

Straight from the "Hart"

Worship Service from October 25, 2020



Special Instrumental Music *Behold our God*

Welcome and Opening Prayer

That was *Behold our God* – who held the oceans in his hand and counted the grains of sand and where kings and nations tremble at his voice while all creation rises to rejoice. For he is seated on his throne– let’s come and adore him.

Let’s pray: Almighty God, we have gathered because you have shown us in Christ that there is no one like you. Your deeds are beyond compare. We have gladly come to receive your mercy, to worship, to bring glory to your name as we put our ultimate hope in your faithfulness, and your ability to keep us faithful. Amen.

Theme

To introduce today’s theme, hear this story adapted from “An Octopus in Trouble” by Pedro Pablo Sacistrán. Once upon a time there was a quiet octopus. He wanted to have a lot of friends, but he was so shy and self-conscious, he was usually ended up alone.

One day he was trying to catch some very slippery food and he got all his arms tied up in a knot and he could not wriggle free no matter what he did. As embarrassing as it was, he had no choice but to ask for help from passing fish. Many ignored him and swam past. Finally, one very kind little fish offered to help, and they worked together to untie his arms. The octopus felt so relieved when he was set free but was so shy all he could do was thank the fish and quickly swim off. That night he regretted missing the chance to make friends with that kind fish.

A couple days later the octopus was resting between some rocks, when he noticed that everyone around was hurriedly swimming past. He looked, and in the distance, he saw an enormous fish coming into the area to feed. The octopus quickly hid; then, carefully peeked out and saw that the huge predator was zeroing in on the kind fish who had untied him. No one else could help the small fish against the large, dangerous one. The octopus remembered what the little fish had done for him, and knew he had to act. He shot out from the rocks into the path of the giant fish and shot out the biggest jet of ink in his life. He grabbed the little fish, and they swam back to hide in the rocks.

The big fish was angry and really wanted to eat them both, but the ink irritated him so much that he could not find them and eventually swam off. As soon as he was gone, all the fish who had been hiding came and congratulated the octopus for being so brave. The little fish told them about their previous encounter and that he had never known anyone be so kind and grateful that they would do something so dangerous. The other fish heard how nice the shy octopus was, and they were all eager to be friends of such a brave and honorable octopus.

The Thessalonian church were new Christians who were getting to be known everywhere as people who knew what it meant to faithfully follow Christ. They were not blessed because of their circumstances. They drew attention because their faith didn't collapse under pressures and persecutions, trials and temptations.

It is not a new story, even for them – The prophets Habakkuk, Daniel, Job, and Jesus all record what it takes to daily rise to walk in his grace, in his enduring love, and in his strength. Our call to worship and praise response song is inspired by these stories and instructions and hopes of these saints who teach us that we can be faithful to God because God is always faithful to us, even when it seems our circumstances are going to gobble us up. Let's give our hearts to God again in this hour.

(freestoriesforkids.com/videostories/british-english/octopus-trouble-animated-story-narrated-british-english)

Call to Worship (Lay Reader Congregation)

Evil authorities warn that the time is running out for us to respond to the clarion call of their priorities. They claim that if we don't bow down to their agenda, we will be burned, and no god will be able to rescue us from their blazing power.

But the God we serve is able to save us.

But even if he does not, we want to be clear,

We will never serve wrong, or its self-serving values.

Evil's minions rush to scatter us. They laugh at us. They think they will easily destroy us. They see us as weak people who are trying to hide.

But time and again, God has moved on our behalf.

The stories stir our pounding hearts. The battle causes us to tremble while we wait for God's deliverance. The fig trees might not bud. The vines might not produce any grapes. The olive crop might fail. The fields might not produce any food. There might not be any sheep in the pens. There might not be any cattle in the barns. But we will be glad because of what the LORD will do. He fills us with joy.

Our LORD and King gives us strength.

He brings stability to life's journey.

He helps us take the high road.

We take the high road because we brought nothing into this world. We can take nothing out of it. The Lord gave us everything we have, and they are his to take away.

Whatever happens, we will praise the Lord.

Listen, my beloved friends, do not fear those who may want to steal your life. They may take your body and possessions, but they have no power over your soul. Honor God in all circumstances, for he alone has authority over your soul. Why, then would we trade the essence of who we are to embrace worldly values?

What good is it to gain the whole world -- and everything it offers -- if it cost us our true selves?

Don't be afraid. God doesn't abandon or forget even the small sparrow he has made. He will not forget or abandon you to even the seemingly minor issues of your life.

