

## St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

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

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany - February 9, 2025

### Call to Worship

**We have come to worship God, the living God,**  
Who calls prophets and teachers to bear witness.

**We have come to praise God, the almighty God,**  
Who answers the forces of hatred and hurt with the power of grace.

**We have come to worship God, all-gracious God,**  
Who chooses even you and me,  
to receive and carry the Word of life and hope. All glory to God!

~ adapted from a post on the United Church of Christ's [Worship Ways Archive](http://www.ucc.org/). <http://www.ucc.org/>

### \*Hymn

*Jesus is risen from the grave*

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1. Jesus is risen from the grave;  
Jesus is risen from the grave;  
Jesus is risen from the grave.  
Hallelujah!

2. Jesus was seen by Mary;  
Jesus was seen by Mary;  
Jesus was seen by Mary.  
Hallelujah!

3. Peter will soon be smiling;  
Peter will soon be smiling;  
Peter will soon be smiling.  
Hallelujah!

4. Thomas will stop his doubting;  
Thomas will stop his doubting;  
Thomas will stop his doubting.  
Hallelujah!

5. Jesus will meet his people;  
Jesus will meet his people;  
Jesus will meet his people.  
Hallelujah!

6. Jesus is here in bread and wine;  
Jesus is here in bread and wine;  
Jesus is here in bread and wine.  
Hallelujah!

7. Jesus will live forever;  
Jesus will live forever;  
Jesus will live forever.  
Hallelujah!

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### Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God ever creating, ever loving, ever leading:  
your presence is peace when we are frantic;  
your Word is truth when we face deception;  
your Spirit offers freedom when we are paralyzed by fear.  
You give purpose in confusing times;  
You call for justice when the world settles for inequality.

For all that you are, all that you have been, and all that you will be,  
we worship you as the source of life, the promise of redemption,  
and the spirit of love in action, One God, now and always.

Hear us now as we confess to you our sins:

**Merciful God,**

**you call us to fullness of life, but we confess our shortcomings.**

**We have wandered from your ways and wasted your gifts;**

**we have ignored your grace at work among us,**

**and focused on loss and complaint.**

**We have been suspicious of the motives of others,**

**too quick to judge and too slow to forgive.**

**Give us the courage to see clearly who and what we are.**

**With your forgiveness, cleanse us from all our faults and failings,**

**and inspire us to walk a new way in faith.**

God of light and life,

We turn to your Word for guidance and inspiration week after week.

Send your Holy Spirit to move in and among us this day

as we listen to the Scriptures read and interpreted.

Help us to hear your challenge and your promise,

and to respond with our commitment to follow Jesus, your Living Word. Amen.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany. February 9, 2025. Year C.

## **Assurance of Forgiveness**

The One who alone is Holy became wholly human so we might see the face of grace. The One who is seated in the heavens endured the cross so we might see the face of salvation. This is our good news: we are forgiven!

**By God's grace, with God's grace, we are who we are meant to be:  
forgiven, restored, called people. Thanks be to God. Amen.**

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## **Scripture Reading 1 Corinthians 15:1-11**

<sup>1-2</sup> Friends, let me go over the Message with you one final time—this Message that I proclaimed and that you made your own; this Message on which you took your stand and by which your life has been saved. (I'm assuming, now, that your belief was the real thing and not a passing fancy, that you're in this for good and holding fast.)

<sup>3-9</sup> The first thing I did was place before you what was placed so emphatically before me: that the Messiah died for our sins, exactly as Scripture tells it; that he was buried; that he was raised from death on the third day, again exactly as Scripture says; that he presented himself alive to Peter, then to his closest

followers, and later to more than five hundred of his followers all at the same time, most of them still around (although a few have since died); that he then spent time with James and the rest of those he commissioned to represent him; and that he finally presented himself alive to *me*. It was fitting that I bring up the rear. I don't deserve to be included in that inner circle, as you well know, having spent all those early years trying my best to stamp God's church right out of existence.

