

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski
Thanksgiving Sunday – October 13, 2024

Call to Worship

God blesses us with gifts of love,
In relationships that bring joy and gratitude.

God blesses us with talents and opportunities to serve,
All we need for faithful living.

God protects us in times of danger,
And guards us from the time of trial.

So we gather to offer thanksgiving to the Lord our God.
Praise be to God for all good things, now and always!

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Hymn

Deep in the Shadows of the past

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1. Deep in the shadows of the past,
far out from settled lands,
some nomads traveled with their God
across the desert sands.
The dawning hope of humankind
by them was sensed and shown:
a promise calling them ahead,
a future yet unknown.
2. While others bowed to changeless gods
they met a mystery,
invisible, without a name:
"I AM WHAT I WILL BE";
and by their tents, around their fires
in story, song and law,
they praised, remembered, handed on
a past that promised more.
3. From Exodus to Pentecost
the promise changed and grew,
while some, remembering the past,
recorded what they knew,
or with their letters and laments,
their prophecy and praise,
recovered, kindled and expressed
new hope for changing days.
4. For all the writings that survived
for leaders, long ago,
who sifted, copied, and preserved
the Bible that we know,
give thanks, and find its story yet
our promise, strength and call,
the model of emerging faith,
alive with hope for all.

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Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God of all creation,
in this season of harvest thanksgiving, we are struck by the beauties of autumn,
leaves in bright colours, birds flying south in formation, fields ripe with produce.
Such beauty speaks of your goodness that provides what each beloved creature
needs.

On this Thanksgiving weekend, renew our gratitude for what you give to us in the
fruitfulness of creation, and in Christ Jesus who teaches us how to walk wisely on the

earth you made. For all your good gifts we honour you with thanks and praise, now and always.

**God of our lives,
even in these challenging times, we know we enjoy an abundance many cannot imagine. Yet we confess we do not always recognize these blessings. We worry about the future, and whether our families can flourish. Forgive our fears of going without, and show us how to share the goodness that is already ours.**

God of wisdom, send us your Spirit to open our minds to your Word. Move our hearts to deeper love, and our wills to greater service, through Jesus Christ, your Word made flesh. Amen.

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Assurance of Forgiveness

This is the good news:

God does not go back on the promises made so long ago.

God does not reject us, God redeems us.

God does not withhold love,

God pours it into our barren lives.

**Forgiven of our sins, filled with hope,
living in relationship with God and one another –
we are a new people. Thanks be to God. Amen.**

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Scripture Reading Romans 4:13-15

¹³⁻¹⁵ That famous promise God gave Abraham—that he and his children would possess the earth—was not given because of something Abraham did or would do. It was based on God’s decision to put everything together for him, which Abraham then entered when he believed. If those who get what God gives them only get it by doing everything they are told to do and filling out all the right forms properly signed, that eliminates personal trust completely and turns the promise into an ironclad *contract!* That’s not a holy promise; that’s a business deal. A contract drawn up by a hard-nosed lawyer and with plenty of fine print only makes sure that you will never be able to collect. But if there is no contract in the first place, simply a *promise*—and God’s promise at that—you can’t break it.

¹⁶ This is why the fulfillment of God’s promise depends entirely on trusting God and his way, and then simply embracing him and what he does. God’s promise arrives as pure gift. That’s the only way everyone can be sure to get in on it, those who keep the religious traditions *and* those who have never heard of them. For Abraham is father of us all. He is not our racial father—that’s reading the story backward. He is our *faith* father.

¹⁷⁻¹⁸ We call Abraham “father” not because he got God’s attention by living like a saint, but because God made something out of Abraham when he was a nobody. Isn’t that

what we've always read in Scripture, God saying to Abraham, "I set you up as father of many peoples"? Abraham was first named "father" and then *became* a father because he dared to trust God to do what only God could do: raise the dead to life, with a word make something out of nothing. When everything was hopeless, Abraham believed anyway, deciding to live not on the basis of what he saw he *couldn't* do but on what God said he *would* do. And so he was made father of a multitude of peoples. God himself said to him, "You're going to have a big family, Abraham!"

¹⁹⁻²⁵ Abraham didn't focus on his own impotence and say, "It's hopeless. This hundred-year-old body could never father a child." Nor did he survey Sarah's decades of infertility and give up. He didn't tiptoe around God's promise asking cautiously skeptical questions. He plunged into the promise and came up strong, ready for God, sure that God would make good on what he had said. That's why it is said, "Abraham was declared fit before God by trusting God to set him right." But it's not just Abraham; it's also us! The same thing gets said about us when we embrace and believe the One who brought Jesus to life when the conditions were equally hopeless. The sacrificed Jesus made us fit for God, set us *right with God*.

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Message Promises, Promises

In the book *Stone Soup for the World: Life Changing Stories of Everyday People*, Marianne Larned writes about Eleanor Roosevelt. Let me share...

