

The Fourth Sunday in Lent - March 15, 2026

## Call to Worship

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good.

**God's steadfast love endures forever.**

God has lifted us up in mercy and grace.

**We come to rejoice and give thanks.**

## Hymn

*Come, thou almighty King*

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| <p>1. Come, thou almighty King;<br/>help us thy name to sing;<br/>help us to praise.<br/>Father, all glorious,<br/>o'er all victorious,<br/>come and reign over us,<br/>Ancient of Days.</p> <p>3. Come, holy Comforter;<br/>thy sacred witness bear<br/>in this glad hour!<br/>Thou who almighty art,<br/>now rule in every heart,<br/>and ne'er from us depart,<br/>Spirit of power.</p> | <p>2. Come, thou incarnate Word;<br/>gird on thy mighty sword;<br/>our prayer attend:<br/>come, and thy people bless,<br/>and give thy word success;<br/>Spirit of holiness,<br/>on us descend.</p> <p>4. To the great One-in-Three<br/>eternal praises be<br/>hence evermore!<br/>His sovereign majesty<br/>may we in glory see,<br/>and to eternity<br/>love and adore.</p> |
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"Come, thou almighty king." Words: Anonymous. Public domain.

## Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Gracious God,  
Great and wonderful are your works!  
Your steadfast love is everlasting.  
Where there is darkness, you bring light.  
Where there is sadness, you speak words of hope.  
Where there is despair, you bring new possibilities.  
You have come among us in Christ Jesus to save us,  
bringing healing for the sick, and forgiveness for the sinner.  
In this time of worship, stir us with your Spirit, O God.

Awaken our joy and reverence  
in our songs and our silence, in our prayers and praises,  
for you are our God, here and everywhere, now and always. Amen.

**Merciful God,**

**We confess that we often take your acceptance of us for granted.**

**We are careless in our relationships, focused on our own needs and desires.**

**The news distracts us, and we put opinion above your expectations of us.**

**Forgive us.**

**Renew our understanding of your purposes and our place within them,  
so we may serve you more faithfully, day by day. Amen.**

The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 4th Sunday in Lent. March 10th, 2024. Year B.

## **Assurance of Forgiveness**

Hear the good news.

The God who made a way of healing in the wilderness  
is the God who still meets us in our suffering.

The God who lifted up a sign of mercy for a wounded people  
has lifted up the Son of Man so that all who look to him may live.

Friends, believe this good news: in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

## **Prayer for Understanding**

Healing God, open our eyes to see your mercy,  
open our hearts to receive your grace, and open our lives to the hope you offer.  
Speak your word to us today, and lead us into the life you give. Amen.

## **Scripture Readings**

### **❖ Numbers 21:4-9**

<sup>4</sup> From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. <sup>5</sup> The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." <sup>6</sup> Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. <sup>7</sup> The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. <sup>8</sup> And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." <sup>9</sup> So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

❖ **Psalm 130 *Waiting for Divine Redemption: A Song of Ascents***

<sup>1</sup> Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

<sup>2</sup> **Lord, hear my voice!**

Let your ears be attentive  
to the voice of my supplications!

<sup>3</sup> **If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,  
Lord, who could stand?**

<sup>4</sup> **But there is forgiveness with you,  
so that you may be revered.**

<sup>5</sup> I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,  
and in his word I hope;

<sup>6</sup> **my soul waits for the Lord  
more than those who watch for the morning,  
more than those who watch for the morning.**

<sup>7</sup> O Israel, hope in the Lord!  
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,  
and with him is great power to redeem.

<sup>8</sup> **It is he who will redeem Israel  
from all its iniquities.**

❖ **Ephesians 2:1-10 *From Death to Life***

<sup>1</sup> You were dead through the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup>All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. <sup>4</sup>But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup>and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— <sup>9</sup>not the result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

❖ **John 3:14-21**

<sup>14</sup> And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup>that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

<sup>16</sup> “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

<sup>17</sup> “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. <sup>19</sup> And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

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

## **Message From Death to New Life**

In the church calendar, or what we call the liturgical calendar, there are two times when the colour pink is highlighted. We see it on the third Sunday in Advent represented in the pink candle of the Advent wreath and, little known at least by many protestants, is that the fourth Sunday in Lent is also represented by the colour pink. Pink is the colour of joy for the church. As one writer put it, “...it signals a moment of joy in the middle of seasons that are normally marked by preparation and [reflection]. The colour is a gentle reminder that even while we wait, repent, and reflect, the light of Christ’s coming and the hope of Easter are already breaking through. It is the Church’s way of saying: pause, rejoice, and remember that God’s promise of salvation is drawing near.”<sup>1</sup>

And that is joyful and hopeful. We know how this story ends so we know the Good News that God’s love in Jesus has overcome death so we can rejoice. However, it takes a little work to get to the joy in the scripture readings today. They are all a little unsettling to say the least and horrifying to take it to the extreme.

