

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay – Liturgy

<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski

15th Sunday after Pentecost – September 1, 2024

Call to Worship

Holy God, you call us to worship.

In your presence, we seek truth and forgiveness.

Holy God, you call us to worship you.

In your presence, we seek the grace to forgive one another.

Holy God, you call us to worship you, heart, body, mind and soul.

So we gather to offer you our prayer and praise with joyful thanks.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. 15th Sunday after Pentecost. September 1st, 2024. Year B.

Hymn

Lord, I want to be a Christian

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1. Lord, I want to be a Christian in-a my heart, in-a my heart;
Lord, I want to be a Christian in-a my heart.
In-a my heart, in-a my heart,
Lord, I want to be a Christian in-a my heart.
2. Lord, I want to be more loving in-a my heart, in-a my heart;
Lord, I want to be more loving in-a my heart.
In-a my heart, in-a my heart,
Lord, I want to be more loving in-a my heart.
3. Lord, I want to be more holy in-a my heart, in-a my heart;
Lord, I want to be more holy in-a my heart.
Ina my heart, in-a my heart,
Lord, I want to be more holy in-a my heart.
4. Lord, I want to be like Jesus in-a my heart, in-a my heart;
Lord, I want to be like Jesus in-a my heart.
Ina my heart, in-a my heart,
Lord, I want to be like Jesus in-a my heart.

Words and Music: public domain

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Faithful God,

In your creation,

you have made the seasons to change,

the sun to shine and the rain to fall,

the vines to bear fruit and the fields to produce good things.

You alone are our strength and security;

you alone bring us rest and comfort.

We turn to you as the source of all life,

marvelling at your wisdom,

seeking to learn your purpose for our lives.

We offer you our praise and thanksgiving,
for you are the God who made us,
the Christ who mends us,
and the Spirit who brings us life.

**Faithful God,
even though we know you are the Source of our lives,
we confess we often turn our backs on you.
We hear your Word but follow our own ways.
We see others in need but prefer to meet our own needs first.
We harbor anger and say things that cause others pain.
In your mercy, forgive us,
and restore us to right relationship with you and with one another.**

God of Word and Wisdom, send your Spirit upon us today as we hear the Scriptures read and interpreted. Help us be doers of your Word, not mere listeners, so that our lives reflect the truth we meet in Jesus Christ, your living Word. Amen

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Assurance of Pardon

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.
When we seek the mercy of God in humility, God will grant us grace.
Be at peace with God, with yourself, and with one another.

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Scripture Readings Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, ²they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. ³(For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; ⁴and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) ⁵So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" ⁶He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,

'This people honors me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me;
⁷in vain do they worship me,
teaching human precepts as doctrines.'

⁸You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

¹⁴Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things

that come out are what defile.”²¹ For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder,²² adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly.²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

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

Message Heart Condition

My mind was a whirlwind of thoughts as I began to work on this message. The number of references to the heart, from song lyrics, to poetry, to movies, and scripture itself is a long one. In literature it is in everything from plays, to novels, to medical references books for doctors actually work on the heart to repair damage. It is amazing to me that we have come so far as to have heart transplants. At some point millions of dollars from our local 50/50 draws that the hospital has been doing since Covid will go into cardiac care and a dedicated care center for cardiovascular surgeries and care.

We have hearts for Valentine's representing love and heart emojis to add to texts and messages. No matter where you look or go you have a heart and hearts are used in all kinds of ways to appeal to our senses and our emotional side of life.

We think of the heart as a place of emotion and a place of life. When the heart stops beating life ends and besides that, just like I mentioned, we think of the heart representing many things. For the ancients the heart represented the seat of rationality and will. Talking about the heart is complicated yet the basis of life. The heart is our essence physically, without it we literally drop dead, and we also talk of it as representing so much more.

In the scripture reading it starts out seemingly that the conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees is about something as basic as washing one's hands before eating. In brackets there is also a side comment about it being common that all Jews do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, by doing so they observe the tradition of the elders. The side comment goes on to talk about other traditions like washing the food and the pots pans that are used for cooking. It is important to note that nowhere in the Old Testament does it give a command to wash hands or food before partaking. It is also important to note that though it might be a tradition, it was not that all washed their hands before eating just like that is not the case today. We might hope it happens, but what person hasn't just sat down to eat without concern for hand washing. Sometimes it is not at all practical for that to happen.

What was happening here was really a conversation between what had become expected through the tradition of the elders and what was actually important and scriptural.

Now don't think for a moment that we don't have similar conversations in our homes, our communities, and in our churches. One of my lines is, "that is not a hill I want to die on."

Meaning there are traditions and expectations that even after nearly eleven years as the minister of this congregation I have chosen to not have particular discussions or ask for certain things to change as I know I am going to get major push back. Some traditions and histories are so strong that they become entrenched to the point that some might think church cannot be church without them.

Now don't misunderstand, traditions and histories, rituals and expectations, can keep us grounded in our faith. Take communion and baptism, we are not the church without them. Different churches do these things different ways, but to be the church we have to have communion and baptism. We can do away with baptismal fonts, clergy stoles, communion cups that have been blessed or donated in memory of a loved one, those things are nice to have, but they do not make the church or the sacrament more important. Physical things do not elevate the sacraments themselves.

So we need to separate out what we like and what gives us warm fuzzies from what is important. And in Jesus' style he takes the conversation with the Pharisees and flips it on it's head. They are talking about the physical need for cleanliness that really may not even be meant as a criticism of the followers of Jesus, but rather have been a desire to help people understand the importance of tradition.