In her time, Eleanor Roosevelt became the most trusted woman in the world, and not because she was the president's wife, or because she was born into one of the country's leading families. Eleanor Roosevelt earned people's trust by always keeping her promises.

When she was a very young child, Eleanor's father promised her that when she was a little older, the two of them would live together again. She lived for that day. After her mother died, she was very lonely, living with her grandmother, who was very old, strict, and old-fashioned. When her father broke his promise, it broke her heart. At ten years old, she realized that she had to become strong in herself if she wanted to go on living, and she vowed that she would never break a promise. For the rest of her life, she could always be counted on to keep her word.

The soldiers in the hospitals in the Pacific islands that she visited during World War II believed her when she said she would telephone their families the moment she got home. Something in her manner made people know they could trust her.¹

Many of us would aspire to be like Eleanor Roosevelt. As I read her story, I was painfully aware of the many ways I fall short. How many times I have promised that something would be ready for a particular day and time and missed the deadline, or simply did not

¹¹ [Marianne Larned She Kept Her Promises - Thrive Global](#) Accessed October 10, 2024.

follow through with something as I had dared hope I could. Those are the daily things, however, there are promises that one makes that are much bigger, like the promise at a wedding to honour and cherish someone 'til death do they part. Our divorce rates show that to be a difficult promise to keep.

In this scripture we hear of the promise that God gave Abraham – that he and his children would possess the earth. This reference comes from Genesis 17. Now there are a couple of things that might perk up your ears. If you know anything about Abraham and his wife Sarah it is that they were well beyond child bearing years and had no children together. Abraham was 99 years old and Sarah 90. And to be fair, both Abraham and Sarah, in their own separate moments laughed that God might make such a promise. But this wasn't the first time that God had promised this to Abraham. We first hear of it back in chapter 12 of Genesis when Abraham was 75 years old. At this point thinking that God might need a little help with the making children part, Sarah had Abraham sleep with her Egyptian maid Hagar who did manage to get pregnant. But that wasn't the way of God. God had other plans. So, we get to this point where God makes the promise a second time some 24 years later saying "I am The Strong God, live entirely before me, live to the hilt! I'll make a covenant between us and I'll give you a huge family."

Now a covenant is a promise between God and people. It is not like a legally binding contract that says, if you do this, I will do this. A covenant was God saying I will do this. There was no earning the promise. The promise was made in response to Abraham's faithfulness to God. There was nothing that Abraham was required to do, it was a promise made because Abraham to this point had believed and trusted that God would do what God said God would do

When God promises something, we can trust that God will follow through. Still, though Abraham and Sarah had trusted God, this promise seemed preposterous and frankly, impossible. Their response was to laugh. Yet, God was serious. God promised and God delivered on that promise, as they soon learned when Sarah became pregnant and gave birth to their son Isaac. An aside, the name Isaac means laughter.

We need a bit of a history lesson in order for this passage from Romans to make any sense to us. Without the background story from Genesis, one does not grasp the point that the Apostle Paul is making in this letter to the Romans and for us now. Another piece of the history lesson is also that the Jewish people had long believed that the covenant relationship they had with God was for them and them alone. That what marked them as the people of God was that the men had been circumcised. Every male of Jewish descent had been circumcised since the time of Abraham. And with another great leader, Moses, they as a people had been given the law, what we call The Ten Commandments, and those two things in particular singled them out as God's people of special privilege before God.

What Paul was saying throughout this letter is that, yes, the direct descendants of Abraham are God's people through blood, but so are all others who come to God through

Jesus and trust God as Abraham did. The reason for bringing Abraham up is that the covenant that God made with Abraham was made before Abraham was circumcised and long before God gave the Ten Commandments. And if that was so, then those things, circumcision and the law, though not taken away from them as God's people, did not define all of Abraham's descendants.

It is why Paul says that "Abraham is the father of us all. He is not our racial father...He is our faith father." (v16). Going back, Paul says, "This is why the fulfillment of God's promise depends entirely on trusting God and his way, and then simply embracing God and what God does. God's promise arrives as pure gift." And it is a gift for everyone whether they are circumcised and identify as Jewish or whether they are what Paul calls gentile believers, which is everyone who is not Jewish but believes in God through faith.

No one is singled out as better than they other, each have the opportunity to believe in God's promise to be made right with God and to have abundant life. I truly appreciate the way we hear this scripture through Eugene Peterson's plain English when it comes to the talking about the faith of Abraham, so let me read again to you verses 19-24 in particular.

¹⁹⁻²⁵ Abraham didn't focus on his own impotence and say, "It's hopeless. This hundred-year-old body could never father a child." Nor did he survey Sarah's decades of infertility and give up. He didn't tiptoe around God's promise asking cautiously skeptical questions. He plunged into the promise and came up strong, ready for God, sure that God would make good on what he had said. That's why it is said, "Abraham was declared fit before God by trusting God to set him right." But it's not just Abraham; it's also us! The same thing gets said about us when we embrace and believe the One who brought Jesus to life when the conditions were equally hopeless. The sacrificed Jesus made us fit for God, set us *right with God*.

