

Straight from the "Hart"

Worship Service from March 14, 2021



Call to Worship (R1 - Reader 1, R2 - Reader 2)

R1: We continue our Lenten “season of recovery” as we focus on health as essential to our spiritual lives. Prolonged times of difficulty can impede our ability to stay proactively, creatively, vitally healthy. Fading hope dulls us to reactivity or no activity. We simply wait and wish for a different time. Today we awaken to our need to seek out our divine healer. We need his touch of inspiration to awaken us from our sleep. We reach out for his power of restoration.

R2: And yet, with all of last week’s demands completed, or not... we turn to yet another week of repeating demands and new challenges. So I invite you to close your eyes, and be *only* in *this* moment – not looking to the week completed or the week confronting us. Set aside for the moment the relief of what is done and the anxiety about what is not. Set aside your concerns about people and projects, and consider where *you* are... right here... right now.... Whatever it is at this moment, whether it be joy or sadness.....gratitude or anxiety.....let those feelings rise up in you now..... Listen.....God is present in these moments too. God meets us where we are, and calls us forward.....moment by moment..... guiding us slowly, but surely toward transformation.

Confession

R1: Now I invite you to open your eyes and focus on the altar scape or its picture on the screen. As we see the broken glass being transformed into something beautiful, we also acknowledge our need to create and imagine new possibilities, new solutions as we restore, repair, and renew our holy vessels. We begin to do that through a time of confession...

Let us pray: God of all possibilities, made in your image, you have tasked us as co-creators of a better world. You bestowed imagination and the ability to learn and progress. We thank you that you are with us, and that we can call on you no matter where we are or what we are feeling, and you will listen. We are tired. Our energy and enthusiasm wanes. The call for ideas, solutions, work-arounds and adaptations overwhelms us at home, school, work, and even errand running and recreation, not to mention our concern for the lives of our neighbors. Not only our livelihoods, but our liveliness is at stake. Too often we want to give up, declare it all too hard and simply isolate, waiting out the time for better days.

As we extinguish this 4th candle, we recognize the pain of life's discouraging, disheartening, demoralizing challenges that deflate our ability to advance productively forward into our future.

R2: Help us, Healer. Show us our energy reserves.

Forgive our cynicism. Inspire us to move one step at a time toward greater care for one another, that we may emerge -- ready to re-engage with the world, seeking and seeing solutions, creating images of life renewed just as a mosaic artist creates beauty from broken pieces of glass. In this next moment of silence, we sense and acknowledge our yearning for wholeness.



SILENCE

When one realizes one is asleep, at that moment one is already half awake" -- P.D.Ouspensky

Music

Holy Vessels

Vessels, holy and whole, broken, needing the One,
Open, body and soul, Healer ---, come.

(Repeat)

Assurance

I invite you to close your eyes again. Imagine that warmth that is the spark of a fire in the depth of your soul. Keeping in mind God's promise of presence and trusting that he is working within us in this very moment..... and is also always working in the moment-by-moment unfolding of our lives. The spark is fanned to flame and is always there and ready when you need it. Imagine it emerging from the recesses of your inner being, igniting and sparking inspiration. It floods your whole body until it radiates outward as a beacon of hope for those around you, and combining with their radiating light, like on Christmas Eve, the lights combine to radiate God's presence in us and among us. God's Spirit has gifted us to affect healing in the world. We are not alone. We can join with others to magnify hope.

Christ answers when we call, when we reach out for who we know can help. He can. For you, for me, for all. Take a deep breath in to let this truth fill you... and breathe out with the relief of assurance. This is our peace. If you have not already, you may open your eyes again. The peace of Christ and his healing forgiveness is with us, for he promises he will never let us go, and we can rest in him as we give our lives to him...

Music Intro This next song speaks of his enduring presence, his warm light that flickers in us, restoring us daily, and ultimately fully blooms on that day we are with him forever...

Music # 480 (vv 1,2,4) *O Love that Will Not Let Me Go*

Theme We've all heard about, if not experienced, the birthday party or Christmas giving where a young child excitedly opens up the gift and spends the rest of the day playing with the container and wrappings. The downside of course is that the ignore the toy that the giver spent so much thought and cost and energy and time to present. The upside is that the child has and is developing and active imagination in their play with the wrappings. Sometimes we need to play. And play is way more than "just for fun." Play brings joy. Play reminds us of the power of being in the moment. Play can be a Spirit-filled opportunity to see something -- not for what it is, but for what it *can be*. Play is about possibilities. Throughout my ministry advisors and seminars and all the rest; emphasized the need to have some sort of hobby -- something to play at. Something I was able to muster with only abbreviated success, except for bowling.

