

Straight from the "Hart"

Worship Service from November 8, 2020



Welcome Good Morning and welcome to our worship service at Harland United Methodist Church. Today we will look forward to the day when Christ will come, when all will recognize him for who he is. But before we do that: (Pause).

Special Veteran Tribute

This is the closest Sunday to Veteran's Day. Therefore, we pause to honor those who were enlisted to defend life and freedom in our country and around the world. If you are a veteran, and able, please stand so we can recognize you. Remain standing as I read the last stanza of "Honor our Military" by Joanna Fuchs (Fooks) and then a "Tribute to Veterans" written by a Lynne Carey.

Honor our Military by Joanna Fuchs

Here is to those who choose to be warriors
And their helpers good and true;
They're fighting for American values;
They're fighting for me and you.

Tribute to Veterans by Lynne Carey

I was a proud veteran that served my country well.
To those that would listen I had many stories to tell.

We fought for America's freedom
in faraway places on foreign land
Wherever the battle for democracy raged,
America's finest took a stand.

We fought for your future and the right to remain free.
For we saw what freedom meant to those not blessed with Liberty.

For you and yours we would gladly have given our life.
We faced the fears and perils of battle.
We braved endless turmoil and strife.

Please remember us veterans
And the sacrifices we made for you.
Please share the blessings of freedom
Proudly wave the red, white, and blue.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank and honor all those who have defended their nation and its people by their service in those branches that we call upon to enforce justice, peace, human rights, and freedom throughout history and to this present day. We appreciate their sacrifices or willingness to sacrifice on behalf of their fellow men and women, and children of the nation; and the cost that they offer to pay until your true peace can settle on the world. Amen.

Hymn # 717 Battle Hymn of the Republic

Theme Our theme today is introduced by an adapted Pedro Pablo Sacristan story called Bobby the Mountain Climber. Once upon a time (made up story to make a point). Bobby was well-known for climbing the big snowy mountain. Actually, he was famous for failing to reach the peak. At least 30 times now. His ascents always started out well, imagining the marvelous view and sense of freedom at the top. But as he trudged on, and his strength dwindled, his gaze and mind dropped from where he was headed and began to focus on the depth of the snow, the cold, and his worn-out boots. When he got high enough for clouds to gather around him, and he convinced himself that even if he did reach the top this day, the clouds would block his view. Then he's sit down to rest, and somewhat relieved because the difficult upward journey was over and he looked forward to the much easier descent back to the village, though he didn't like the thought of people knowing he had failed yet one more time.

On his last attempt, Peeper, the town eye doctor went with him and saw what happened. He encouraged Bobby to try again, but with a pair of his specially designed sunglasses. He said, "As soon as the clouds gather, or the cold starts stinging, or your feet start aching, put them on."

Bobby accepted them without much thought because Peeper had made them sound almost magical -- how could sunglasses help sore feet? It wasn't too much longer before he made another attempt at the mountain. Sure enough, as the clouds gathered and he began to lose sight of the top, as the snow got deeper and the cold began to sting, as his feet began to ache in his worn out boots, he pulled out the glasses and put them on. But somehow as he glanced up, through the glasses he could see the bright summit above. Therefore, despite the discouragers, he continued on up instead of turning around. Eventually he ascended above the clouds and reached the top. He took the glasses off and the view was almost as inspiring as the indescribable joy of accomplishment. As he

glanced down, he saw the clouds he had come through. He didn't remember them that thick and dark. He took the sun glasses and examined them more carefully.

Dr. Peeper knew it was when Bobby lost sight of his goal that he became discouraged and gave up. Therefore, he had carefully engraved an image of the lit-up summit that could be seen if he looked upwards through the glasses. So when Bobby looked up and saw the summit in the lenses, the obstacles didn't overwhelm him and he continued on to reach a goal which had previously been impossible to reach. <https://freestoriesforkids.com/children/stories-and-tales/bobby-mountain-climber>

If you've been with us through this series, you know that the church in Thessalonica began and grew in the midst of severe opposition. Paul had been fearful they were going to give up in discouragement and has been trying to encourage them. Today, in response to a question, Paul reminds they can stay encouraged by what they focus on -- except unlike our little story, it is not a created illusion, but a truth that we believe in faith...that even when storm clouds come and all seems dark, the sun continues to shine on the other side of the clouds, and it is just a matter of time before the sun (or Son (S-o-n)) will break through because God is in control and still actively working in his creation.

Call to Worship (Lay Reader, Congregation)

To whom or what can you compare God? Haven't you heard and known these stories all your life? Don't you understand the foundation of all things?