We never need to worry, for we are more valuable to God than anything in this world.

It is for this reason that no matter our season of life or of circumstances, we can bless the name of our Lord.

Opening Song

Blessed Be Your Name

Blessed be Your name in the land that is plentiful,
Where Your streams of abundance flow;
Blessed be Your name.

Blessed be Your name when I'm found in the desert place,
when I walk through the wilderness;
Blessed be Your name

Refrain

Every blessing you pour out I'll turn back to praise,
When the darkness closes in, Lord, Still I will say
Blessed be the name of the Lord,
Blessed be your name
Blessed be the name of the Lord,
Blessed be your glorious name

Blessed be Your name when the sun's shining down on me,
When the world's all as it should be;
Blessed be Your name.

Blessed be Your name on the road marked with suffering;
 Though there's pain in the offering;
 Blessed be Your name

Refrain

You give and take away. You give and take away.
 My heart will choose to say, "Lord, blessed be your name."
 (Repeat)

Blessed be the name of the Lord,
 Blessed be your name
 Blessed be the name of the Lord,
 Blessed be your glorious name
 (Repeat)

CCLI # 2561297

Prayers Let's continue to prepare our hearts for prayer by singing what can happen when we remain faithful in God's presence.

Prayer Chorus TFWS # 2119 (2x) *Where the Spirit ...*

Pastor's Prayer

Lord, for many of us -- our days are extremely busy with what are the duties of life -- we are rushing to keep up with the cares that weigh us down and the caring we do for others. We remember in Mark 6 where your followers were so busy with people coming and going that they didn't even have time to eat, and you told them to get away with him to refresh and renew their spirits. Lord, we have come to this sanctuary from the world, to quiet our pace, and especially in these moments, to breathe out the stress of our week and breathe in your calming Spirit, so that we can be ready to face another week, another day of to do lists and interruptions - and see them again not as duties to be grudgingly done, but as opportunities to move our lives forward and make our corner of the world, and beyond -- a little better than it was the day before. It is why, in the next moment of silence, we pray with praise for the joys we have experienced, and with petitions for the struggles and hurts of those on our hearts and minds **SILENCE. Quilt Prayer:** Today we also remember * Jim Malot who is home and recovering well, * Pattie Didomizio, who was hospitalized with back and lung issues, * for Amanda, the mother who is recovering from a difficult delivery, who is now home and doing better. And finally, for the recipient of today's quilt, Jennifer DeHanke (Danke) We pray for your loving arms to enfold her with your strength to give her faith and endurance throughout her difficult journey. In the quiet times, as she wraps this quilt around her, let your peace reign within her, and your spirit calm her.

Throughout each day, let the love and prayers of this church bring comfort to her heart, and rest to her body. Even in the darkest of nights, remind her that God is there, always awake, keeping watch, holding her close, sharing her innermost thoughts, holding a special place in his heart for her and each one of us and is with us each moment of every day... reminding us that we are never alone.

We pray this prayer for Jennifer, and for the blessing of this quilt in the name of the ultimate healer, the One who always moves alongside us to share with us all of our joys and endure all our sorrows.

Now Lord, we give you thanks for vast number of people in this church and across the earth who are committed to doing their very best -- for you, for their neighbors, their communities, and the world; making it a productive place where your will and peace can reign -- as we learn better and better how to live as you taught us to pray. **Lord's Prayer**

Bible Reading From Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4

The prophet Habakkuk lived in a day when people turned to evil as an easy means to success. Listen to portions of the beginning of chapters 1 and 2 where he laments to God the seeming victory of evil and God's reply that evil's conquest will not last forever.

Our Lord, how long must I beg for your help before you listen? How long before you save us from all this violence? Why do you make me watch such terrible injustice? Why do you allow violence, lawlessness, crime, and cruelty to spread every-where? Laws cannot be enforced; justice is always the loser; criminals crowd out honest people and twist the laws around. (CEV) ... I will wait to see what the Lord will say...The Lord answered me: "Write down what I show you...clearly... so whoever reads it can run to tell others. It is not yet time for the message to come true. But that time is coming soon... It may seem like a long time before it happens. But be patient and wait for it. These things will happen. They will not be delayed. See, the nation that is evil and trusts in itself will fail. But those who do right because they trust in God will live. (ICB)

Hymn – # 452 1,2,3 *My Faith Looks up to Thee*

Message *Nightmares and Day Dreams* 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:9

An artist, a pastor, and a cowboy walked to the edge of the Grand Canyon. The artist said, "What a beautiful scene to paint". The pastor said, "What a wonderful example of God's handiwork." The cowboy said, "What a terrible place to lose a cow!"

