

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski
22nd Sunday after Pentecost - October 20th, 2024

Call to Worship

On an ordinary Sunday,
we come to worship God:
we come, trusting God will speak to us;
we come, hoping God will surprise us.

On this day, like every other day,
we seek to follow Jesus:
we follow, believing Jesus will be with us;
we follow, hoping Jesus will work through us.

On this day, we lift our souls to God's Spirit:
we open our hearts, that the Spirit may fill us;
we open our hands, that we might be a gift to others.

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Hymn

Amazing Grace

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1. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found
was blind, but now I see.
2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed.
3. Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'tis grace that brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.
4. The Lord has promised good to me:
this word my hope secures;
God will my shield and portion be,
as long as life endures.
5. What thanks I owe you, and what love—
a boundless, endless store—
shall echo through the realms above
when time shall be no more.
6. When we've been there ten thousand years,
bright shining as the sun,
we've no less days to sing God's praise than
when we'd first begun.

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

You, O God, are overflowing with love,
infinite in kindness,
and incomparable in glory.
You are the source of all good things.
There is none like you in all our imagining.
You bring new life forth from death and offer us hope.
In you, all things work together for good.
Your presence breaks into our lives in many ways
and you touch us with wonder.

In this time of worship, we offer you thanks with our prayers,
praise with our hearts and honor with our lives,
this day and every day, now and always.

**Wise and patient God,
We confess that we often stray from your presence.
You have offered us peace
yet our lives feel frustrating and unsettled in these times.
You offer us compassion
yet we feel neglected and resentful amid life's challenges.
You offer us a mission with meaning and purpose
but we become preoccupied with our own plans and desires.
Forgive us, O God, and draw our attention back to you
so that we follow your guidance and trust you as our Shepherd.**

Holy One, you are the Source of Wisdom for the ages. Send the Holy Spirit to open the Scriptures for us, so that we may grow wiser as we listen, and serve you more willingly as we live. Amen

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Assurance of Forgiveness

If you are looking for proof of God's love, here it is: at the very moment we realize we cannot help ourselves, that is the time we discover God has saved us in Christ Jesus in whom we find ourselves being made right with God. Thanks be to God.

Scripture Reading Romans 5:1-11

By entering through faith into what God has always wanted to do for us—set us right with him, make us fit for him—we have it all together with God because of our Master Jesus. And that's not all: We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has already thrown open his door to us. We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand—out in the wide open spaces of God's grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise.

³⁻⁵ There's more to come: We continue to shout our praise even when we're hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, we're never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary—we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!

⁶⁻⁸ Christ arrives right on time to make this happen. He didn't, and doesn't, wait for us to get ready. He presented himself for this sacrificial death when we were far too weak and rebellious to do anything to get ourselves ready. And even if we hadn't been so weak, we wouldn't have known what to do anyway. We can understand someone dying for a person worth dying for, and we can understand how someone good and

noble could inspire us to selfless sacrifice. But God put his love on the line for us by offering his Son in sacrificial death while we were of no use whatever to him.

⁹⁻¹¹ Now that we are set right with God by means of this sacrificial death, the consummate blood sacrifice, there is no longer a question of being at odds with God in any way. If, when we were at our worst, we were put on friendly terms with God by the sacrificial death of his Son, now that we're at our best, just think of how our lives will expand and deepen by means of his resurrection life! Now that we have actually received this amazing friendship with God, we are no longer content to simply say it in plodding prose. We sing and shout our praises to God through Jesus, the Messiah!

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

Message Amazing Relationship

Passion is a word most of us equate with a strong emotion toward something. First thing that may come to mind is the act of passionate love making since movies, tv series, and books seem to always include those kinds of scenes and we are a very visual generation. We also talk about being passionate regarding something, it may be our vocation or a pastime. Some people are passionate about painting, creating, woodworking, gardening, music, specifically types of music. One might be passionate about the opera or theatre. There are those who have a passion for inquiry or debate. We give thanks for those who are passionate about finding answers to a cure for cancer or other debilitating illness, or those whose inquisitive minds search for truth in stories that comes to us in the news.

What struck me this week as I pondered this passage of scripture, this part of the letter to the Romans written by the Apostle Paul, was Paul's passion for God and for people and even more so God's passion for setting people right with God, not just in a particular time, but throughout the Bible, the passion that comes through from the beginning to the end of scripture. And this passion of God for people is most strikingly exhibited through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In fact, the story of the crucifixion, the sufferings of Christ between the night of the Last Supper and his death, is often referred to as the passion of Christ.