God sits enthroned above the earth.

The people look like grasshoppers. He stretches out the skies like a canvas under which we live. Lift your eyes and look to the night skies. Who do you think created all these? He marches out his army of stars each night and calls them by name. Not one of them is missing.

All because of his great power and mighty strength.

Why would you complain that God does not see, that he does not care, that he has disregarded our cause? Do you not know that there is no one like our God?

The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of everything seen or imagined.

He does not become tired or weary. No one can grasp how great is his wisdom.

He gives energy to the tired, and power to the weak.

Even young people wear out, stumble and fall.

But those who trust the Lord receive fresh strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles!

They will run and not grow weary.

They will walk and not be faint.

We will be still before the Lord. We will rest in him. We will renew our strength. (inspired by selections from Isaiah 40:18-41:1a (NIV, ICB, MSG))

Song

Our next song which lyrically reinforces what we just read.

Indescribable

From the highest of heights to the depths of the sea
 Creation's revealing Your majesty
 From the colors of fall to the fragrance of spring
 Every creature unique in the song that it sings
 All exclaiming:

Refrain

Indescribable, uncontainable
 You placed the stars in the sky and You know them by name
 You are amazing God
 All powerful, untamable
 Awestruck, we fall to our knees as we humbly proclaim:
 You are amazing God

Who has told every lightning bolt where it should go?
 Or seen heavenly storehouses laden with snow?
 Who imagined the sun and gives source to its light?
 Yet conceals it to bring us the coolness of night
 None can fathom:

Refrain (2 x), You are amazing God

Prayer Chorus

Sanctuary

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary,
 pure and holy, tried and true,
 with thanksgiving,
 I'll be a living sanctuary for you.
 (Repeat)

Prayers Lord, we give thanks to you because we are never alone. We live in your world. You created and are creating. You came, come, and will come in Jesus to

make peace and make everything new. We confess that we are too easily held back by distractions and discouragements. Remind us that you are active all around us and in us. Remove our focus from lesser things and remind us what is truly important. Move us forward in love and service of others as we celebrate your presence with us, knowing that you will accomplish your purposes in your time.

It is this knowledge that prompts us to lift our joys and needs before you -- since last Sunday, we had heard requests for *Sheila Daniel finding a doctor in Florida for additional testing, * Carolyn Lynch's granddaughter Elsie Bierge (17) with covid, and all others suffering from it as it trends up throughout most of the country, * and Fran Warthman's niece Sherri who has, from a human standpoint, a poor prognosis with cancer; and with her family.

We pray for the rest of us, some named in weeks previous, some named only in our hearts and minds -- in this next moment of silence. **SILENCE** Be with us in our joys and needs as we live in the land and strive for peace. Give us courageous hearts that cannot be dragged down. Unconquered hearts that no trial can wear out, and upright hearts, which no unworthy purpose can tempt aside. Give us the wisdom to seek you, a faithfulness to embrace you, through Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray... **Lord's Prayer**

Bible Reading Luke 21:8-11, 19, 28, 36

In a few minutes we are going to hear Paul trying to clarify some confusion about how Jesus is going to wrap up history. It isn't surprising. Jesus himself said that even in those last days there would be lots of confusion. Like we heard from Isaiah in the Call to Worship, and are about to hear from Paul, the advice is to not obsess with the stormy seas around us, but to keep focused on living faithfully. Hear some of Jesus' words from Luke 21:8 and following

Jesus said, "Be careful! Don't be fooled. Many people will come using my name. They will say, 'I am the Christ' and, 'The right time has come!' But don't follow them. When you hear about wars and riots, don't be afraid. These things must happen first. Then the end will come later." Then he said to them, "Nations will fight against other nations. Kingdoms will fight against other kingdoms. There will be great earthquakes, sicknesses, and other terrible things in many places. In some places there will be no food for the people to eat. Fearful events and great signs will come from heaven. You will save yourselves by continuing strong in your faith through all these things. When

these things begin to happen, don't fear. Look up and hold your heads high because the time when God will free you is near!" So be ready all the time. Pray that you will be strong enough to escape all these things that will happen. And pray that you will be able to stand before the Son of Man." (ICB)

Song

It was because of who Jesus was and all that he did that so many claim to come in his name, for he represents such a powerful, positive influence in the world. When we think of a specific person's name, it conjures up their entire life. It speaks to who they were, what values they held, what personalities they presented, what they were like and what purpose they were about. All of this is wrapped up in a person's name. Our next song speaks to the name of Jesus.