Personalities and experiences, our varied backgrounds can make a big difference in how we view and approach the very same thing. The sermon title *Nightmares and Day Dreams* is about how our personalities and experiences form our imaginations to create worst-case and/or best-case scenarios for life.

A successful expression and expansion of the gospel (Jesus' message and what he had done for us) depends on believers standing firm and living faithfully no matter what evil, or life, throws at them. The ability to be faithful – to live right when wrong seems the more rewarding path, to love when surrounded by a culture of hate, to risk investing our lives in others when there is no pay back (no reward), to boldly move forward when it would be easier to give in or give up. To live faithfully demonstrates the *reality* of the *power* of God in his people.

The Nightmare: Gives in to the temptation to fall from faith

No wonder Habakkuk and Paul were praying constantly. Habakkuk's nightmare, his worst-case scenario, is that the remaining faithful would fail to withstand a nation that had turned from God and against each other to realize their personal narcissistic dreams.

In Thessalonica, Paul was afraid his new church was going to become a lost cow in the Grand Canyon – lost in a major city of idol worshipers and others who were eager to stamp them out. But the real threat was not from their surroundings, for as Jesus said, "Do not be afraid of people. They can only kill the body. They cannot kill the soul." (Matthew 10:28a (ICB)) The real fear is that God's people would be unsettled or shaken by these trials and persecutions. They were afraid that people pressures and circumstance challenges would lead to a desertion of their faith and a loss of their salvation. Today's bible passage is from 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:9.

I won't be reading it in full, but will summarize it and the background behind it and quote key verses and we move through the sermon.

Paul's mission team had been forced to move on to Berea, then Athens, and then Corinth, and he hasn't been able to get back to Thessalonica. He knows that when the pressures of life are on, and we have no support, *and we don't know better*, we tend to listen *any voice* (including our own) that offers us hope - *no matter what it says or where it leads us*. Paul writes to them, "I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you..." (1 Thess. 3:5b (NIV)) that someone led them away from the gospel and back to their sinful and "idol-ic" ways. This is the nightmare of any true spiritual leader. Listen to Paul explaining his concern:

“when we were... separated from you... (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you...but Satan blocked our way. For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.” (From 1 Thess 2:17-20 (NIV))

Not having the internet, any kind of social network, or phones; Paul couldn't stand not knowing what was going on with this young church. While they were at Athens, he sent his close friend and trainee, Timothy back to Thessalonica to find out how it was going with them, to comfort them and to encourage them to stand strong.

And while they were waiting for Timothy to re-connect with the mission team in Corinth, their spirits were like the body of a limp balloon -- slightly blown up and the stem being pinched in suspense. Would Timothy's news -- the stem -- open and deflate what was left of them? or would the news open to breathe in fresh air, fresh energy, and fresh life...

The Day Dream: Faith and Love is strong even in suffering and trouble

Timothy returns with great news. This is the day - dream. Usually that is one word and implies our zone-out, looking-out-the-window wishing fantasies. (Like some of you are doing right now 😊!) But here it means to be awake, aware (day) and to think (dream) of wonderful and *realistic possibilities*.

The Thessalonians longed for the mission team too. They still respected Paul's teaching, leadership, and example. Even more importantly, their love and faith in God was firm and they continued to model what the power of God can do in his people. They had not given in to the negative forces in the city.

This is Paul's best-case scenario, his dream -- any true spiritual leader's dream - that in spite of what was going on with the Thessalonians, with the mission team, (or with us); faith and love stand strong. Paul's team is inflated and elated! He writes -- "*It is life to us [Now we can really live] to know that your faith in the Lord is strong. How can we give God enough thanks for you for all the joy you give us?*" (1 Thess. 3:8-9 (NIV))

The practical application is this: Are we a nightmare or a dream? -- even to ourselves? How do we hold on to the faith in tough times? How do we resist giving into temptation? How do we not fall from faith or fall from love? It helps to understand the nature and power of temptation.

Temptation is persistent. Resistance and victory over one instance of temptation will not, unfortunately, resolve the issue for the rest of your life. It will come back and haunt you at another inopportune time. (See Luke 4:13) Someone once asked, “Why is it that opportunity knocks only once, yet temptation is always banging on the door?”