<sup>10-11</sup> But because God was so gracious, so very generous, here I am. And I'm not about to let his grace go to waste. Haven't I worked hard trying to do more than any of the others? Even then, my work didn't amount to all that much. It was God giving me the work to do, God giving me the energy to do it. So whether you heard it from me or from those others, it's all the same: We spoke God's truth and you entrusted your lives.

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## Message Can I get a witness?

I just learned of a movie that premiered at the [Toronto International Film Festival](#) on September 6, 2024. It is set to be released in Canada on March 14, 2025. It is called, ***Can I Get a Witness?*** It is a Canadian science fiction film directed by [Ann Marie Fleming](#).<sup>[2]</sup> Blending live action and animation, the film is set in a postapocalyptic world in which travel and technology are virtually banned, and people who reach the age of 50 have to submit to death to control the size of the population, while young people are tasked with artistically documenting their final moments.<sup>1</sup> Another way of putting it, "In a not so distant future, there is a reality where in order to save the planet, "death is everyone's job", with 50-year-olds taking the sacrifice, while teenage artists need to document it."<sup>2</sup>

It is a story of witness...witnessing to the fact that someone lived and died... that they actually existed. It is done with art, as technology is not to be used in this eco conscious future time, so no photographs, only drawings. Though I have only seen the trailer, it appears to be a powerful story of life, death, grief, and witness.

Witnesses are important. Whenever there is an accident or a crime, one of the first things police or investigators are looking for are witnesses. They never expect witnesses to tell exactly the same story. In fact, if witnesses do have exactly the same story it can be suspect. Witnesses see things from different perspectives and with relevance to their own positioning, understanding, and experience. This is true whether it be a crime or just a story telling from the past.

You have likely been part of a conversation with a spouse, sibling, or friend, and each of you remembers an event in your past differently. It may be that one of you is just not remembering correctly, but often it is likely that you truly remember it differently because you experienced it from your perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> [Can I Get a Witness? - Wikipedia](#). Accessed February 7, 2025.

<sup>2</sup> [Can I Get a Witness \(2024\) - IMDb](#). Accessed February 7, 2025.

Perspective is influenced not only by physical presence, but by one's emotional presence...how you were feeling that day. Perspective can be influenced by your own history in certain situations. What brings joy to one person may be terror to another... think roller coasters or Ferris wheels.

It is witness that comes up in part of this scripture from the first verses of chapter 15 of the first letter to the church in Corinth. Paul is talking about the resurrection and he is stating that there were witnesses to the resurrection appearances of Christ. It is interesting, as we have become very skeptical people and so we appreciate it when many people say that they witnessed an event or occurrence, as that helps us to feel like it has been verified. As I write this though, I realize that in a time of people claiming fake news all over the place, even attesting to something as true or not has come into question.

But there was a time that you could trust the witness of many. If many people witnessed something, it was likely to be true. And this is what Paul is counting on as he reminds the church people in Corinth that Jesus was seen in his resurrected body by not just one or two people, but a multitude. The reading says, Jesus presented himself alive to Peter, then to his closest followers, and later to more than five hundred of his followers all at the same time, most of them still around (although a few have since died); that he then spent time with James and the rest of those he commissioned to represent him.

Now this is not a complete list as we know that Jesus was seen by women as well, but this is the list as Paul has it.

If any of us heard that many people had seen something or witnessed Jesus alive after he had died, we would likely believe it happened. Yet, for that group then and for us now, we question things. Time and distance have a way of making people question whether or not something actually did happen. In the case of the Corinthian Christians, they were a group divided. It wasn't so much that they questioned the resurrection of Jesus, but that they were questioning whether or not they themselves would experience a resurrection body.

At the time there were there two schools of thought, one in which only the spiritual was considered worthy of resurrection, and then the school of thought to which Paul belonged, where the whole of a person was important and the whole person experience resurrection... body, mind, and spirit.

