we live and move and have our being:

As we consider the world around us today, we are grateful to know you are near.

We thank you that your presence will not fail us, no matter challenges we face.

We are aware of so many challenges –

in our own lives, the lives of those we care about, and in the world around us.

Help us trust that you never give up on situations which we find overwhelming.

God, in your mercy, Hear our prayer.

In faithful silence, we lay before you the concerns on our hearts this day:

We pray for those people and places who have been in the headlines this week, and for all who cry out to you in situations we can't even imagine:

We pray for those who are suffering from illness of any sort,

coping with pain or ongoing treatment,

for those waiting for or recovering from surgery,

and for those who are bereaved or burdened by any deep loss:

We pray for those who are waiting for something significant –

a birth or a death, a trip or a visit, a move, a new job or the moment of retirement.

Grant them patience, O God, in times of restless waiting:

We pray for students and teachers, and all who serve in educational settings.

As graduations take place, and as summer marks a time for transition of many kinds, bless all the learning that has occurred this year.

Grant rest and renewal to each learner and teacher.

Bless our congregation and its ministries, its leaders and volunteers,

as we seek to be truly a congregation where our love and God's love for everyone is evident in all we do.

Bless the faithful work of all churches in our community.

Unite us in our witness to the love of Jesus.

Open our eyes to new possibilities to serve together

as we pray the words Christ taught us:

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 Scriptures teach us of the courage it takes to serve God. Giving takes courage, too. So give to God as you are able, trusting that God will honour your courage and generosity with the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

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Should you wish to support and/or would like to learn more about St. Andrew's, get involved in our ministry or make a donation toward the life and work of St. Andrew's Presbyterian, in Thunder Bay visit our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>

Hymn

Called as partners in Christ's service

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1. Called as partners in Christ's service,
called to ministries of grace,
we respond with deep commitment,
fresh new lines of faith to trace.
May we learn the art of sharing,
side by side and friend with friend,
equal partners in our caring
to fulfil God's chosen end.
2. Christ's example, Christ's inspiring,
Christ's clear call to work and worth,
let us follow, never faltering,
reconciling folk on earth.
Men and women, richer, poorer,
All God's people, young and old,
Blending human skills together,
Gracious gifts from God unfold.
3. Thus new patterns for Christ's mission,
in a small or global sense,
help us bear each other's burdens,
breaking down each wall or fence.
Words of comfort, words of vision,
words of challenge, said with care,
bring new power and strength for action,
make us colleagues, free and fair.
4. So God grant us for tomorrow
says to order human life
that surround each person's sorrow
with a calm that conquers strife.
make us partners in our living,
our compassion to increase,
messengers of faith, thus giving
hope and confidence and peace.

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Benediction

Go in the strength of the Lord
and let Christ shoulder your burdens in every challenge,
trusting that the Spirit will equip you to thrive.

And may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
That you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.