

Straight from the "Hart"

Worship Service from October 4, 2020



Welcome and Intro to the Service

Welcome to our morning worship service's manuscript. This is World Communion Sunday, the day that participating Christians all over the world gather around the altar of their local church (this year, a more metaphorical phrase than normal) to recognize our common faith in Jesus Christ and our kinship with other Christians across the globe, as well as those who have gone before us, and especially to share in the Lord's Last Supper... Communion, is an important avenue of grace through which Jesus prepares our hearts to be his home, freely offers us forgiveness, and expects us to do the same, so that by our lives, empowered by God's Spirit, we may add flavor and light to our communities -- that the good news of Christ's transformational work will continue to spread to the four corners of the earth and the whole world will honor the Lord for the great things he has done.

Hymn # 569 1,3

We've a Story to Tell to the Nations

Prayers

Teach us, God of every nation, to see every question of national policy in the light of our faith, that we may check in ourselves every passion that makes for war, ungenerous judgment, all promptings of self-assurance, and all presumptuous claims. Grant us insight to recognize the needs and aspirations of other nations, other peoples. Remove our unfounded suspicions and misunderstandings, that we may honor all people in Jesus Christ our Lord.

For you are the hope of all the ends of the earth, the God of the spirits of all humanity. Hear our humble intercession for all races and families on earth, that you will turn all hearts to yourself. Remove from our minds, hatred, prejudice, and contempt for those who are not of our own race or color, class or creed, departing from everything that [alienates] and divides, that we may by you be brought into unity of spirit, in the bond of peace.

We pray that someday an arrow will be broken, not in something or someone, but by each of humankind, to indicate peace, not violence. Someday, oneness with creation, rather than domination over creation, will be the goal to be respected. Someday fearlessness to love and make a difference will be experienced by all

people. [Hear our prayer for peace and love, lifted on the wings of an eagle] so that communities of all colors can sit in the same circle together to communicate in love and experience the presence of the Great Mystery in their midst. Someday can be today if we choose to live the prayer that you taught us to pray

Lord's Prayer

Bible Reading

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

Today we begin a new worship series called *Children of Light*. Jealous persecution broke out against the local church in Thessalonica. Paul writes to clarify Christian teachings, but he especially wants to ground them in their hope and build their faith on the foundational Cornerstone of Christ. He wants to encourage them by telling them how well they are doing and to keep doing it -- modeling what Christ like living looks like. After a standard greeting, he writes,

We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. (NIV)

Hymn # 529

How Firm a Foundation

Message

Modeling the Flow of Faith

Deep waters, fiery trials, life striking out at us, evil forces trying to strike us down -- But Jesus is with us, holding us up by his strength, and he is a foundation that cannot be destroyed. And yet, for some of us, it is easy to be discouraged. Even after a victory, (at least if you are like me) we worry about the next foot fall, or as

most people say – the other shoe to drop – stripping us of any victory we *felt* we had. Miracles become coincidences, doubts creep in about God, his provision, his love, his salvation. Noble feelings fade and we wonder if they were just dreamy delusions.

Robert and Rory sat in a duck blind. They passed the time with quiet conversation as they waited for birds to take flight. Rory had just accepted Christ. He was struggling because people were trying to drag him back into his old way of living. He asked, “Why am I having so much more trouble since I became a Christian? Everything is going wrong. I’m facing pressures I’ve never faced before.”

Sometimes, people are misled into thinking that if they accept Christ, their life will instantly enter Eden, automatically becoming a stress free, pre-weeded rose garden without the thorns. And when that doesn’t happen, they feel let down and doubt. It is like a balloon that is puffed up and then Phbbbt, away it goes, deflated. But Jesus and others in the Bible said that we should expect difficulties (See Matthew 5:22, 1 Peter 4:12, 1 John 3:13) because we are bucking many cultural norms to live right and productive lives. That is usually harder than going with the flow.

Robert answers Rory, "Somewhere out there, a whole lot of ducks are waddling around in the dark and mud and muck. They make no difference and attract no one’s attention. But when one decides to take flight, everyone notices, and that’s the one people try to take down. Evil doesn’t like it when someone begins to soar for the heavens, escaping the dark muddy dirt of sin and showing others that we are designed to take flight.

Paul founded a church in Thessalonica. It was beginning to take flight. Others saw and were jealous of their success. They rounded up some people to create a riot. They rushed to Jason’s house where the church met. They hoped to find Paul and Silas and take them down by delivering them to this mob. Paul and Silas were not there. They changed plans and dragged Jason and some other Christians before the city officials to accuse them: “These people have welcomed people who are known all over the world for causing trouble by saying that there is another king besides Caesar”. That scared the officials. But that story is for another day. For today’s view of the story, this is not an encouraging start for new Christians forming a brand-new church – dragged before the city officials and accused of treason.