I want to digress for just a moment as I think there are some points that might also be not only interesting, but also helpful. Though the letters of Paul come after the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, in the New Testament, researchers and historians have come to understand that Paul's letters were actually written before the gospels were written. It means that Paul's writings come closer to the time when Jesus died than the stories of Jesus life that we have come to know through the gospel writers.

This letter, and others like it, all share with us the gospel according to Paul. Though even he admits that Jesus presented himself alive to Paul last saying, “It was fitting that I bring up the rear. I don’t deserve to be included in that inner circle, as you well know, having spent all those early years trying my best to stamp God’s church right out of existence.”

At this in itself it compelling. To have been one who first actually oversaw the work of killing those who followed what was then called “The Way”, to becoming a Christian himself, even going to prison for what he believed, being beaten, and facing constant attack and judgement, speaks a lot to Paul’s own witness. He completely did a one eighty in his own life based on an experience of the risen Christ.

The reason for all this talk about resurrection is that it will become foundational to the teaching that is yet to come in chapter 15, and if they or we are still questioning the resurrection of Jesus and also our own resurrection in Christ, however that looks, then the rest of the conversation is mute. The Christian faith is based in and on the resurrection of Jesus. This is our hope. This is the Message of Good News that we proclaim. The resurrection is why we can talk about responding, restoring, and rejoicing. Responding to needs, restoring people to wholeness, and together rejoicing in what God has done in, with, and through us.

And what Paul says about himself in the next sentences is true for us as well. “...because God was so gracious, so very generous, here I am. And I’m not about to let his grace go to waste.” Paul continues to speak about his own experience in comparison to others who have worked to bring the message of hope to others saying, “Haven’t I worked hard trying to do more than any of the others? Even then, my work didn’t amount to all that much. It was God giving me the work to do, God giving me the energy to do it. So, whether you heard it from me or from those others, it’s all the same: We spoke God’s truth and you entrusted your lives.”

All of what Paul did in his life after his conversion from persecutor to be persecuted, was done to witness to the resurrection of Christ which brings life to all people. That life is one that bears witness to hope, peace, joy, and love, forgiveness, grace, and life beyond death.

Paul has not been the only person to experience this life-changing message. Even in our modern times we can think of C.S. Lewis who was an atheist before becoming a Christian, and Lee Strobel who was an atheist journalist and investigative reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*, who tried to disrupt his wife’s new found faith, and in trying to disprove her reason for faith, Strobel ends up writing the book called *The Case for Christ* as all his research only proved to him the resurrection. He ends up leaving his job as a reporter and becoming a pastor.

But let’s take a look at what all of that means for us. First of all, the resurrection is the basis of our faith and witnesses. We may not see Jesus in bodily form, though some have claimed to, but we understand the Holy Spirit to still be at work in the world. People in our own time and in our own lives have experienced profound and not so profound

moments of God. You may have yourself experienced times when, contrary to any physical evidence, you knew that God was with you.

Right now, we are the witnesses to faith, to Christ's resurrection, to abundant life, a life abundant in hope, grace, and love. We are the ones called to bear witness through our own living. We are called to bear witness to friends, family, co-workers, and all we encounter each day...because God is so gracious, so very generous. And we should not let God's grace go to waste. Through our actions and our words, being kind, generous, loving, and forgiving people, we bear witness. We are people who have received grace and know it, but don't forget, if you never talk about your faith, it will not become evident that it is the basis for why you do what you do, or that it is the basis of who you are at your core.

We are all called to witness to Christ's resurrection of the body through our own lives. The scriptures are the basis of our knowledge, but it is not our only knowledge of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Our lives attest to people, are a witness for others about forgiveness, grace, wholeness, and life in Christ. It is God giving us the work to do, God giving us the energy to do it. Take courage, have faith, that God will give you words to share your faith. You don't need to do it perfectly, but maybe you might hear God saying to you, "Can I get a witness?"