What a Beautiful Name It Is

You were the Word at the beginning
 One with God the Lord Most High
 Your hidden glory in creation
 Now revealed in You our Christ

What a beautiful name it is
 What a beautiful name it is
 The name of Jesus Christ my King
 What a beautiful name it is
 Nothing compares to this
 What a beautiful name it is
 The name of Jesus ---

Death could not hold you
 The veil tore before you
 You silence the boast of sin and grave
 the heavens are roarin'
 the praise of your glory
 for you are raised to life again
 You have no rival, You have no equal
 now and forever God you reign
 Yours is the kingdom Yours is the glory
 Yours is the name above all names

What a powerful name it is
 What a powerful name it is
 The name of Jesus Christ my King

What a powerful name it is
 Nothing can stand against
 What a powerful name it is
 The name of Jesus
 You have no rival, You have no equal
 now and forever God you reign
 Yours is the kingdom Yours is the glory
 Yours is the name above all names

What a powerful name it is
 What a powerful name it is
 The name of Jesus Christ my King
 What a powerful name it is
 Nothing can stand against.
 What a powerful name it is
 The name of Jesus

Message *Night's Shock – Day's Certainty* 1 Thessalonians 4:13 - 5:11

I had mentioned earlier in the series that one of the reasons Paul was concerned about the Thessalonian Church falling away is that they had to leave town before he could teach them as thoroughly as he would have liked and they would have questions. Last week, Timothy returned with the good news about how faithful they were to Christ and Paul's mission, and after Paul says how elated he is that they are remaining faithful, he turns to the questions they sent through Timothy.

Note: Bible verses within the sermon of from the NLT. Those that are italicized and indented were read as a part of the sermon. Bible verses that are boxed like this note were not read during the sermon but are placed for easy reference for that section of the sermon. Double outlined boxes are central applications in the message

And now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope. (1 Th 4:13)

When someone dies, we “celebrate their life” rather than “memorialize their legacy”. And life *should* be celebrated. But **Future Hope** in some circles, there is added to it an unspoken expectation that pressures us to deny our pain. But sadness and a sense of loss are normal emotions and need to be processed. And while it is normal that we all react and feel and process

differently, stuffing our grief so it is *not* processed is not healthy in the long term.

Paul's contrast of Christian grief with pagan despair is not that Christians should not grieve or grieve as deeply as others. Experiencing the hurt of loss is not a lack of faith. It has more to do with how strongly we love, and since Christians should be especially good at loving, we may feel loss even deeper than others. Paul is saying something else when he says, "we do not grieve like others".

The common belief back then, and it seems like in increasing numbers today too, is that you are born, you live, you die, and you are done. But for Christians, even in our pain, unlike secular counterparts, also have a certain hope that we have a future beyond this physical life on earth and a great reunion someday.

This is something that the Thessalonian Christians had been exposed to but not yet completely taught and they developed several practical issues surrounding their misunderstanding. They were certain of Christ's soon return, that they and all history would be wrapped up into Christ's new and eternal kingdom, and they expected that "soon" meant a matter of days. They were caught off guard as time passed and some of their loved ones who had accepted Jesus died, either naturally or through persecution, before Jesus returned. That part of the teaching had eluded them and they were not sure what would happen to loved ones. So, they asked Timothy to ask Paul. Paul answers on the basis of Christ's own work and words:

For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died. We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died.

(1 Th 4:14-15)

Those that had already died would not miss out on Christ's return. They would be with the Lord when he comes. He then goes on to describe that day.

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, (1 Th 4:16a)

Pastor Louis T. Talbot said, "When I left Australia years ago, I said; "Mother, if God spares me, I will come back to see you." She waited for years. Had a friend asked her, "Mrs. Talbot, what are you waiting for?" She would have answered, "My boy is in America and he is coming back."

And suppose this person said, "Coming back? What do you mean? Surely you don't expect a personal, visible, actual coming!"

She would've replied, "Yes, that's the way he is coming." The friend may have persisted, "Did you ever get letters from him? Phone calls? Do you ever receive gifts? Well, that is probably what he meant -- he is coming in all these things." [And in a sense, the Son, Christ does come in these things, but] My mother would have answered: "No, he said that he would come back and that is what he meant!" And years later, Talbot crossed the ocean, landed at the port, went to the old family home and said, "Mother, here I am."

with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel,
and with the trumpet call of God. (1 Th 4:16b)

Christ will return like the cry of the charioteer to his horses, the hunter to his hounds, or the commander to his soldiers – His return will ring with all authority and urgency.

