

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

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

The Third Sunday in Lent - March 23, 2025

Call to Worship

We come, because we seek our God.

**Every morning, every day, every evening,
every moment, God is with us.**

We come, because we hunger for Christ.

**Jesus will feed us with hope,
will replace our emptiness with grace.**

We come, because we thirst for the Spirit.

**Who fills our yearning for peace,
who ends the drought of justice.**

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Hymn

Thou whose almighty word

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1. Thou whose almighty word
chaos and darkness heard
and took their flight,
hear us, we humbly pray,
and where the gospel day
sheds not its glorious ray
let there be light!

2. Saviour who came to bring
on thy redeeming wing
healing and sight,
health to the sick in mind,
sight to the inly blind,
now to all humankind
let there be light!

3. Spirit of truth and love,
lifegiving, holy Dove,
speed forth thy flight;
move o'er the waters' face,
bearing the lamp of grace,
and in earth's darkest place
let there be light!

4. Blessed and holy Three,
glorious Trinity,
Wisdom, Love, Might,
boundless as ocean's tide
rolling in fullest pride,
through the world, far and wide,
let there be light!

"Thou whose almighty sword." Words by John Marriott. Public domain.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God, our Creator and Sustainer,

in you we live and move and have our being.

In your depths we find meaning; in your heights we find light and joy.

You are the source of peace and hope for all who turn to you.

You alone have been our help and our guide;

you give us strength and courage when we face challenges.

In you we find rest and welcome along the way.

We praise you, O God, for your steadfast love.

Draw near to us once more in this time of worship.

Reveal your purposes for us and prepare us for the days ahead
so that our lives may witness to your mercy and grace as we follow Jesus.

**God of grace and mercy,
We confess that our thoughts are so often not your thoughts;
our ways are rarely your ways.
Our tempers are short and we fail to act with kindness.
Our confidence is weak and we treat others without respect.
Our faith falters and we lose track of you.
Forgive the many ways we fail you,
and inspire us to follow you more faithfully.**

O God, we turn to the Scripture to seek your wisdom and your truth.
Send your Holy Spirit to open our minds and hearts to receive your Word for our
lives and our times. Equip us to follow Jesus Christ, your Living Word. Amen.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. The Third Sunday in Lent. March 23, 2025. Year C.

Assurance of Forgiveness

God's grace and mercy abounds.
God is with us in the change.
God's everlasting arms embrace us.
Each of us is beloved, affirmed, and set free.

Adapted from Rev. Mia M. McClain on the Worship Ways site of the United Church of Christ, <https://www.ucc.org/worship-way/lent-3c-march-20-2022/>.

Scripture Reading Luke 13:1-9

¹At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ²He asked them, 'Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? ³No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. ⁴Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.'

⁶Then he told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. ⁷So he said to the gardener, "See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?" ⁸He replied, "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. ⁹If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

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

Message

Ken and I happen to live next door to a woman who understands gardening. She spends a lot of time guiding us as Ken and I are not nearly so knowledgeable about these things and we often seek her advice. Other times she just sees us out in the yard and pops

over to see how our gardening endeavours are going. A few years back we purchased a new shrub and chose a spot for it near the front corner of our home. As we were preparing to place it in the ground our neighbour came round the corner and suggested that we really loosen the roots, poking and prodding them in preparation for planting. We also had purchased fertilizer to place in the hole before putting the shrub in and then getting the dirt back around the roots giving it nourishment and stability. Then a lot of water.

Neither Ken or I had thought about loosening the roots system in preparation for planting. It seems a rather ruthless thing to do when the plant was already being traumatized by being transplanted, and yet it was exactly what was needed. We now do that even for the delicate seedlings we purchase each spring for our bedding plants. Turns out that tussling helps produce a stronger root system.

It makes me think of that gardener in the scripture reading who asked the owner of the vineyard to allow him one more year to tend to the fig tree to see if he could make it produce fruit. A year of grace for the tree.

But let's take a moment to look at what got us to this story of the barren fig tree. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem knowing that this was a journey that was not going to end well. As he was making his way, there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. Though the Bible does not give us more history about this attack, it is known from other sources that Pilate was ruthless and that terrible things happened.

