

# *Straight from the "Hart"*

Worship Service from January 31, 2021



## **Opening Prayer**

Almighty God, we thank you that you are a Lord who truly listens to us, understands us and our situations. You know our strengths and our weaknesses and answer us in ways we can receive it. That is why we have come to this place (online) -- to praise you for your amazing love - which defies our ability to fathom -- that it would seek and reach out to each one of us and lift us up. Amen.

**Music Intro** We haven't used the praise band sound for a while, so we'll use that kind of sound -- but to sing one of my favorite hymns. Let's sing... And Can it Be?

**Music** *And Can it Be* (Praise Band version)

**Call to Worship** (R1 = Reader 1 R2 = Reader 2)

**Intro** Our call worship is inspired by the first 6 verses of 2 Corinthians 3. Paul defends his life and leadership by the transformation that has happened in the lives of the people he served. Just as the song proclaims that it is God's amazing love that frees us to rise up and follow, Paul also reminds us that this transformation is not accomplished by ourselves, or by conformity to rules or to credentialed leaders, but by allowing Christ's life to work within us.

R1: We do not need to prove ourselves with reference letters. You yourselves are all the endorsement we need.

**R2: Our transformed lives are a recommendation letter that anyone can read just by looking at us.**

R1: Christ wrote the letter. (He made you who you are). He wrote it not with ink, but with God's Spirit. He did not chisel what are lives are supposed to be in stone. He carved it into our hearts and lives.

**R2: We can't, on our own, do that work in others or even in ourselves.**

R1: It is God who equips people to be instruments of his work.

**R2: We serve him – not under a written law that kills the spirit.**

R1: But under a new covenant written by the Holy Spirit on our spirits,

**R2: imprinting Christ's life on our lives.** (Inspired by 2 Corinthians 3:1-6)

## Theme

And if we want to experience the freedom of Christ to be so written into our lives that others will see Jesus in us, then we must learn how to communicate, which includes, but goes way beyond talking. **4 quick stories.**

**Story 1:** When my children were very young and I asked them to do something, sometimes they didn't always respond, or if they did, it was kind of automatic -- and I suspected they hadn't really heard or hadn't listened. I would ask them to tell me what I told them. Sometimes they could repeat the request, "take a shower after dinner", but sometimes it made them snap to attention because they had to give a response and they had no clue what I had asked of them. They would say "Huh?" Sometimes we get into what I call "Sunday School" answers. We've heard it so many times that we think we know what the right answer is supposed to be, so we don't really listen to the instruction, or we blurt it out a response without any thought to actually hearing what was said, "take a shower after dinner" and even if our intent was to follow through, by the time dinner is over, it has left our mind.

**Story 2:** I once asked someone how they were doing, and they answered with a hand gesture. Later, I was writing to describe the hand gesture and I found it was not easy to put into words. I had to make the gesture again to myself so I could watch it in order to describe it. I wrote that the person held out their hand with their three middle fingers curled in, and twisted their wrist back and forth so the extended pinky and thumb made a roller coaster motion. Did you understand that? Some of you, if you are familiar with that motion, may have. For others, especially if not seeing it before, it may have been more difficult to grasp... But if I show you -- and the camera is close enough for you to see it... you can immediately see what the gesture is -- and may even understand its meaning: (my life is up and down, so-so, or as some say -- fair to middlin'.

**Story 3:** I read a made-up story, but I think versions of it have really happened. A class was struggling with some math concepts. The teacher recruited a new student that nobody knew to act like he knew nothing about math. Then he enlisted the class to help the new student. As the students corrected and explained the math to this new student, they themselves began to understand it a lot better.

**Story 4:** One teaching speaker would have two people who disagreed on a topic come up front and instead of supporting their own position to the other (like in a typical debate), he would make them explain the opposite person's position to that person's satisfaction. It forced them to truly listen and understand what their opponent felt and believed and why.