First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. (1 Th 4:16c-17a)

And to answer the church's question about their loved ones; this forceful, sudden event will lead to a great reunion. The original vocabulary pictures an official welcome of newly arrived dignitaries, and it is "in the air", (popular first century thinking believed the air to be) the home of all kinds of evil spirits. Paul is reinforcing God's complete supremacy over any other powers of life or death that may threaten to separate us from our loved ones or from Christ.

Then we will [all] be with the Lord forever. (1 Th 4:17b)

So encourage each other with these words. (1 Th 4:18)

Trouble, hardship, persecution, destitution, danger, violence? We are more than conquerors through Jesus who loves us. Death, life, angels, demons, present, future, power, heights, depths, nothing in creation can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (See Rom 8:37ff)

Now concerning how and when all this will happen, dear brothers and sisters, we don't really need to write you. For (1 Th 5:1)

Then he turns to the timing... He seems to have taught them this important point, at least...

you know quite well that the day of the Lord's return will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. When people are saying, "Everything is peaceful and secure," (1 Th 5:2-3a)

(just like false prophets of the Old Testament who predicted God's blessing, victory over enemies, and a booming economy just before the people were stripped away of their homeland and lost everything)

then disaster will fall on them as suddenly as a pregnant woman's labor pains begin. And there will be no escape. (1 Th 5:3b)

I cannot improve Paul's natural birth labor metaphor. You know it is coming, ladies, but don't know exactly when. One hour you are resting peaceably and the next you're screaming in pain (and that is just the men! 😊). It is inevitable, but concisely unpredictable. Sometimes, Braxton Hicks contractions fools us -- we think we are reading of signs, but it isn't the end. Jesus also gives us signs, but then says that is not the end. Those who don't believe will be completely shocked that the time is even pregnant for birthing a new kingdom and they will be completely caught off guard...

But you aren't in the dark about these things, dear brothers and sisters, and you won't be surprised when the day of the Lord comes like a thief. (1 Th 5:4)

... but we who have come into the light of Christ, while not able to predict the time of his coming, we can be certain of its coming and shouldn't be caught off guard when it does suddenly happen.

For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don't belong to darkness and night. So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clearheaded. (1 Th 5:5-6)

for we are not of darkness and night, but children of the day, (we are included in the future great day of the Lord -- on the positive side of that action), and we are children of light (we are aware and constantly alert to God -- through Christ; and adopted into his family -- this is one of our distinguishing features. It means we are

being transformed by Christ, illuminated by his life and guidance. Children of light -- children take on the nature of their parents – Two disciples were call “sons of thunder”. Can guess what kind of personalities they had? Children of God take on the characteristics of God. For the Thessalonians -- New God – new nature.

In a world where everything revolved around religions, choosing to follow Christ meant getting cut off from the life of the city. Paul reminds them that they are children of a new family, a new city – and he compares the old community to the new community, and the ultimate outcome of each.

Night is the time when people sleep and drinkers get drunk. But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation. For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us.

(1 Th 5:7-9)

While their non-Christian peers may reject them, it would be those peers who would not escape the day of the Lord -- and Christ’s followers will be vindicated and receive God’s mercy and salvation. So, live confidently as God’s chosen and protected children of light --

Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever. So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing. (1 Th 5:11)

-- so that (as Paul comes back to reinforce his answer to the original question) – whether we are dead or alive, we will live with him forever. So, keep on strengthening and encouraging each other to be faithful as children of the day -- people who are alert!

Having amplified the text, let’s get the rubber on the road. What are we supposed to encourage each other to be and do as children of light?

Children of the light are alert and active. People of the night

Children of Light Are (CL): Alert / Active

do not watch against temptations and sin; they do not watch against their lusts and pride. Nor do they watch for chances to do good, to teach, to strengthen, to comfort, and nurture those in need. Maybe sometimes people of light fail to do that too...

Paraphrasing a preacher. “For themselves”, people can rise early, stay up late, and are constantly diligent. They work till their fingers ache, their eyes are red, and

their brains whirl. Yet they still have time to spare for their own amusements.

But “for God” they claim they can’t find time, the energy, or the will -- to engage in holy works and good deeds for Christ’s church and for those in need. So many professing Christians are asleep. They are inactive, coming only to be served and not to serve. What is interesting about this preacher is that he was the well-known Charles Spurgeon, and he preached that in 1857. And if that was true in what we probably perceive as a much slower-paced culture, what does that say of our culture that doesn’t have time to wake up or go to sleep -- either one -- zipping along at the breakneck speeds of today.