Now, as has been the case throughout Lent we have more than one reading that we are linking together to find a common thread that pulls together an overall theme from Old Testament to the New. I could preach on each of these individually as there is much to learn and understand in each reading, but that is not the aim of this sermon. In fact, I am going to tell you straight up what I hope you are able to find as a theme throughout before I get into the nitty gritty. Each of these scriptures is about what happens when we do or do not respond to God’s invitation to live our life in trust that God’s got this. If our response to God is to turn away or make a decision that does not put our trust and faith in God first, then death is the result. It is not death in the sense that we take our last breath, but death in the sense that we do not live our lives as fully as God hopes for us. We live without the same meaning and purpose that happens when our response to God is to trust fully that God is with us, that God wants us to live transformed lives. God wants

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<sup>1</sup> Facebook post on *Prayer Request*. Posted March 14, 2026.

us to live fully as image bearers of hope, peace, joy, and love. So let get into the scriptures and figure out how God is getting us there.

Remember when I said that some of these scriptures are at extreme horrifying? Well, it was to Numbers 21:4-9 that I was referring. A little background here. The Israelites are wandering about in the wilderness and had been for a long time. They were disgruntled ... again. I wouldn't be too harsh in judging them. It is crappy to not know where you are going and stay motivated. But over time they have complained. Craig Kocher writes,

“The people did not like the bitter water of Marah, so the Lord showed Moses how to sweeten it. They complained about the lack of food, so the Lord gave them manna. They complained that they were thirsty. Moses struck the rock at the Lord's command and water gushed forth. When the march resumed after Sinai, they were back at it again, asking for meat to eat. A wind from the Lord brought quails, but the birds were accompanied by a plague. In numbers 14 the people rebelled at the prospect of invading Canaan. They were saved from exterminations by and angry God through the intercession of Moses, but the Lord decreed that none of those who tested the Lord “ten times”, including Moses, should ever set foot in the promised land, except for Caleb, Joshua, and the innocent children.<sup>2</sup>

And then we have this final complaint as the story goes, “From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. The people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.” Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died.”<sup>3</sup>

Now if you are like me and you are not too keen on snakes, then this scripture is haunting in the first place, but to consider God sending poisonous snakes to kill people is one of the reasons people think of God as the great judge in the sky who is more likely to be vengeful than loving. And to get to the heart of this, if I could, would take some time, but even in all this God hears the voices of the people and gives instructions to Moses so that those who choose can be saved by looking at another poisonous serpent made out of bronze and set on a pole. The thing to note here is that people had a choice. It may not have felt like much of a choice, but it was a choice to respond and live or not.

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<sup>2</sup> Kocher, Craig. *Feasting on the Word: Year B Volume 2 Lent through Eastertide*. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2008. P99.

<sup>3</sup> All scripture quotations taken from *New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition*. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

And without this background you cannot hear the reading from the Gospel of John without understanding how it connects to God and how our response to God can lead to death or to life, remembering that death and life here are as I explained earlier. This reading starts out referring to the serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness. When people looked at that bronze serpent they lived. When Jesus refers to himself being lifted up, he is promising eternal life. This is followed by a verse that many of us had to memorize in Sunday School, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

We pull that verse out without the surrounding verses that are helpful in understanding that, with Jesus, things have changed. Things have changed for all people and because of God's love there is a better way to live. Life that is eternal in our present time and in our dying. When I say life in our present time, it is about making a decision to respond to God's love, care, and provision in times of abundance and times of crisis. The word, judgement, that carries with it such a negative connotation, can also be translated as crisis, discernment, or decision. And understood that way, verse 19 comes across differently. It is not God who judges, but rather that by our own decisions we judge whether or not we are going to love darkness or light. Whether or not we are going to respond to God or keep living in ways that rob us of the fullness of life.

Ephesians continues the theme of death to life. If we follow the desires of flesh and our senses it leads to death. And think of these things in terms of anything that robs you of your freedom, things like idolizing power, money, or prestige. Or it could be addictions, habits, choices that you know in your heart are not the best you could make for yourself. This is what leads to death in the sense that you are not living fully as an image bearer of light and love.

Then consider the word that the writer of Ephesians speaks about...grace. Grace is a gift, a free gift to believe that God's got you. You don't have to work for it, you just get this free gift of life, a transformed life that has meaning and purpose that fills you up, makes you feel fully alive even if times are trying or difficult, because you know that you do not walk through this life alone. The response to this gift is to choose to live in ways that bring healing and hope to others. Love and light to people who didn't know that there is love and light beyond what they are experiencing.