During hard times, it is easy to get stuck focusing on what we don't have and what we can't do. We dwell on all the limitations covid or other challenges of life that has been put upon us. But God has placed an incredible power in us. The Bible teaches us that we are created in the image of God. And since he is a Creator, that means we have the power to be creative. And this time we're in now, full of limitations, we not be able to go out and or have the expensive toy that does mean we cannot play. But we surely can play with wrappings. Limitations may *increase* our creative abilities! So let's exercise our creativity, because creativity has healing qualities to it.

Sometime this week, I challenge you to not go to a store, but go around your house and find interesting looking things that may not be used at all, and see if you can lump them together and create something out of them. If not, at least you've helped fill your recycle bin, right? 😊. Try to do something creative and have fun doing it. *Don't look at those things you find for what they are, but for what they could be if joined with other things.* Maybe you could make an imaginary animal, a building, an abstract object that just looks interesting to you. Enjoy yourself. Create..... Play..... Heal.... Keep your hearts and minds open to all the creative possibilities God has placed before us -- and be reassured to know that no matter what we're going through, we can always turn to God in prayer. We can ask God's

help for ourselves and for others. And God always hears our prayers. So let's pray... Loving God, We come to you with Hearts [*hands over heart*] Hands [*hands raised*] Minds [*point to head*] And Souls [*praying hands*] In need of your healing touch. Heal us from the inside out [*breathe in and sigh out*] So that we may reach out to help heal your world. Amen.

Musical Intro

Through this series, we've talked about how Jesus' teaching and actions go hand in hand to declare his authority as the Son of God. The last verse of this next song says, Great things he has taught us, great things he has done, teaching and actions going together; and the great things God has done for them in Jesus so long ago he does for us too when we see Jesus, even now. Listen as Donna and Kathy play.

Special Instrumental Music *To God Be the Glory*

Bible Reading Matthew 9:14-26

Intro: Albert Schweitzer once wrote, "The path of awakening is not about becoming who you are. Rather it is about unbecoming who you are not." Most of this season have been about Bible characters whose problems were multiplied because society rejected rather than helped them. Last week we heard that Matthew was ostracized because of his hated profession, lumping him together with thieves and traitors to the nation and faith.

But Jesus did not play by the old rules. He didn't see Matthew for what he seemed to be, but for what he could become if he could shed the labels and stereotypes put on him. Unlike society, Jesus gave Matthew a chance to unbecome what he was not. He left his tax collecting behind, followed, and discovered who he really was as a child of God and disciple of Jesus.

Jesus came to Matthew's house. Dinner was offered to Jesus and his disciples. Tax collectors and sinners joined in. Pharisees saw and asked, (complained really), to the disciples about how Jesus could associate with "*those kinds of people*". Jesus answers, "I have come for the ones who know they need God's mercy."

This week another group shows up at Matthew's home. Jesus' answer to their question also gives enlightenment on becoming by unbecoming, on the discovering the new life by discarding the old life. That truth is then illustrated by what happens next. Listen ...

Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?” Jesus answered, “Can the guests of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they will fast. “No one sews a piece of new cloth into an old garment, for that which is sewn in to fill it up pulls on the garment, and the tear is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old wineskins. Or else the wineskins burst, the wine runs out, and the wineskins perish. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.”

While He was speaking these things to them, a certain ruler came and worshipped Him, saying, “My daughter is even now dead. But come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live.” Jesus rose and followed him, and so did His disciples. Then a woman, who was ill with a flow of blood for twelve years, came behind Him and touched the hem of His garment. For she said within herself, “If I may just touch His garment, I shall be healed.” But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her, He said, “Daughter, be of good comfort. Your faith has made you well.” And the woman was made well instantly. When Jesus came to the ruler’s house and saw the musicians and the mourners making a noise, He said to them, “Depart. The girl is not dead, but is sleeping.” And they laughed Him to scorn. But when the people were put outside, He went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. The news of this went out into all that land. (MEV)

Music Intro The healing of the daughter demonstrates Jesus’ power over death. The woman -- “If only I can touch, I will be healed.” “Your faith has made you well”, and she was made well. In each case, “healed”, and “made well” is most often translated in The New Testament as “saved”. The woman desperately wants to be saved, comes to Jesus and his mighty saving power seeking his never-failing, merciful compassion. Jesus says she has been saved, and then she is saved. Matthew uses this saving word 3 times, and of healing -- only with this particular person. He saw something in this woman that made her especially representative of what it means to be “saved” by Jesus. We’ll looking at that in a moment, but first let’s sing along with this song that expresses Jesus’ resurrection and saving power.