I have said this before...I have hesitated to use the letter to the Romans for the basis of a sermon over the course of the last eleven years of my preaching. This letter is so dense, so packed full of difficult passages, that to speak to it in 15-20 minutes within the framework of worship is not something I have attempted often. My hope in this month of October, as I use passages from this letter, is that your interest in learning more might be piqued. Even as I have spent time with a group in study this past month I have continue to want to delve further into Paul's words and understanding. What I took away from this particular part of the letter, as I prepared this message, was God's passion for us.

Now, for a moment, let's talk about gods. I cannot think of another story of gods (small g) that makes people the center or the reason for compassion. The gods of the Romans

and Greeks, and any others that I have learned about throughout my years, even in different religions, all those gods are about doing what we have to do to make ourselves right with them, most often in the form of a sacrifice. It is about appeasing them and staying out of trouble with them. It is about their power without much concern for people.

And as I write I am going to try and keep myself out of trouble but there are definitely some parallel lines to be drawn. In the case of God and people, it is true that we were out of align with God and the ancient Israelites were required to make sacrifices, never was it a sacrifice of another human being, but certainly animals and incense. But these things never did much to appease what was really wrong with the relationship. People could not live in a way that honoured God and each other. In Isaiah it says, "bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me." Reading the first chapter of Isaiah will help one to understand that God was tired of Israel continuing to live in a way that did not honour the relationship that God had established with Abraham way back in Genesis, nor honoured the law, what we know as the Ten Commandments. And Paul has gone to great length in the first four chapters of the letter to the Romans spelling all this out.

Paul has also gotten to the point of sharing that despite all of this, God sent God's self through the person of Jesus to make it all right. Or maybe better stated, to make us right with God. Now one thing that needs to be undertaken first the belief, the understanding, that it is by faith that we walk with God, that we live for God. It is also by faith that we believe that Jesus was both fully divine and fully human. This is not something we can explain, just as there are many things that cannot be explained. We take many things by faith, and this is no different. It is by faith that we believe in Jesus and that his life, death, and resurrection set us straight, or in the right, with God.

It is because of Jesus, and his passionate act to make us right with God, that we are able to persevere and become people who live in the world as image bearers of God. People who seek to do God's will in the world. That will is, that everyone should be set right with God and living in that manner brings about a transformation and abundant life. Abundant life does not mean that you have all the material wealth you desire, but rather that you have peace, joy, love, and hope in abundance.

You see God did not come to us saying that you are blessed when things are going well and you have an abundance of wealth, though there are many who would say that a sign of blessing, that God's blessing on you is when you have wealth and prosperity. And it is not that faithful people do not have those things. Rather God chose to meet people in suffering. God has chosen to meet *us* in our suffering. This is what we call the theology of the cross, as opposed to a theology of blessing. The cross is the sign that points to God choosing to be with us in suffering, which is where life seems to take all of us at some point.

It is why Paul can write that "There's more to come: We continue to shout our praise even when we're hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop

passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, we're never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary—we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!"

Being a human being means dealing with trouble and adversity, but this can hone us, strengthen us. It is not that we go about looking for ways to be tested, but when it comes, God and we ourselves can use it for developing in us patience, a passionate patience. Through those woes and being patient in coming through them, we are then tempered like steel.

Think about a blacksmith and how steel is tempered through heating and cooling, bashed about yet never taken to the point where the metal is useless. Rather the steel is crafted into something stronger than it was before. That is how patience and tempering work together to make us alert for whatever God will do next. And this does not make us weaker, but rather we become and are ready to continue to be forged into the likeness of Christ, living as image bearers of God in the world. Life, being what it is, gives us plenty of opportunity to work on the passionate patience and forging that will make us more resilient. Though not necessarily pleasant at the time, it actually makes us more ready to take on the next thing, ready to live for God. It makes us passionate for God and passionate for people especially those who struggle because we know what it means to struggle and be challenged.

We don't feel shortchanged in life when we live this way, in faithfulness to God, as Eugene Peterson writes in *The Message*, "we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!"

It is important to realize that we don't do any of this alone. This passage is full of the pronouns, "us" and "we". We face struggle and challenge together, in community, particularly the community of faith. I am often saddened when people say they don't want to come to church because it might hurt too much to remember others who were with them and have now passed on. Or they are worried they will cry in church. Church is where we are to be together to get through all of these things. We forge through pain and challenge together. This is what God intended for the church...a place where those who are feeling broken can find love, compassion, healing, and wholeness.

It is important to look at what is being said in verses 6 through 11. This is what brings us to the passion of God for people. God, "while we were still far too weak and rebellious to do anything to get ourselves ready...God put his love on the line for us by offering his Son in sacrificial death while we were of no use whatever to God." God has not waited until we had it right to make us right with God. God doesn't wait for us to believe. God has already gone ahead and done what was needed in Jesus to make it so we can be right with God.