Paul writes to encourage them that their faith is real and worth it. **He assures them** by saying that in his constant prayers, he always giving thanks to God for them. (v 2) **He assures them** by reminding them of his certain knowledge that God dearly loves them and has chosen them. (v 4) This confidence is not based on us, our

actions, our feelings, or on the ease of our circumstances; but on God's love and choice and promise.

Someone once asked Martin Luther, "Do you feel that you have been forgiven? He answered, "No, but ... I'm [as] sure [I am saved] as [I am sure that] there is a God in heaven. For feelings come and go, and feelings [*can be*] deceiving. My [confidence] is the Word of God. Though all my heart should *feel* condemned... there is One greater than my heart whose word cannot be broken."

We can know we are loved and chosen to fly. The Thessalonians should know this because they didn't only hear the message of Christ, their lives were deeply impacted. Jesus came to them with power, and the Holy Spirit and with conviction. (v 5a)

At one point of his life, John Wesley was basically kicked out of every church he had preached. Undeterred, he went to fields and street corners and wherever he could gather a crowd. One of these "open air meetings", as they called them; was in a bad place of London. Today we would call them young gang members, vandals, or bullies. Back then in England, they called them ruffians. A couple of them were "unhappy" that this preacher was invading their space and keeping them from their fun. They picked up stones and elbowed their way through the crowd until they came within throwing distance of the preacher. As they positioned themselves to aim and throw, they heard Wesley talking about the power of Christ to change people's lives. As they watched, frozen in their tracks, it seemed Wesley's face was transformed and began to glow. One turned to the other, and said, "Billy, he ain't a man!"

The rocks fell from their hands and they accepted Christ. Wesley finished. The crowd parted to make room for him to leave. These two boys were at the edge of that aisle, and one reached out to him. Wesley noticed, put his hands on their heads and said, "God bless you, my boys." and continued on his way. The same boy turned to his friend and said, "He is a man, Bill; he's a man like God." It wasn't the meeting's atmosphere. It wasn't Wesley. It was the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ that came on those boys with power, conviction, and the Holy Spirit.

Paul also assures the Thessalonians of the soundness and validity of their faith in Jesus because as he and his team modeled Christ to them, they modeled Christ to others. (From vv 5b-8a) That means Christ legitimately and "lastingly" changed their lives. The fact that we can be so impacted that we become examples is yet another assurance of God's empowering call on our life. He changes us. The mature in faith imitate Christ, we imitate the mature in faith (and therefore imitate Christ), as then we too become a model for others of what it means to have faith; and maybe they will imitate us.... and be imitating Christ.

Hirata San looked for work on the ship of Captain Bickel (a missionary to the islands of Japan). They didn't want Hirata. His brother was already on the ship and he was bad enough. But Hirata was persistent. The next time they needed a crewman, he was there and waiting. Hirata had one virtue. He was openly, cheerfully evil. He gambled, stole, and lied by preference. He drank heavily and loved to fight (a 7-year jiu-jitsu expert). Man has a soul, they say. They tried to find his for two years, but never got a glimpse. At their daily worship services, he participated appropriately, but afterwards mocked it with others. Morally, spiritually, it was bedlam with the lid off, and Hirata held the lid. Bickel wrote about his frustration. Had they failed to represent Christ? He had come to change men like this, yet these men held no restraint, no shame, no conviction. Two years this lasted. Then, during a winter gale, a man fell overboard and drowned. God used this tragedy to change Hirata's heart. He began to ask all kinds of questions about how to gain help from Christianity. Two years on the ship and it seemed he had learned nothing. They answered his questions with disappointment and even disgust. They didn't believe he was sincere.

Humanly speaking, he was hopeless. Ignorant and evil in all his ways, nothing they did had a positive effect. When at last a desire for knowledge came, his ignorance and lack of mental training seemed a hopeless hurdle. Their traditional methods of teaching Christian doctrine fell futile, so they left him to God. Hirata San poured over the Bible in every spare moment with prayer and tears.

They noticed a change in him they could not deny. It was slight, but growing in force continually. Now, in the same measure of his moral bankruptcy was his conviction of sin. In the same measure of this conviction was his appreciation of God's wondrous mercy and his longing to render service of love. Harsh fighting hands became gentle in service. Pride became loving humility that could not be refused. The shrewdness to create evil was turned into a thoughtfulness and resourcefulness to find ways to serve. The man who loved to start quarrels became a peacemaker. They witnessed an evil man become a completely new man and an example to all. He was a living product of Bible influence. And he also developed a remarkable ability to hold a diverse audience with a powerful presentation of God's love and mercy...

