

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski
World Communion Sunday – October 6, 2024

Call to Worship

- O Lord, open our lips,
And our mouths shall declare your praise.
- O Lord, open our eyes,
That we may behold your presence.
- O Lord, open our ears,
That we may hear your call.
- O Lord, open our hearts,
That we may respond to your love in worship.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 20th Sunday after Pentecost. October 6th, 2024. Year B.

Hymn

All My Hope on God is Founded

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1. All my hopes on God is founded
who does still my trust renew;
through all change and chance God guides me,
only good and only true.
Love unknown, God's alone,
calls my heart to be God's own.
2. Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown, betray all trust;
what our care and toil establish,
tower and temple, fall to dust,
but God's power, hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.
3. God's great goodness reigns eternal,
deep in wisdom, passing thought;
light and life are all God's splendor
bringing beauty out of naught.
Evermore from God's store
newborn worlds rise and adore.
4. Daily does Almighty Giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow,
God's desire our soul delighting,
pleasure leading where we go.
Love will stand at God's hand;
joy will wait on God's command.
5. Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ, the Son.
Hear Christ call one and all:
you that follow shall not fall.

"All my hope on God is founded," words by Robert Bridges and Joachim Neand
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Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Eternal God,
as we come today,
we join with your Church which stretches around the world,
and across many generations, to meet you in our midst.
As we remember Jesus this day,

unite us to those who have served you over the centuries,
and to all who serve you in so many different situations today.
We praise you for your amazing love
which embraces this countless congregation
and invites us into a future you are creating.
Here, O God, let us join hands with heaven and earth
to celebrate your holy name.

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20th Sunday after Pentecost. October 6th, 2024. Year B. World Communion Sunday

We confess, God of every person, how easy it is to think that our way of being your church is the one, true way. And so, we believe we have no reason to hear your name spoken in another language. We are sure we don't need to learn songs that have tunes which sound dissonant to us. We believe that our baptism, our communion, our beliefs are the ones closest to your heart, and so we close our hearts, eyes, and hands to those around us.

Forgive us, Gracious God, and have mercy. Remind us that while there may be many types of bread, there is that one Love which has been broken for us. Remind us that there is one Life which has been poured out for us. Remind us, there is one Table, offered to us by your grace, through Jesus Christ, our Brother, our Savior. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

In little churches with wide open windows,
in ancient buildings echoing with the songs and prayers of generations,
in buildings that do not look like sanctuaries,
the same good news is proclaimed:
God is love. And that love forgives us, redeems us, restores us.

In whatever language, in every tongue and dialect, we rejoice and give thanks. We are forgiven by our God of grace and wonder. Amen.

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Scripture Reading Romans 1:1-17

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ²which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, ³the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, ⁶including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, ⁷To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁸First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world. ⁹For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing

the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers, ¹⁰asking that by God's will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you. ¹¹For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— ¹²or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. ¹³I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish ¹⁵—hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."

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Message Who are you?

When you tell people who you are how do you start?

For years I was Michael's mom, or Janelle's mom, or Jonathan's mom. I have often been introduced as Ken's wife, or Ann and John's daughter. If you didn't know me and met me in my current role, you would most often hear me introduce myself as Joyce Yanishewski, minister at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Thunder Bay.

How one is introduced is predicated on what information is needed in a certain circumstance. If one needs to know that I am a parent they may not need the other information. When it comes to who to contact in case of an emergency, well, Ken as my husband is going to get the call. If you want pastoral care, you are not going to be concerned about whether or not I have children or a husband but the knowledge that I am a minister definitely comes into play.

So it is with this ancient letter written by the Apostle Paul to the Christians in Rome. Now we are going to be spending the month of October looking at the first half of this letter so a good place to find our grounding is with the introduction in these first verses of the scripture. It is here that Paul sets out who he is and why it matters.

Ancient letters had formulas much like form letters today. How one writes a letter depends on the type of letter and in this case, Paul is structuring the letter based in the practices of the day. So he starts with introducing himself. A letter today is addressed to the recipient, for ancients you started with yourself.