This grace is a sense that you are lifted up, pulled up out of the muck and mire of life, to live more fully, more intentionally as an image bearer of God. This image is seen in Jesus. Jesus who spent time with those who were hungry, longing for meaning, longing for freedom, longing for justice. This is where God is. God through Jesus, who is the new covenant, the new promise of God's love and provision, is offering what God always wanted for humanity, life and life abundant.

Our decision to respond to God's invitation to new life is one we make each and every day. God loves us, but we are not puppets, we have choice. We can choose to live redeemed lives or continue in the struggles of life without God. Psalm 130 is a great example of the struggle to choose and the hope of God's great power to redeem. There are sorrow and frustration, sin and death, but God in Christ sees us through the sacrifice and love of Jesus that is steadfast and powerful. In Christ we are forgiven, redeemed, loved, and filled with grace for ourselves and one another. That is something to be joyful and joy filled about.

Today may you pause, rejoice, and remember that God's promise of salvation is drawing near and choose to live your life in the Spirit of Jesus. Amen.

### **Prayers of the People**

Gracious God,  
you have called together a people to be the church of Jesus Christ.  
Keep our minds and hearts open to your Word and your ways,  
so that the world may see in us compassion and wisdom in action.  
May our lives lead others to believe you are love and live by your truth.

Creator God,  
you made all things and called them good.  
Thank you for the wonders of the world that surround us  
and the promise of new life stirring in burrows and seed beds around us.  
We pray for the earth in its vulnerability,  
staggering under the demands of human needs and expectations.  
May your planet earth be held in reverence by all peoples.  
Guide us in our country and our community to use its resources wisely  
and respect its fragile balance between life and death.

Christ, Prince of peace,  
thank you for your commitment to mercy and forgiveness  
which overcome our desires for revenge.  
Speak to the hearts of peoples everywhere  
and to those who occupy places of power and influence in every land.  
Teach us how to seek peace on earth together.  
Especially this week we remember the regions in conflict  
and pray that a just resolution to conflict will soon prevail  
for the sake of the vulnerable.  
Overcome the fear, greed, violence or vanity

that turn neighbour against neighbour and nation against nation.  
May all who claim your name be known as makers of the peace.

Christ, healer of hearts and hopes,  
you desire health and wholeness for each one of us,  
thank you for times of wellbeing, whether measured in minutes or months.  
We pray that lives caught up in the economic pressures of these times  
may find enough to sustain them day by day  
and hope for more generous future.  
Grant rest and renewal to all who are broken in body or spirit  
and bring comfort to those who ache with loss or anxiety.  
In silence we lift before you the names of those on our hearts today.....

Holy Spirit, source of wisdom and courage,  
embrace your church with hope this day that we may live faithfully,  
encouraging each other by the commitment we have witnessed in Jesus Christ who  
taught us to pray together, 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

The season of Lent leads us closer and closer to the Cross. As we contemplate Jesus lifted up for our sakes, consider what the gift of his mercy and grace means for you. Let your offering express your thanksgiving for such an amazing gift from God.

You are invited and encouraged to financially support St. Andrew's ministry through our website, [St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay, ON – Part of the PCCWeb network of churches](#)

## Hymn

*You who dwell in the shelter/On Eagle's Wings*

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1. You who dwell in the shelter of our God,  
who abide in this shadow for life,  
say to the Lord: "My refuge,  
my Rock in whom I trust!"

*Refrain*

*“And I will raise you up on eagle’s wings,  
bear you on the breath of dawn,  
make you to shine like the sun,  
and hold you in the palm of my hand.”*

2. The snare of the fowler will never capture you,  
and famine will bring you no fear:  
under God’s wings your refuge,  
God’s faithfulness your shield.

*Refrain*

*“And I will raise you up on eagle’s wings,  
bear you on the breath of dawn,  
make you to shine like the sun,  
and hold you in the palm of my hand.”*

3. You need not fear the terror of the night,  
nor the arrow that flies by day;  
though thousands fall about you,  
near you it shall not come.

*Refrain*

4. For to God’s angels is given a command  
to guard you in all of your ways,  
upon their hands they will bear you up,  
lest you dash your foot against a stone.

*Refrain*

“You who dwell in the shelter/On Eagle’s Wings.” Words from Psalm 91; Paraphrased by Michael Joncas.  
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## **Benediction**

May the God who made a way for healing in the wilderness  
set your eyes on mercy when the road is hard.  
May the Christ who was lifted up for the life of the world  
draw your heart toward hope when the night is long.  
May the Spirit who brings life out of dry ground  
go with you into every weary place.  
Go in peace. Walk in hope. Amen.

*Grounded and Growing—Journeying from Lent to Easter A - Year of Grounded and Growing  
by Ron Rienstra. As Published on the Reformed Worship website January 2026*