And this is the reason we celebrate! We are invited into an amazing relationship with God, with others, and ourselves, through Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. It is why we use the words responding, restoring, and rejoicing as a reminder of all that we stand for. It is a reminder that we strive to be a community of faith that responds, restores, and rejoices. We do this first of all because of what God has already done for us and now how we are part of God's work.

Responding, restoring, rejoicing, all part of the amazing relationship we get to have as the people of God who have been offered the opportunity to have an abundant life, a grace-filled life. It is not a life devoid of suffering, but certainly one in which suffering can produce endurance, character, passionate patience, and make us as people forged in steel. Not hard like steel, but useful as a tool forged in steel. As N.T. Wright says, "true reflections of God, the true image-bearers, that we were made to be"¹ in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit!

Prayers of the People

God of each and every life,
You open our eyes on the world you love
to show us your presence and purpose in all creation.
We thank you for the wonders of the seasons as they change,
and for gifts of love and compassion you offer us through friend and stranger.
We pray for the earth as it struggles to support your many creatures.
Make us better stewards in creation,
and kinder neighbours to both friend and stranger.

God of justice,
You open our eyes on the world to show us its struggles and conflicts.
We see the burdens many are carrying,
and the way differences create division.
We pray for all those struggling with daily expenses these days
and for those feeling stress over hard choices.
Show us how to support those in difficulty
and mend relationships in our community.

God of compassion,
You open our eyes on the world to show us suffering and despair.
We see challenges for health care all around us,
and share the impatience to improve access to needed treatments
in so many communities.
We pray for those who are suffering in so many places in the world you love.
(Keep silence for 15 seconds)
Give strength and compassion to all who provide life-giving care,

¹ Wright. *N.T. Romans for Everyone Part1, Chapters 1-8, 20th Anniversary Edition with Study Guide*. 2004, 2023 Nicholas Thomas Wright. Study Guide 2023 Westminster John Knox Press. P61.

and courage and hope to all who wait for healing.

God of wisdom,

You open our eyes on the world to show us its complexities.

We see countries locked in old animosities

and communities overwhelmed by fresh upheaval.

We pray for the millions displaced in current conflicts and by natural disasters.

Open the eyes of leaders here and around the world

to the suffering of the earth and those in their jurisdictions.

And open all our eyes to ways we can participate in solutions

to situations which break your heart and ours.

God of the generations,

you open our hearts to receive your calling to serve

in an ever-changing world.

We give you thanks for the students and teachers

in our all place of learning and particularly in theological colleges

as they study together and explore new ways of serving

the church and the world you love.

Bless them with deep faith and hope

as you lead them to take up the callings you prepare for them

in the name of Christ, our teacher and your servant.

And so we pray for your kingdom to come in the words Jesus 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

God's goodness inspires us even in times of suffering so that we endure in faithfulness and find hope even amid difficulty. We present our gifts to God in gratitude that God's love never lets us go. ©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 2nd Sunday after Pentecost, June 14, 2020 Year A

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.

1. And can it be that I should gain
 God's riches through the Saviour's blood?
 Died he for me, who caused his pain?
 For me, who him to death pursued?
 Amazing love! How can it be
 that thou, my God, should'st die for me?
 Amazing love! How can it be
 that thou, my God, should'st die for me?
2. Long my imprisoned spirit lay
 fast bound in sin and nature's night;
 thine eye diffused a quickening ray;
 I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
 my chains fell off; my heart was free.
 I rose, went forth and followed thee.
 My chains fell off; my heart was free.
 I rose, went forth and followed thee.
3. 'Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies:
 who can explore his strange design?
 In vain the first-born seraph tried
 to sound the depths of love divine.
 'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore;
 let angel minds inquire no more.
 'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore;
 let angel minds inquire no more.
4. No condemnation now I dread;
 Jesus, and all in him, is mine;
 alive in him, my living head,
 and, clothed in righteousness divine,
 bold I approach the eternal throne,
 and claim the crown, through Christ, my own.
 Bold I approach the eternal throne,
 and claim the crown, through Christ, my own.
5. He left his Father's throne above,
 so free, so infinite his grace,
 emptied himself of all but love,
 and bled for Adam's helpless race.
 'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
 for, O my God, it found out me.
 'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
 for, O my God, it found out me.

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Benediction

Go out into the world
 and in your words and your living
 make it known that Christ is the saviour of the world.
 And may God shepherd you and lead you with care.
 May Christ who justifies you, give you peace with God,
 and may the Spirit fill you with truth
 that your lives may be worship, and your worship may live.
 Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

[3rd Sunday in Lent – Year A – LaughingBird](#)