What is not initially apparent to those of us so far removed from the time in which this letter was written is just how subversive it is. This is a time in history when the Roman Empire is strong and getting stronger. They held control, they had the power. It was a system of honour and shame, of rulers and servants and slaves which is why the letter uses that kind of language. Don't get bogged down in those words of rulers, servants, and slaves, especially as the connotations have changed since those early times.

In the time of this empire everyone was expected to pledge their allegiance to Ceasar. And Paul began his letter not by pledging allegiance to Ceasar but rather saying he was a servant of Jesus Christ. We don't realize how dangerous that statement was until we see it in light of the cross. People who didn't obey and do as the Roman authorities expected could suffer severe punishment. The worst punishment being hung up on a cross to die.

Yet for Paul the most important thing he could say, the best way to introduce himself was not really to say much about himself at all, except for how it related to his relationship with Jesus Christ. He was a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.

Now Paul was writing to the followers of Christ in Rome, but this was not some homogenous group. This was a very diverse group of people. Some were Jewish, some were gentiles, in other words, any one who was not Jewish was considered to be a gentile. There were the rich and influential but for the most part Paul would have been writing to people who were servants and slaves. But don't think for a moment that the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians necessarily got along with each other. There were many suspicions on all parts, especially the Jewish Christians about gentiles.

And to clarify some information here, Jesus was Jewish. He never was a Christian. It was sometime after Jesus' death before the word Christian began to be used to describe followers of Christ. Those first followers were all Jewish. They never imagined being anything else. They just believed that in Jesus the promised Messiah had come. The Jewish people had been waiting for such a Messiah since the time of King David's death. The difference between Jesus and what they expected was that they were looking for a strong leader who would deliver them out of the clutches of whatever oppressive regime they were under. In Jesus time it was the Roman Empire. And well, Jesus didn't do that, at least not in the way they were hoping for and expecting.

Even the disciples that had journeyed with Jesus for three years thought that Jesus had come to overthrow the Roman government. It was not until Jesus' death and resurrection that they began to really put two and two together about what Jesus had been saying to them and teaching them about the kind of kingdom, the kind of empire that Jesus was the ruler of. This kingdom being one in which peace, hope, joy, and love were the basis. Where compassion and justice, care for the least of people in society, were the hallmarks of a good and faithful servant.

The Roman authorities never understood. They just saw in Jesus a man who had a following and that kind of thing could not be tolerated. Jesus would be made an example of. Actually, even the Jewish authorities had no stomach for Jesus because his way of being, of leading, was a threat to their authorities as well, and we know how power wants more power. So the Jewish temple authorities worked in cahoots with the Roman government to rid themselves of Jesus. This even though they did not want to be under Roman rule themselves.

Jesus was going to have to pay a price for the way he posed a threat to the status quo. Jesus was put to death on a cross because it was the most shameful way anyone could die. You were stripped of your clothes, beaten, nailed to a cross and left where everyone could watch you die. You became a non-person, showing all who passed by that Rome could do this to you.

And this brings us back to what Paul is saying about himself. He is a servant of Jesus Christ, but not only that, he states that he is not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek or gentile.

Paul is saying, though Jesus died the most shameful death, experienced the worst that the Roman government could do in order to dehumanize a person, Paul was not ashamed of Jesus and not ashamed of the good news that is the story of Jesus.

Let me share with you a definition of what the words gospel, good news, message, or word mean when speaking about our faith. I take this definition from writing by N.T. Wright a much-respected teacher and preacher who has been teaching about and studying scripture for decades.

All that we will hear in this letter to the Romans rests on knowing what Good News is, what the Gospel is. Wright's explain this in regard to Paul's writing,

The idea of 'good news' for which an older English word is 'gospel,' had two principal meanings for first-century Jews. First, with roots in Isaiah, it meant the news of YHWH's long-awaited victory over evil and rescue of his people. Second, it was used in the Roman world of the accession or birthday, of the emperor. Since for Jesus and Paul the announcement of God's inbreaking kingdom was both the fulfilment of prophecy and a challenge to the world's present rulers, 'gospel' became an important shorthand for both the message of Jesus himself, and the apostolic message about him. Paul saw this message as itself the vehicle of God's saving power.¹

The letter to the Romans is about Jesus and the saving power that Paul experienced and was giving his life for. Just a reminder that in the book of Acts we read about Paul, who then was named Saul as a persecutor of Christians. He did a complete 180 going from persecutor to be persecuted. One who did harm working as an authority to one who was a servant, which is what can happen when we encounter Jesus in a profound and powerful way.