The Power of Temptation is in its (POT): Persistence

Recognize too, that temptation is appealing. Its consequences may not be, but the temptation itself can be. (See James 1:13-15). During a freezing rain storm, ice built up on trees causing some branches to fall and pull down a power line. A policeman arrived to keep people away. There was a small tree with a short trunk and long slender branches in the middle of it all. As the power line hopped and crackled and popped with electricity, it threw sparks through those iced branches sending out a rainbow of glimmering colors. The policeman wondered how anything so beautiful could be so deadly. Temptation isn't hard to resist because it is ugly and evil, it is hard to resist because it *appears* to be powerful, beautiful, enticing, appealing.

(POT): Appeal

Temptation can also get at us because rather than trying the obvious overpower and devour directly (shock and awe) type of attack, it may subtly sneak up on us sideways. Most animals don't get lost because they are yanked away from home or want to run away from home or pasture. They get lost because they aren't paying attention. (See Jeremiah 50:6a,c) A grazer nibbles on a tuft of grass here, and then there, and then one just off the property, and then another one -- and when they finally finish grazing and look up – they have no idea where they are or how they got there.

(POT): Subtlety

OR, if it can't catch us off guard, it will use bait to distract us away to where it can entice and entrap us.

(POT): Distractibility

A young predator joins a pack and chases something. (See Proverbs 1:10, 15,16a) It is a longer chase than expected, and when it ends, they are not near home. Temptation may nibble us into nowhere or get us to chase something, and we chase that something on a run into a wilderness of nothingness before we even realize it.

So what tools, what helps, do we have and use to resist temptation? Portia Nelson wrote: *Autobiography in Five Short Chapters*.

Resisting Temptation by (RT): Awareness

I'll read the chapter, then make a comment on each in connection with today's topic of temptation. (Don't panic, each chapter is only a few sentences long 😊)

Chapter 1) *I walk down the street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I fall in. It takes forever to find a way out.* We fall to temptation because we don't see it.

Chapter 2) *I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I pretend I don't see it. I fall in again. I can't believe I'm in the same place, but it isn't my fault. It still takes a long time to get out.*

We fall to temptation because we deny its danger – or we think danger is exciting -- perhaps because we have lost sight of what is good and what is evil, or for whatever reason it may be -- we continue to plunge in and are surprised at, and blame others for the results, the consequences of our own choices.

Chapter 3) *I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I see it is there. I still fall in ... It's a habit. My eyes are open, I know where I am. It is my fault. I get out.*

(RT): Proactive

We are aware of the temptation; and that it is a danger, and we accept responsibility for falling into it -- these “awarenesses” are important first steps, but we still need to take action and deal with it. Bad habits must be overcome.

Chapter 4) *I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I walk around it.*

(RT): Face (Resist)

Sometimes we have no choice but to look temptation in the face and beat it. To illustrate by a trivial example, but one that many of us can probably relate: In my previous church, I sometimes had the privilege of preparing the goodies for coffee hour following worship. It forced me into the fruit and bakery section – right by the apple fritters. I can eat apple fritters by the box... But now I face them down, I remember the hole I'll fall in, the calorie cost it will create -- and when I win, it is because I manage to go on by. James tells us to resist the devil, and he will flee. (James 4:7))

Chapter 5) *I walk down another street.* Sometimes, perhaps most times, the best way to resist is to never enter

(RT): Flee (Avoid)

the bakery section in the first place. It isn't the devil we make run, it is prudent for ourselves to run... Paul tells us elsewhere to flee sexual immorality, flee idolatry, flee the love of money, flee the evil desires... (1 Cor 6:18, 10:14, 1 Tim 6:11, 2 Tim 2:22) If you know you shouldn't, when it is at all possible -- don't keep it in your house, don't surround yourselves with it, don't go to places where it is at. Of course, that is not always possible. For example, sometimes our temptations may be at work, and we can't not go to work. And we do have to eat, we can't have no food in the house. It isn't like we can give up food cold turkey (no pun intended) Or hot turkey for that matter. So here are some additional suggestions.

Reward yourself when you succeed more than punish yourself when you fail. It is easier to beat ourselves up, to give up and throw ourselves in the

(RT): Reward victory more than punish failure

hole and stay there rather than to keep pulling ourselves up and out. It is also easier, when we do manage to walk around the hole or choose another street -- to hardly notice -- because nothing dramatic happens. How often do you notice that you did not put on three pounds because you did avoid that box of fritters? When we fail, we may notice dramatic consequences. When we succeed, nothing may happen. So, it is important to make a point to recognize and make a bigger deal out of our victories. It should go without saying, but I'm not sure it does -- (it doesn't always with me) if the celebration is for losing 3 pounds, don't reward yourself with a box of fritters -- if it is for not smoking, don't reward yourself with a cigarette. Find a reward that won't sabotage your goal).