**[SUM]** These stories get us to thinking about how we learn (or teach) something well enough to apply it to life.

First, we can't assume that just because we can know and repeat the answer (because we've heard it 1000 times before) that we have actually applied it or applied it correctly to our life. We must always pay close attention. Some people call that "study", or in faith circles "study and meditation".

Second, words are a start - or a supplement, but they are not always enough. ("Say as I say and not as I do" is not usually an effective teaching method). Sometimes we have to "show" what we know.

Third, we begin to understand something better ourselves when we share/explain the learning with another.

And finally, to understand what we know, and how to best explain it to another, we need to be able to truly understand what others who disagree think about what we have learned.

To put in a phrase, Paul tells Timothy, **"Study and do your best to show yourself to God approved, a workman [tested by trial] who has no reason to be ashamed, accurately handling and skillfully teaching the word of truth."** (2 Timothy 2:15) (AMP) [Timothy is to work so as not to be ashamed because he is embarrassed because he doesn't know what he believes about God or what God thinks about others, or what we think about others or what others think -- all are necessary elements of effective teaching so others can correctly understand and perhaps be persuaded by Timothy] The first phrase of that verse again: **"Study to show yourself approved by God"**. (2 Timothy 2:15a) (MEV).

**Intro to Prayers** Today's theme amplifies the essence of what we have been talking about this series. Since we took a break, as a series reminder, we have risen up to shine for God because God has risen over us like the sun rises in the morning. We have risen to listen to him, to enter into relationship with him, to move in obedience to what he is telling us – today, we rise up to "show and tell" our faith journey. People will hopefully see our lives as the fruit of our faith in Jesus and understand that we are God's servants and are always in the process of growing in our service of him. Our faith grows to fruition as we meditate on how to and then live out our faith -- first, by trusting that God will care for us as a shepherd tenderly cares for his flock, protecting us, leading us to pasture, keeping us from wandering off in sin. Therefore, let's prayerfully ponder all of this plays out in our life while Donna and Kathy play *Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us*, after which we will sing

our prayer song, which expresses our hope that all this will become more and more a reality in each of our lives.

**Special Music Instrumental** *Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us*

**Prayer Music** *Bear the Fruit*

**Prayers** O God, we thank you for raising up faithful messengers who did their best to teach us your truth -- and sending your Son Jesus to show us yourself and your love. We praise you with all our hearts -- for you have done and are doing great things. We love to think about your deeds, and as we do we love you all the more -- for what you do is filled with glorious wonders. Your kind and merciful miracles are memorable throughout the generations. You show us your loving power. You provide for those who honor you, for you always remember your everlasting covenant. That is why we lift up to you those that you place on our minds and hearts. This week we heard of Fran's niece Sherri who is being kept comfortable at home in her end stages of cancer, and for a person named Claudio who is struggling in many areas of his life, and for the family and friends of Roger Pedigo who passed away from covid last Friday...

Lord, we always praise you for everything you do is good and fair. Your instructions can be trusted -- always -- to lead us to be right and live true. Direct our efforts to fulfill your will in our lives. May our offerings, spiritual gifts, and service bring joy to people within your church, in our neighborhood communities, and around the world. We will do our best to live under your new covenant which set your people free to live as Jesus taught us to pray: **Lord's Prayer**

**Music Intro** We began our service by singing about being freed to rise and follow. This next song sings our commitment to follow, and God's promise to be with us and lead us. The second verse contains some imagery that we may not have time to pick up on in the moment of singing it, so I will pre-clue you: When life seems dark and difficult, and also when life seems like the paradise of Eden, in peace or in storm, God still leads us... Let's sing...

**Music (vv 1,2,3)** *He Leadeth Me*

**Bible Reading** **From Dt 18:15, 18b-19, Acts 7:22, 37-39, 51-53**

In the Call to Worship, Paul defended his right to speak and be heard because of the genuineness of his faith and ministry -- which was evidenced by reminding the Corinthians that he brought them to Christ who had indeed transformed their lives.