Jesus adds to this the report of eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them. Both of these were stories of harm and evil, of people befalling a terrible fate. One story about people suffering at the hands of a willfully cruel person the other of people in an accident.

No question was asked of Jesus regarding these two incidents, but Jesus gets to the point of their statement really quickly. You see, there was a sense in those ancient times that people got what they deserved. Actually, there are a lot of people who still think that today. If something terrible happened to you or your family it must be because someone had done something really bad, sinned in such a way that God was punishing them. And Jesus says emphatically, that none of those who suffered these events were worse sinners than anyone else.

Still, it kind of feels like Jesus is making some kind of correlation that can be misconstrued. In order that we understand that Jesus is not contradicting himself, it is important to know that evil just is evil. Accidents just happen. Yet there are consequences for sin. The consequence is that someone suffers. Not because suffering is God's punishment, but rather because neglect, harm, power mongering, and a whole host of ways people manage their lives or the decisions they make have consequences and those consequences effect people's lives, our own and that of others. Sometimes those consequences are deadly.

So why does Jesus say, “I tell you; unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.” In fact, he says it twice so it is probably something we should pay attention to. So, what is Jesus saying if on one hand he says that it was not sin and punishment that caused these terrible events, well at least not on the part of those who suffered and died, and on the other hand he is saying repent or you will perish as they did?

Could it be that Jesus is just saying, take a look at your life. What are you doing that you need to pay attention to? What actions in your own life are causing harm? The word repentance or to repent seems a rather archaic way of saying something so let’s take a look at that idea. In part, to repent means to see the world in a different or new light. As much as we don’t often speak of it, repentance “is core to the preaching of Jesus, Peter, and Paul.”¹

The Bible, both the Old and New Testaments urge repentance but also promises forgiveness. Now if you feel you have nothing to repent of then what you are hearing will have little meaning for you, but many of us can find things in our lives that need correction. Sometimes the same things get us over and over again and we seem to be continually needing to ask forgiveness.

Sins of gossip, of adultery, addiction whether to food, booze, substances, or computer games... insert the name of your addiction. It may be an unhealthy desire for power and control. It may be that you have to look at your intentions. Are they for good or for harm? Just this last week I was in a conversation about revenge and how often we want that. It may be that repentance, as one book stated, is “running away from bad habits, tactical withdrawal from being a morally deficient moron, and the unhardening of one’s heart.”²

Repentance though is not the end of it. Like all you have to do is be remorseful for having made a poor decision or consistently making poor decisions. Repentance is meant to lead one into a different way of being in the world and in relationship with God. It means renewed efforts, often daily, to get it right, to make the best decisions, to really pay attention to how one is living. Paying attention to your thinking and your heart all while remembering that you and others are trying to walk in God’s way and in God’s will.

The five short verses about repentance and the one parable about the barren fig tree that follows might not appear to have much in common, and the parable might even feel rather unsatisfying as we never hear how the gardener and the tree made out in the end. Did the gardener succeed in getting the tree to produce fruit? And what significance does this for us anyway?

What if we considered ourselves to be the fig tree? The season of Lent is known as a time of reflection. Can we think of ourselves in light of the fig tree? Are you bearing fruit? If not, why not? What, in your way of following Jesus...what does not bear fruit?

¹ Jacobson, Rolf A., Editor. *Crazy Talk: A Not-So-Stuffy Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Augsburg Books. Minneapolis. 2008. P144.

² Ibid. Page 145.

God gives us everything we need to flourish. It is God's desire that we live abundant lives. Lives that are abundant in hope, love, joy, peace, and grace. Now that fig tree was given a year to produce fruit. It is not that you have only a year to get your act together, but what would you or could you do in a year to bear fruit or bear fruit in abundance.

Often we think we have to do this work alone, but even the fig tree had a gardener who was going to dig around it and put manure on it in order to make the conditions conducive to allow the tree the best possibility for becoming fruit bearing.

Are there people in your life who can tend to you, dig around you, tussle the roots, fertilize, and help you become more and more a fruit bearer of God that you are meant to be? My hope would be that this congregation, those of us together here can help one another bear fruit in our families, with our friends, and in community.