Another suggestion is that we may need to get to the root of the problem. Band aids are fine for minor cuts and abrasions. But sometimes we need a deeper cure. When

(RT): Get to the root of the problem

dealing with temptation, we often want to deal with outer symptoms and consequences -- the cuts and abrasions we get from falling into the hole, but we do not want to deal with why we keep falling in in the first place. Or to use my example, it is one thing to stop eating fritters, it is another thing to understand why I crave comfort foods. Even though it may be unpleasant to delve into the deep, if we never deal with core causes within us that attempt to coerce us to fail, (if I never deal with why I crave comfort foods so much, the long term fight may be much more difficult because the core drives will keep rising to the surface).

Then, trust God and his strength. Know that "the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." (1 John 4:4) (and in your core). I don't know how to tell you to gain

(RT): Depend on God's strength

God's strength in your life. I think we all find it in different ways. All I can say is, find and do whatever disciplines work for you, and whatever those disciplines are, include a priority and focus on God's sustaining help. Open your hearts to Christ in willingness, and the Holy Spirit will choose to do what he does in you. It is not up to us to win this battle alone, but it is up to God working within us. Earlier, Paul wrote about the Thessalonian's work produced by faith, their labor prompted by love, and their endurance inspired by hope in Christ. Transformation was possible because Christ came to them with *power*, the *Holy Spirit*, and *deep conviction*. (See 1 Thess. 1:3,4 (NIV) *emphasis added*)

Another practical idea is to find an alternate positive activity (habit) that fills the time and energy that was spent on the bad habit you are trying to overcome. Wesley said to spend so much time doing good that you don't have time to do bad, you don't have time to do what tempts you.

(RT): Replace Bad Habits with Good Habits

If it is necessary and possible, find a support network you can trust that will offer their support and if need be, hold you accountable. It may be a personal friend or an organized group. Find and participate in what you need...

(RT): Find a support network

And finally, keep in mind that each victory over a trial or temptation breeds additional strength and additional victories that become increasingly easier. You see it in sports teams sometimes-- they get a victory, they get in a zone, and they become extremely hard to beat. As the power to resist increases, the power to tempt fades...

(RT): Victory will make you strong

An elderly man brought a boy into the woods to cut down hickory trees to make ax handles. They were in a valley. The boy pointed to some, "These trees will make good ax handles, let's cut these down."

The man replied, "These trees in the lowlands have natural protection from the weather. Let's go to the heights where the trees have been rocked by fierce winds and had to fight to suck up the scant water before its levels drained and sank out of reach. They are hardened by the storms and they will make much stronger ax handles."

When we fight to drink in God's presence, and when we are tempted but do not give in, we become stronger. We are more than conquerors through him that loves us! (See Romans 8:37) And when we become conquerors over temptation and stand firm in the faith, as we win more and lose less in the things that really matter, as we continue to grow toward spiritual maturity, – it is a joyful, pride-filled dream of our Father-God for his children, and for ourselves, and for all who care about us.

God's dream for us, and our dream for ourselves is that we can build a faith that will not fail in good times or bad.

Closing Hymn *O For a Faith That Will Not Shrink*

Closing Prayer Let's pray. Loving, faithful, and gracious God, we are grateful that you believe in us. You call us to walk with Christ, and to be more than we ever thought possible. We come humbly to you, relying on you to see us through every

trial and temptation, so that by your power we can stand firm and faithful, lifted by your grace, growing stronger and moving forward into your future. When we do happen to fail, we can be forgiven by your mercy. Setbacks do not destroy us, but only make us more determined to succeed the next time. We pray you will grant us a strength of faith so that no matter what happens within or without -- we will sense your pleasure and gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ... Amen.

This one verse emphasizes our "Children of Light" worship series, We will sing it as the beginning of our Closing Blessing, which I will then conclude with words.

Closing Series Theme Song 2175 v 2 *Together We Serve*

Closing Blessing Now as we prepare to leave, let us go with the assurance that God's grace and power always goes with us and guides us toward his light. As his children, then; hold high the light of Christ -- be a beacon of hope to those around you -- that all may be drawn to him. Amen.