Most scholars think it was the sincere faith of the first recorded martyr --- Stephen --- that planted a seed in the heart of Paul that allowed Christ to transform his life

from a front-line leader approving the persecution of Christ -- into a leading missionary to the Gentiles for Christ.

During those last minutes of Stephen's life, he pointed his executioners to one of their leading heroes of faith --- Moses --- who had reminded the people that they needed to listen to God before they could speak and act on God's behalf. He quoted Moses telling the people how they would be led --- how they would be instructed --- in God's will. Moses told them:

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you. You must listen to him. [God says,] "I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name."

It was centuries later that Stephen explained to the people who were stoning him --- in the name of Moses and the Law --- how they missed *these* instructions of Moses -- Instructions that they were claiming to uphold. Stephen said:

Moses was taught all the knowledge of the people of Egypt. He became a powerful speaker and a man of action. [Moses told them, "God will send you a prophet."] ... Moses was with the Israelites in the desert. He was with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai.... He received living words to pass on to us. But our people refused to obey Moses. They would not accept him. In their hearts, they wished they were back in Egypt.

... "You stubborn people! You won't obey! You won't listen! You are just like your people of long ago! You always oppose the Holy Spirit ! Was there ever a prophet your people didn't try to hurt? They even killed those who told about the coming of the Blameless One. And now you have handed him over to his enemies. You have murdered him. The law you received was given by angels. But you haven't obeyed it."

**Message                    *Rise Up to "Show and Tell"*                    2 Corinthians 2:14-18 (etc).**

One-time prime minister of England Ramsay MacDonald was discussing with an expert in foreign affairs the possibility of lasting peace. The official was unimpressed, "The desire for peace does not necessarily ensure it." MacDonald replied, "Neither does the desire for food satisfy your hunger, but at least it gets you started toward the table."

God's people are preparing to enter the promised land. Moses warns them that the people currently had chosen a different way of living and that they

<p><b>Crave Jesus, the ultimate prophet/voice of God</b></p>
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were not to adopt those practices and to crave only God's voice. Moses assures them that God will indeed raise up a new leader from their own people, a prophet like himself who would speak only what God tells him to speak, and from that prophet's voice they will know, and had better do, God's will.

People throughout the ages have craved to hear that prophetic voice. Leaders, prophets, priests and kings, with varying degrees of faithfulness spoke or failed to speak God's word to God's people. People, for the most part, ignored, rejected, persecuted and even killed those who would interfere with their doing what was right *in their own eyes* rather than what was right from God's point of view. Yet God refused to let go of them. He kept sending a new voice after new voice after new voice; and ultimately, he sent his Son Jesus Christ to live among us as one of us. (See Hebrews 1:1-3).

It is kind of like King James V of Scotland, who from time to time, would remove his kingly robes and dress in peasant garb. He would then move freely through the land, making friends with ordinary folk, not to spy on them, but to see their world from their point of view, entering their difficulties, appreciating their obstacles, and sympathizing with their sorrows. Then when he returned to his kingly role, he was better able to rule over them with compassion and mercy.

In a similar way, God enters into our human experience in Jesus Christ – he listens, understands, and sympathizes, He also knows how to accept us, save us, and teach us how we can live most fully. The Bible goes on to warn us that when we suffered consequences for not listening to the voices who truly spoke God's word, how much more will that be the case if we refuse to learn from Jesus, the voice of heaven on earth. (See Hebrews 12:25 NIV)

The goal of listening and learning is to point ourselves and other people into a (deeper) relationship with Jesus who will **Point to Jesus** teach them everything. Though people may not realize it, this is what they are still waiting for – just as they were waiting back then.