Now we get to the point of this story. The Captain had just returned from his nightly walks through the hills. He requested Hirata deliver a Bible to a certain person. Hirata replied, "He is not yet ready for a Bible, but he has another. You are his Bible. He is watching you. As you fail, Christ fails; and you live, so Christ is revealed to him." Apparently, the Captain and missionary team had had more influence than he first thought as they lived their lives before Hirata and the rest of his hired, hardened crew

of sailors, who in turn spread the news of Christ to villages all across the islands they traveled. (Harrington, Charles Kendall, *Captain Bickel of the Inland Sea* New York-Chicago: Fleming H Revell, 1919 pp 138-143).

Not everyone will pick up a Bible, but they will read our lives. All of us are models, examples; to someone. We are the only Bible some people may ever see. We don't model being perfect, for no one is, but we do model what it means to be changed by Christ and striving to live more and more like him.

More specifically, the Thessalonian Christians modeled a turn from idols to God (v9b), as evidenced by their (1) work produced by faith (2) their labor prompted by love (3) and an endurance inspired by hope in Christ. (v 3) Their idols were literal gods. For us, idols are whatever we prioritize over God. What are the potential idols of our day? What keeps us from serving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength? What keeps us from loving our neighbor (which means everyone in need of God)? What prevents us from being all God would have us be, to soar like he would want us to soar? We need to have a conversion away from these "idol-ic" things, or a healthy channeling of them to the living and true God.

As Paul's team lived and taught before the Thessalonians, so the Thessalonians received, believed, and lived before the community, and the Lord's message rang out and became known throughout the region (v 8) and eventually the world. It is because of people like these Thessalonians that we even have a World Communion Sunday. We too, if we can overcome the fear of that next falling shoe, are set free to confidently fly as we were designed to become -- better and better examples of Christ as we invest our lives in the lives of others. A poem:

A builder built a temple,
He made it with grace and skill,
Pillars and groins and arches,
All fashioned to work his will.
Men said as they saw its beauty,
"It shall never know decay.
Great is thy skill, O builder,
your fame shall endure for aye. (forever).

A teacher built a temple
with love and infinite care,
planning each arch with patience,
laying each stone with prayer.

None praised his unceasing efforts,
 None knew of His wondrous plan,
 For the temple the teacher built
 was unseen by the eyes of man.
 Gone is the builder's temple,
 crumbled into the dust;
 Low lies each stately pillar,
 food for consuming rust.
 But the temple the teacher built
 will last while the ages roll,
 for that beautiful unseen temple
 is a child's immortal soul.

Things are important, but only as they serve the building of people. Currently, our culture will not help us to be effective models. They want to take our flight away. They will try to shoot us down at every turn. To fly straight and right, we have to be grounded in an assurance, a hope, a foundation; a fearlessness that allows us to fly -- fly to the service of God's love, teaching and modeling the powerful gospel in our lives for the sake of others throughout the world.

We started the service by singing and reminding ourselves about that foundational hope -- let's end it the same way, by reminding ourselves of what he has done and that we can rely on him

Hymn # 368 1,3

My Hope is Built

Communion

Prayer God of all nations, we praise you that in Christ the barriers that have separated humanity are torn down. Yet we confess our slowness to open our hearts and minds to those of other lands, tongues, and races. Deliver us from the sins of fear and prejudice, that we may move toward the day when all are truly one in Jesus Christ. For you are the way of peace. Come into the brokenness of our land with your healing love. Help us to be willing to bow before you in true repentance, and to bow to one another in real forgiveness. By the fire of your Holy Spirit, melt our hard hearts and consume the pride and prejudice which separates us. Fill us O Lord, with your perfect love, which casts out fear, and bind us together in that unity which you share with the Father and Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

(cont. on back)

Closing Blessing / Song / Blessing

The Lamb for sinners slain, who died to die no more,
 Let all the ransom'd children with all his earth adore:
 Let earth and heaven be join'd his glories to display,
 and sing the Savior of humankind in one eternal day.

O what a taste is this, which now in Christ we know,
 a promise of our glorious bliss, and our heav'n begun below!
 When *he* the table spreads how royal is the cheer! (the thanks)
 Enraptured, we lift up our heads, and know that God is here.

All praise to God above, in whom we have believed,
 the tokens of whose dying love we have now received.

Now as you go, give thanks for this holy mystery in which Christ has given himself to us. Go into the world in the strength of your Spirit. Give yourselves for others, and in so doing, you usher in the coming kingdom. Amen.

Closing Song # 2184

Sent Out in Jesus Name (2x)

Closing Blessing (Part 2)

Now may the Lord of peace grant you his peace at all times and in every way --
 Regardless of life's circumstances, a peace and spiritual well-being that goes with
 all who walk with Him. Amen.