God took Abraham and Sarah's bodies that should not have been able to bring life into the world and gave life to them through the child Isaac. God took the crucified and buried body of Christ and gave life through the resurrection. And now we are given life through our belief in God, through Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit to bring life. We are made right with God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. When things seem hopeless, we are given hope.

Let's spend just a little time with that word hope because sometimes we confuse hope with optimism or thinking that hope means that all things will get better. So how are we to understand it when we speak of hope as Christians. Professor Doug Bratt share that "The historian Christopher Lasch (*The True and Only Heaven*, W.W. Norton, 1991) once wrote, "Hope is not the naïve thought that tomorrow will be better. Hope has braced itself, and is thus

prepared to cope if tomorrow isn't better. It may take some time. And hope doesn't depend on you and me getting our act together and fixing things, like optimism does."²

So our hope is based in God's promises, promises like...God will be with us, we are loved, we are forgiven. We are promised that the Holy Spirit will comfort, lead, guide, and teach us. We are promised that God will respond to our prayers, while remembering that how our prayers are answered are not up to us. This is not about what we would like God to promise us. The promises are what God has spoken into being. So grounding ourselves in God's promises, believing that God is capable of doing and following through, that God will do what God says God will do, that is where we place our hope.

When we embrace and believe the One who brought Jesus to life when the conditions were equally as hopeless as that of Abraham and Sarah trying to have a child, we can trust that we are made fit for God, set right with God. We are children of God, loved, forgiven, and set free to live an abundant life even when there is struggle and challenge. We are part of Abraham's big family.

So as you go through your day making decisions, dealing with your life and the things before you...as we as a church plan and prepare and hope...as the world seemingly plunges into despair as we watch hurricanes, flooding, wars, politics and power bring so much uncertainty and in some places death, we continue to trust that the God who brings life out of what seems like death is still at work in the world today.

We have reason to trust that what we see is not the whole. God's got this because God has promised life. And so we continue each day to trust, to believe, to hope, and to follow this one God in the name of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Kind and Generous God,
as we give thanks for the harvest,
we pause to praise you for all those things, both great and small,
which fill our lives with meaning and offer us a sense of well-being.
By your Spirit, O God,
May our friends see in us signs of a grateful heart.

Merciful and Generous God,
as we give thanks for the harvests of the earth,
show us how to live respectfully in creation
and protect all that is precious to you.
In a year when harvests vary across our country,
show us how to share what has been produced so that no one goes hungry.

² Doug Bratt. [Romans 4:13-25 - Center for Excellence in Preaching \(cepreaching.org\)](http://cepreaching.org)

Just and Generous God,
we pray for the wellbeing of your world and our own community.
Where there is hostility between nations or neighbours,
inspire leaders to show wisdom and courage in decision making.
We pray for areas hard hit by flood, storm, fire or earthquake,
and for all those struggling in an uncertain economy.
May neighbours with resources maintain generosity and compassion
for the long work of reconstructing lives and livelihoods.

Healing and Generous God,
we pray for those facing health challenges or difficult times for any reason,
and we pray for family and friends under stress or in sorrow
whom we name in silence before you.

Give us patience and understanding as we draw near to them
and help us reach out with compassion.

O God, in Jesus Christ we have met your generous love and mercy.
As heirs of the promises made to Abraham,
we give thanks and praise that you keep your promises
to those who trust and are faithful.
Through our lives and by our prayers,
reveal your love and mercy in this generation,
for it is in Jesus name we offer the prayer he taught us, 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

At Thanksgiving, we celebrate the gifts of God's good earth which sustain us. Yet this year we know in some places, harvests will not be plentiful. In every community, neighbours struggle to make ends meet. Today we offer what we have to share in gratitude, praying our gifts will make a difference in difficult times, trusting that God goes with us, whatever we face.

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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 e-transfer

to the online donate button that allows you to give by credit card. We are deeply grateful for your generosity.

Hymn

How firm a foundation

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1. How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in God's excellent word!
What more can God say than to you hath been said,
to you that for refuge to Jesus have fled?
2. "Fear not, I am with thee; oh be not dismayed!
For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.
3. "When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
the rivers of woe shall not thee overflow,
for I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,
and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.
4. "When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
my grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply:
the flames shall not hurt thee; I only design
thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine."
5. "The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose
I will not - I will not desert to his foes;
that soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never - no, never - no, never forsake!"

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Benediction

Cherish each day as God's gift
So that you may gain a wise heart,
And live with gratitude for all God's goodness.

So may the God who made you,
The Christ who mends you,
And the Spirit who brings you life
Bless and keep you now and always.

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