A Samaritan woman was a national, political, and religious enemy of the Jews. She had not lived the best of lives, and so she also carried the burden of that reputation with her as well. She came to a well in the heat of the day (in order to avoid most people who would do this chore during a cooler time). It was here that Jesus met and struck up a gracious conversation with her, inviting her to the water of life and to be one of the true worshippers who leaves the importance of location and empty formalities behind in order to worship in the Spirit and in truth. To this, "The woman said, 'I know that Messiah is coming... When he comes, he will

explain everything to us.” (John 4:25 (NIRV)) Even Samaritans were expecting the prophet from heaven who would be the true kingly voice from God.

“Then Jesus said, ‘The one you’re talking about is the one speaking to you. I am he.’” (John 4:26 (NIRV)) He introduces himself as the one who can and will explain everything by his words and works, and he pleads with them – with us - to listen to God’s voice speaking through him. Later, Jesus said:

“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.” (John 14:23-24 (NIV))

And as Stephen is being stoned, he confirms that Jesus was the ultimate voice from heaven – God’s message to his world – a voice which the religious realm once again rejected and killed. But for those who repent and believe, Jesus invites them – he invites us -- to the joy of everlasting life; and to participate in pointing people to the Son who died, yet now lives; and to join us on our journey to a banquet in the heavenly home.

Jesus tells a parable, a story about that banquet, about how the banquet was ready, and all the usual people were invited, but they all made excuses as to why they could not attend. So, he told his people to go out further, into the less conspicuous places and invite the “less likely” people to come to God’s home, so that his banquet hall will be full. (Luke 14:16 ff).

A missionary was on his way to India, and he wrote a letter proposing marriage to a girl. He concluded, “If I do not hear from you, I’ll assume you are not interested and have other plans.” She immediately wrote a letter and accepted his proposal. She asked her brother to mail the letter but she never heard from the missionary again. Her brother had put the letter in his coat’s chest pocket, but it fell through a hole he had forgotten about. Years later, she discovered the crumpled, yellowed letter inside the coat’s lining.

How can people connect with God if we bury the invitation - or their desire to respond -- within us and fail to deliver the word? That is, how can people come to God if we get in the way by our silence or by put stumbling blocks in the way of those who want to respond? (See Romans 10:13-15, then Matthew 10:18-20, and also 2 Corinthians 6:3)

For some of us, it can be scary, especially when we think that we are called to go into uncomfortable places to invite

**Overcoming fears**

the “less likely” people, people who may not like us or be like us. Perhaps like Jonah two weeks ago, maybe we fear that God may accept people we don’t particularly want him to accept.

Or more likely, we fear we are not competent to handle such a powerful message with such eternal consequences.

Jonah’s story helps us. Serving God is, in a sense, always a second opportunity, an undeserved privilege, and our failures do not discount the message we share. Not that we should feel free to keep running from God, or to keep failing God. Who wants to forever stay or keep returning to the guts of a fish? Further, there is no indication that the people knew of Jonah’s miraculous dealings with the sailors or with the great fish. No reputation preceded him. Nor was there anything particularly appealing about his gloom and doom message. And there was certainly nothing about Jonah’s attitude toward the Ninevites that would have drawn them to receive him or his message.

**It is the gospel, not us**

The only explanation is that the Ninevites were prepared ahead of time by God to be eager for a word from heaven, and when Jonah came along, it wasn’t Jonah, but God’s Spirit in the message and the receiver that made all the difference. Jonah was full of flaws, but God saved the city through him. We are all flawed. Even Paul said no one is competent or equal to the task of carrying out God’s mission. But we aren’t the one who saves, it is the Spirit of God who goes before, during, and after the delivery of the invitation that points people to God. The appeal is in the message, not us. (Our job is to do our best to live in a way that supports and doesn’t get in the way of the message).

Paul’s story is similar to Jonah’s – a man who at one point was cheering on Stephen’s stoning, but then received another chance and became missionary for Christ to the non-Jewish world, and even then, often found himself reeling against false assumptions and accusations made by the churches he founded. In 2 Corinthians he is trying to explain to an incriminating church why he had changed travel plans. It was God’s love that drove out his fear and compelled him, compels us, to trust him to lead us even into scary and uncomfortable places. When Paul completes his defense, he suddenly changes moods and bursts out in praise...