One might also ask, what kind of fruit are we to bear? There are many answers to this that could get really specific based on your resources, your character and particular gifts, but generally the fruit is of the Spirit...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23). These are fruit that each Christian is called to bear.

So trust that you are meant to flourish, to bear fruit, and that may take a little or a lot of work as you and others tend to your roots, fertilize your imagination and creativity, your heart and your mind. You may find that there is some trimming or pruning that needs to happen, you may even find yourself transplanted, but through it all, the intent is that you will grow and bear fruit that God will use to bring life to you and to others. Conditions can be made right and given time and patience you may find yourself abundantly sharing who you are with others in faithfulness to God's will for your life.

Thanks be to God for the wonderful gift of abundant life.

Prayers of the People

God of Hope,

When the world is confusing and frustrating, you bring light and hope.

We give you thanks for lessons learned, for changes of heart,
for fresh discoveries made, and new paths followed.

We pray this day for those who are confused or afraid,
for those who feel anger or despair.

O God, give us hope in our time. Turn our hearts to you.

God of Peace,

there is so much conflict, hostility, and antagonism around us and within us.

Personal relationships are often tense; the world community is at odds.

We pray for understanding to prevail

in relationships at home and at work, in our community and our country.

And we pray for diplomacy to alleviate conflict and threat among nations,

especially holding before you (*add names of conflict zones in the world*)

O God, give us peace in these times. Turn our hearts to you.

God of Joy,

we give you thanks for moments of joy and celebration in our lives,
for small pleasures given and received through times of isolation.

We remember those who feel left out or bitter,
those who are anxious or in distress.

We pray for those who face loss and hardship in these uncertain times,
and all who know sorrow and suffering,
naming before you those on our hearts this day.

O God, give us joy in our time. Turn our hearts to you.

God of community and compassion,

we thank you for your steadfast presence

in the face of all that brings uncertainty and worry these days.

Bless our congregation; inspire us to consider renewed ministry and mission.

Reawaken our love for one another

and our desire to worship and serve together in Jesus' name.

Sustain leaders who feel exhausted by the challenges they've faced
and renew our stewardship with gratitude for your love.

O God, give us strength in our service. Turn our hearts to you.

God of grace,

receive these prayers and the unspoken prayers of our hearts.

Deepen our trust in you for the days ahead,

for we offer ourselves as Jesus' friends and followers in the words he 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 has given us life and breath, and created a world of beauty and order.

In Christ we know God's generous mercy. Our gifts are tokens of gratitude for all that we have received in Christ and in creation.

May our gifts speak for our thankful hearts this day.

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There are various ways that people give to this congregation for our work as God's people, through signing up for a monthly donation, or sending an e-transfer.

Hymn

When long before time

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1. When long before time and the worlds were begun,
when there was no earth and no sky and no sun,
and all was deep silence and night reigned supreme,
and even our Maker had only a dream...
2. ...the silence was broken when God sang the Song,
and light pierced the darkness and rhythm began,
and with its first birth-cries creation was born,
and creaturely voices sang praise to the morn.
3. The sounds of the creatures were one with their Lord's,
their harmonies sweet and befitting the Word;
the Singer was pleased as the earth sang the song;
the choir of the creatures re-echoed it long.
4. Though, down through the ages, the Song disappeared,
its harmonies broken and almost unheard,
the Singer comes to us to sing it again:
our God-is-with-us in the world now as then.
5. The Light has returned as it came once before;
the Song of the Lord is our own song once more;
so let us all sing with one heart and one voice
the song of the Singer in whom we rejoice.
6. To you, God the Singer, our voices we raise;
to you, Song Incarnate, we give all our praise;
to you, Holy Spirit, our life and our breath,
be glory forever, through life and through death.

"When long before time." Words by Peter W. S. Davison © 1995, Augsburg Fortress Publishers.
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Benediction

May the mercy of God ground us,
the love of Christ take root in us,
and the Holy Spirit grow in us,
that we may be ready for the coming of the kingdom.

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