It was why Paul was willing to pledge his allegiance to King Jesus and why he was not ashamed of Jesus and the message of Jesus. Paul had a life changing and life-giving experience of Jesus and he was willing to risk everything in order to share with others the message of Good News, where lives could be changed, people made whole,

¹ Wright. N.T. *Romans For Everyone: Part 1, Chapters 1-8. Woth Anniversary Edition with Study Guide.* Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky. 2023. Page124.

ushering in a peaceable kingdom where power and authority looked to the well being of all.

We cannot grasp what is being put to us in this ancient letter without understanding the risks of what it meant to be a Christian at this time. The whole of the letter will continue to expound on this and other key themes.

For us now though, what is the take away? As we partake of communion and remember the death and resurrection of Jesus, as we eat the bread of life and drink from the cup of salvation, how do we experience Jesus in our own time? How do we live out our lives as followers of Christ? Hearing these things as individuals but also as a community of faith, and part of the global church, are we able to say as Paul did, that we are servants of Jesus Christ? Are we able to say that we are not ashamed of the gospel? Have we experienced the power of God for the salvation of everyone who has faith?

So many questions, but questions that are for us to ponder, to reflect on as we partake of these visible signs, the bread and the cup, visible signs of an invisible grace. May this moment and the coming days help you to see the grace of Jesus in your life, the impact of the gospel on how you live, and inspire you more and more to be a servant of Jesus and to serve others, and to learn more and more who you are in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen.

Prayers of the People

God of mystery and wonder,
We look around at the beauty of this world
and the worlds beyond us,
and sense that you have given each precious thing its place
and a way to sustain itself.

Thank you for the care you hold for your whole creation.

We also look around at the aching of the world
and sense that many precious things are under threat.

Too many pieces of your creation have fallen out of balance with each other.

Show us how we can help restore that balance
and protect what is at risk for the health of your whole creation.

God of all creatures great and small,
make us stewards of what is precious to you.

God of energy and life,

We look around at the peoples of this world
and see your image and dignity in every variety of face and culture.

Thank you for the care you hold for all humankind.

Yet we look around at the people of this world
and see the aching of the hungry and hurting;
we hear the groans of parents whose children die in their arms
and feel the tears of children whose parents die too soon.

We know neighbours who are suffering
and hear of strangers who can't imagine how to make it through tomorrow.
Awaken our generosity to offer what healing and hope we can
to the lives you cherish in every neighbourhood and nation.

God of promise and possibility,
We look around at places where people collide with each other
We hear the grumbling of nations locked into old rivalries and grievances.
We watch the jousting of leaders impressed more by polls than effective policies.
We worry about the future of our communities and our children.
We hear your call to do justice and live generously.
Guide us as citizens to act for justice that brings peace and well being
to communities near and far.

God of faithfulness and surprise,
We look at ourselves
and sometimes doubt we can make a difference or have an impact.
Challenge us to recognise the kinds of power we do have:
The love and compassion,
The courage and commitment,
The laughter and friendship,
The generosity and mercy
You inspire within us.
In all these gifts we know your power.
Through all these gifts, our lives have been changed.
Using these gifts in our lives, bring Christ's love and mercy to the world you love,
And so we pray 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

Worship reminds us that we are part of a global family, committed to serve our neighbours in Jesus' name. The gifts we offer join the gifts of many others to bring the love and compassion of Christ into places of deep need. Let us bless others as we have been blessed in Christ.

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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.

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

May the blessing of God,
the giver of every good and perfect gift;
and of Christ, who summons us to service;
and of the Holy Spirit, who inspires generosity and love,
be with us all.

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