<sup>14</sup> But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ’s triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. <sup>15</sup> For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. <sup>16</sup> To the one we are an



aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task? [a rhetorical question that is answered “no one” but] <sup>17b</sup> on the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God. (2 Corinthians 2:14-17 (NIV))

Paul gives thanks because it is not us humans but God that brings the victory of his ever-active grace that is always able to defeat the power of sin's hold on us. Paul is picturing the Roman triumphal procession. Among many other things, the victorious general leads home his armies and the conquered, chained captives down the city street that is lined with watching people and the air is filled with incense. Odor is a powerful trigger. To the conquered, they would never forget that smell in connection with their defeat and imprisonment.

That same aroma was forever entrenched in the minds of the Roman citizens as a reminder of their victorious life.

What we believe, say, and do, how we handle situations and convey our attitudes --- how we live --- is meant to become to others a vision of victorious Christian living -- an incense that penetrates the community. The aroma of our life is pleasing to God because it makes known to everyone God's invitation to be in relationship with him by following Jesus.

Seeing us, the watching world now has an opportunity to reject or accept God's word in Christ. Depending upon how they respond, our lives will remind them that their life is not all it can be under the power of sin, OR reminding them that they have a new and eternal life and becoming more victorious each day.

Our aroma has nothing to do with becoming experts in all topics of faith, about winning clever debates with opponents, or passionately arguing condemnation and judgment on those who don't agree with us -- or conversely, developing a charisma or natural magnetism that overwhelms the defeated with a desire to jump on our particular wagon...

None of us are equal to the task of perfectly successfully carrying out God's mission because no human is powerful enough to overcome sin in themselves, much less in others.

But that is not to say we should not sincerely and eagerly desire to learn and live life as fully as possible, to represent Christ as well as we can, to develop our individualized particular God-given gifts and personalities and work with enthusiastic zeal in the situations we find ourselves, to grow where we are planted, and to welcome others to the faith -- just as we ourselves discovered our faith ---

because somewhere along the line in our personal histories, someone made us aware of, and directly or indirectly, in their own unique way, they invited us to join the faith by living their relationship with Jesus before us.

During the great Depression in a small Midwestern town, there lived a mentally challenged man named Myron. No professional services were available. He lived with his mother and they survived on Myron's gardening work. It was easy to identify the homes where he worked, for the landscapes were obviously cared for with great skill and loving attention. Myron also volunteered by cutting grass, raking leaves, and planting flowers in what would otherwise be unsightly vacant lots. He was best known for his "oil can". He always carried a small can with him in his pocket. A squeaky door or gate always got a free dose from Myron's can.

Myron was in church with his mother every Sunday. Other boys had tried to tease him, but he was unflappably cheerful. When his time came, people came from distant places to join the whole town in attending his funeral. Myron would not be considered a man of fame or fortune, but by his optimistic attitude, dedicated work, and easer of tensions; he had lived a life that really mattered, victorious over a challenge he didn't even know he had. He, like all of us, was unequal to the task, but through him, people sensed the fragrance of a Christ-led life. Let's pray.

**Closing Prayer** O Lord, we want our lives to demonstrate how happy we are to be yours, and how happy you are that we are yours, and we want that joy to be contagious. Mold us into the shape of the message of victorious grace that you embodied in Jesus Christ. Release in us the fragrant aroma of Christ, that our lives may speak of your love. Let us rise up in you within all our circles of influence -- to *show and tell* by our lives -- your invitation to receive your saving peace. May we always remind each other of the full life found in following you. Amen.

Our final song was written in a day when men could mean men, or as I believe it means here, men and women of all ages.

**Closing Music** *Rise Up, O Men of God*

**Closing Blessing** Know that God's light has risen upon *you*. So, through you, let his light shine into a dark world by rising up to live kingdom values and daring to serve Jesus in new and adventurous ways. Amen.