### **Prayers of the People**

God, our creator and our redeemer,  
you have given us a universe that is full of wonders that we cannot begin to understand. Thank you for all of the blessings of your creation.

Ruler of the nations, we thank you for the country in which we live,  
a country where we can live in freedom,  
a country where we can worship you when and as we choose.

Head of the church, we thank you for our denomination and for this congregation.  
We thank you for all of the people who give so much of themselves  
in support of your ministry in this place and around the world.

God, our parent and our friend,  
we thank you for the families into which we were born,  
or adopted, or married, or accepted,  
and for the circles of friendship that surround us as we move through life.

God, our healer and our comforter,  
we ask that you would be with all those who are sick,  
all those who are suffering,  
all those who are grieving,  
all those who are lonely.

We ask your blessing also on those whom we now name in our hearts.

God, who calls us to follow, we ask that you continue to inspire us on our journey of faith. May this congregation be a source of hope and light in this community. May you give us strength to carry on as your faithful ones, sometimes lost and sometimes found, always in your care and keeping. We pray for your church in all places around this world, that it might be healed and renewed.

God of peace, we ask that you would use the leaders of our nation to help bring peace to all nations. Grant that we might help to bring justice to all your people in this your earth.

God of creation, we need your help to look after the world that you have made. Grant that we might be faithful stewards of your universe, so that those who come here after us will also enjoy its beauty. Grant that we might learn to control our use of the world's resources, so that our impact on this planet might be lessened and your glaciers and icefields might not be destroyed by us.

Loving God, your son promised that our prayers would be heard by you. Remind us of your will for us, and encourage us to live in your light.

And now, with the church throughout the world and down through the ages, we come together as your family here on earth, praying the prayer that 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 alone is holy, so we offer our gifts, our lives, our compassion, our service to others, and to God's creation that we might be blessings of hope, peace, and grace. We offer our gifts to God this day with open hands and open hearts and present them as an offering of gratitude and praise.

We give thanks for the support we receive for the ministry here at St. Andrew's in Thunder Bay. Head to our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> to learn more about us and ways to send financial support or give directly through an e-transfer at [offerings.standrewspres@tbaytel.net](mailto:offerings.standrewspres@tbaytel.net).

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| <p>1. The church's one foundation<br/>is Jesus Christ our Lord;<br/>we are his new creation<br/>by water and the word;<br/>from heaven he came and sought us<br/>that we might ever be<br/>his living servant people,<br/>by his own death set free.</p> <p>3. Though with a scornful wonder<br/>the world sees us oppressed,<br/>by schisms rent asunder,<br/>by heresies distressed,<br/>yet saints their watch are keeping;<br/>their cry goes up, "How long?"<br/>But soon the night of weeping<br/>shall be the morn of song.</p> | <p>2. Called forth from every nation,<br/>yet one o'er all the earth,<br/>our charter of salvation,<br/>one Lord, one faith, one birth,<br/>one holy name professing<br/>and at one table fed,<br/>to one hope we are pressing,<br/>by Christ's own Spirit led.</p> <p>4. 'Mid toil and tribulation,<br/>and tumult of our war,<br/>we wait the consummation<br/>of peace forevermore,<br/>till with the vision glorious<br/>our longing eyes are blest,<br/>and the great church victorious<br/>shall be the church at rest.</p> |
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1. We now on earth have union  
with God the Three-in-One,  
and share, through faith, communion  
with those whose rest is won—  
O happy ones and holy!  
Lord, give us grace that we,  
like them, the meek and lowly,  
on high may dwell with thee.

Words and music: public domain

## Benediction

May the loving power of God,  
which raised Jesus to new life,  
strengthen you in hope,  
enrich you with his love,  
and fill you with joy in the faith.

Posted on the Third Space website. <http://third-space.org.uk/blog>,  
reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/02/easter-benediction.html>.