I happen to think that most of us, given the circumstances that we are in, are doing our very best and I want to thank you for being that kind of people. So I am kind of like Paul last week, when he said: “Do this! You are doing it 😊! Do it more...” More than ever, people of the day need to be alert to the threat of temptation and deception of sin, and must be constantly active in doing good.

They are also self-controlled. Or perhaps better, God controlled. People of the night

(CL): Self - (God) Controlled

claim “Religion is all about limitations and restrictions. It wants to dominate your direction through strict disciplines. It would wrap in chains anything that is fun, free, or joy-filled. It won’t let you go anywhere, do anything, or be with ‘cool’ people. It is all about legalistic, binding control.”

If we defined control that way in driving, then when we say, "I have my car under complete control," it would mean you are sitting on the side of the road and going nowhere. But the car that is subject to perfect control has the potential to travel easily at the needed speed, will start, stop, and turn effortlessly without problems.

A piano player or athlete learns that it is through disciplined self-control that frees them to move with excellence around the keyboard or the playing field. The ones who just play at practice are the ones who make a wreck out of the concert, or the game, or the car, and let down the team, their supporters, and themselves.

Children of light grow in what some people call the triad of faith hope and love, three basic traits of Christians. Closely related to what I just said,

**(CL): Growing in the triad
(Faith, Hope, Love)**

when we willingly place ourselves under the control of God. Yes, there are things we need to say “no” to – --but the intent of the “no” is to free us to say “yes” to those things that are more important and allow us to live even more excellently –

and that is even more fun, more freeing, more meaningful, and joy-filling; than if we just live in any old haphazard way.

Therefore, people of the day never stop looking to grow in their faith, in their hope, and in their love because with more alertness, with more control, comes more abundant purpose, more accomplishment (like reaching that peak (from the theme story)), and we are less likely to let ourselves or others down.

That same preacher, Spurgeon went on to say (paraphrased) -- if churches were awake, we wouldn't be lacking material resources, we wouldn't need more agencies, or people, or talent, or money, or time. If we had the will, the heart for the work, and God pours out his Holy Spirit in our midst, we would have everything we need to fulfill God's mission that he is calling us to do -- through us -- to his world.

And children of the light are eternally saved.

(CL): Saved to eternal life

Why would we not have that willing heart – in

light of God's work for us in Jesus Christ – saving us from the power of sin and evil, adopting us into his family and offering us eternal life? With the kind of heart God has for us, why would we not have a heart for him?

Have we “fallen asleep” or pushing ahead in active service?

Grace Troy wrote a hymn that asks the motivating question for us today:

If he should come today
And find my hands so full
Of future plans, however fair,
In which my Savior has no share,
What would he say?

If he should come today
And find my love so cold,
My faith so weak and dim
I had not even looked for Him,
What would he say?

If He should come today
Would I be glad, quite glad?
Remembering that He died for all
And none through me had heard his call
What would he say?

Instead, what we will want him to say to us is “Well done, good and faithful servant” (See Matthew 25:21,23) “You have been encouraged and encouraged others to the end”.

(CL): Encouragers to the end

In the NCAA Regional Basketball Finals, LSU was leading Indiana by 8 points with only a couple minutes left in the game. The LSU players made a strategy shift and began watching the clock rather than wholeheartedly playing the game, they began playing to not lose rather than playing to win. This shift in focus enabled Indiana to rally, win the game by one point at the buzzer. They went on to become the 1987 national champions.

Jesus calls us to be aware of the signs of the times, but not to be distracted by them. His emphasis is not as much “to avoid destruction”, or to “watch the clock”, but to spend our focus and energy in wholehearted, faithful, active service during the time we have available before that final buzzer sounds.

I’ve heard some of you are not big on athletic illustrations, and so let me throw this in as final illustration. It is not over until the soprano sings her finale! (to put a positive twist on that old phrase). So keep on “working”, keep on “singing” keep on - living as faithfully and fully as Jesus empowers you to do -- each day, every day of your life.

Prayer Let’s pray. Lord, you have given us the light of your salvation, and called us to carry that light of grace and love and faith and hope to a dark world. We do not want to waste our days spiritually comatose, so grace us to wake up to your glory and daily presence, that we should move through our days serving you -- actively living victoriously and abundantly until we finally join you and see our loves ones and your Son’s face... What a day of rejoicing that will be when we see Jesus, Amen.

Hymn # 701 *When We All Get to Heaven*

Closing Blessing

Now as we 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.