Still Jesus says, you are paying attention to the outward appearance of things and trying to make sure what goes into the body is clean, but really what you need to be paying attention to is what is going into one's heart and what is coming out of one's mouth in terms of speech.

You see they had lost sight of what was important. Such an easy thing to do for any of us. I can't tell you how many times I have been sidetracked by unimportant details or demands, my own hopes and desires, my own thoughts, and have been corrected by another. I am truly thankful for those corrections, as I am trying to live as a follower of Christ, which means one must pay attention to our thoughts, words, and actions. This entire scripture is far more about our lives and how what we say and do shows others Jesus than it is about anything else.

Jesus gives a list of things that corrupt us, some of those things I would have to get out a dictionary to define. The list runs from theft and murder to licentiousness, envy, slander, pride and folly. But this is not an exhaustive list. Add to that sloth, or filling our minds with endless games of solitaire or video games, binge watching shows, shooting up with drugs, or drinking oneself into a stupor. It is not only what goes into our mouths that can make us unclean or as the word used is the scripture says, defile us, but also what we consume through our eyes, ears, smell, taste, and touch.

This scripture is a warning to pay attention because what goes in comes out in some way, and if what goes in is unhealthy then it may possibly produce or go out in sinful actions. We need to pay attention and examine both what we are consuming and what we are doing as a result. People are paying attention. If we say we are church going

people, followers of Christ, or even if you don't but people figure it out, and then our words and actions don't align with that, we give them reason to call us hypocrites.

This is not to say that we live perfectly, that is impossible. It is more about intentionality. This living as a Christian is not easy as there are expectations that if we believe in God then we no longer get to just let life happen around us. We not only have to aspire to live in a certain way, we actually *desire* to live differently. This living in faith make us want to examine our own words, actions, and even our belief and faith. We get things wrong, but ask for forgiveness and then work toward the transformation that is promised to us if we continue to walk in the way of Christ.

And though this scripture feels somewhat like a brow beating and angry, it is a scripture that points toward fullness of life, of life-giving words, thoughts, and actions. We are called to be image bearers of God so how we live and move and have our being in the world matters. Our heart condition matters.

What we do, say, and think, is a reflection of the heart. Not the physical beating heart, but the heart that can change the world. It is the heart that shows love, care, compassion. It is a heart for justice for those who are oppressed or suffering.

Check your heart rate, not just the one that tells you that you are physically alive, but the one that also lets you know whether or not you are emotionally and spiritually alive.

These words of scripture are about the condition of your heart, the heart of the church, and the heart of God's love beating within you. I pray that you are alive and well, but know there is a great physician who can heal your heart, give you life now and everlasting through Christ and in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Invitation to the offering

Our God is a generous God, so let our offering today reflect God's generosity and our gratitude for every gift we have received through God's faithfulness to us.

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St. Andrew's uses all the money that we receive to support the ministry of God from this church and in community. Your gifts make a difference and this includes the ministry of online worship as well. If you are able to make a one-time donation or support this ministry on an ongoing basis your gift makes an impact. Please check us out at standrewpres-tbay.ca. There you can find various ways of giving from etransfer to the online donate button that allows you to give by credit card. We are deeply grateful for your generosity.

Prayers of the People

God whose Word created life,
we give you thanks for the abundance we enjoy from earth's goodness.
Make us wise caretakers of the earth's fragile balance,
so vulnerable to drought and disaster.
May your world become a place of abundance for all your creatures,

for we know all our lives depend on you.

God of transforming love,
we are grateful to live in a land which is mostly peaceful,
with leaders accountable for their decisions.
We pray for those who face racism, violence and greed
in our communities and in many other nations.
Open hearts and minds to recognize such harm,
and help us build a common life where all people find dignity in their work,
are rewarded fairly, and respected fully.

God of vigilant care,
thank you for the strength and comfort you offer us in times of sorrow and stress.
We pray for those who do not know security in their lives day by day,
for those facing financial pressures,
for the vulnerable who must depend on others for their care,
and for those who feel exhausted by the responsibilities they carry.
Guide us to shape a society where the weak are protected,
where the elderly are honored for their experience,
and children are cherished for their potential.

God of all times and places,
as the summer moves toward autumn,
and activities reorganize for another season,
we pray for families who face decisions about schooling,
and for churches and organizations planning programs.
Equip us all with the wisdom to plan well,
and act with understanding for those eager to get things going
and for those anxious about moving too quickly.

God who hears our desires even in the silence of our hearts,
listen now as we name before you the people and situations on our minds today:
Receive all our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, 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

1. God is love: come heaven, adoring;
God is love: come earth, rejoice.
Come creation, voices soaring,
sing exulting with one voice.
God who laid the earth's foundation,
God who spread the heavens above,
God who breathes through all creation—
God is love, eternal love.
2. God is love, whose arms enfolding
all the world in one embrace,
with unfailing grasp are holding
every child of every race,
and when human hearts are breaking
under sorrow's iron rod,
all the sorrow, all the aching
wrings with pain the heart of God.
3. God is love, and though with blindness
sin afflicts all human life,
God's eternal loving kindness
guides us through all earthly strife.
Sin and death and hell shall never
o'er us final triumph gain;
God is love: so love forever
o'er the universe must reign.

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Benediction

And may the God of wisdom guide you;
The Christ of mercy walk beside you;
And the Spirit of hope inspire you each and every day,
Now and always. Amen.

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