Music

Mighty to Save

Everyone needs compassion, a love that’s never failing,
let mercy fall on me. Everyone needs forgiveness,
the kindness of a Savior, the hope of nations.

Refrain

**Savior, he can move the mountains.
 My God is mighty to save,
 He is mighty to save
 Forever, author of salvation
 He rose and conquered the grave,
 Jesus conquered the grave.**

So, take me as you find me, all my fears and failures,
 fill my life again. I give my life to follow,
 everything I believe in. Now I surrender (Yes, I surrender)

Refrain

Shine Your light and let the whole world see
 We're singing for the glory of the risen King (Jesus)
 Shine Your light and let the whole world see
 We're singing for the glory of the risen King

Refrain

You're my Savior, You can move the mountains
 God, you are mighty to save, You are mighty to save
 Forever, author of salvation
 You rose and conquered the grave,
 Yes you conquered the grave...
 (You are mighty to save)...

Message A New Thing

I have a friend who uses the phrase "I made enough for Thrashers." I think it might be unique to their family clan. It is an expression that means she has made an overabundance of food -- far beyond what is needed for the expected number of guests. It is usually a food that would make good leftovers or could be given to extended family members or others. Apparently, Matthew could have used it this particular day because Jesus and his disciples come and sit down to eat. Then sinners and tax collectors join them. And then Pharisees show up, although I doubt they participated in the meal, they just didn't like what they saw and talked about it. Then disciples of John the Baptist show up, and now a certain official ruler arrives. Mark and Luke indicate that it was Jairus, a leader of the local synagogue, and his position sometimes gets imported into English translations of Matthew, but it is not really there. He had kept the name unknown and the role vague. He wants to stretch his story to be applied beyond the details of this particular event. In fact, Matthew eliminates a lot of details that Mark and Luke put into their story. He wants to go beyond the event to teach us something much deeper.

Another difference is that in Mark and Luke, Jairus requests help for his dying daughter, and then Jesus is interrupted and delayed along the way which gives time for the daughter to expire. In Matthew, the official is appealing for nothing less than a resurrection of an already deceased daughter. (He skips the story ahead) And while nothing is said of the man's faith, it is expressed clearly in the fact that he kneeled (worshipped) before Jesus and in the kind of request that he made -- that's a pretty bold request to make of somebody. But it also reflects his status in society -- and man who is used to getting his way -- barging into and interrupting a banquet uninvited and asking Jesus to leave that banquet to serve him at his house in a way that would make Jesus ritually unclean. That is the kind of authority he threw around. And maybe it was his authority -- and maybe his desperation.

Matthew reports no words from Jesus in response to the man, but simply says Jesus rose with his disciples to follow him to his home. Even though Matthew often has different settings and chronology of the same incidents reported by Mark and Luke, for example. He has no need for the woman to delay Jesus on that trip because the daughter is already dead. It would have been easy to rearrange into two separate stories, making them much more clear and to the point -- but he doesn't. He must have a good reason to keep that event cluttered with the "interruption".

The interruption is a woman who has been bleeding for 12 years. At worst, her ailment was seen as a loss of vitality, of the life forces that are in a person. She was, symbolically, metaphorically, lifeless in that culture. At best, she was ceremonially unclean, and so was everything she touched. Like many others in this series, she had no business being out in public, but she has no choice for she does not seem to have anyone who will be an advocate for her. Unlike the brazen official, she approached Jesus surreptitiously (sneaking up from behind), outdoors, and wanted to touch only the fringe of his garment -- some interpret her thinking and actions as superstitious or magical. ("If I can only touch that, then I'll be okay") It also may have been in part that though touching the garment was a violation, it was not touching the person himself, but for the pious Jew, any touch of any kind on anything would make them recoil in horror. But as we've seen over and over again in this series, Jesus doesn't concern himself with these things because they are outweighed by his concern for the people in need.

She does manage to touch the fringe -- or hem. By the way that fringe probably refers to a blue cord/tassel that was put on the four corners of a person's garments as a reminder as they dress every day and when they see them; to not follow the

evil enticements of their own eyes and hearts and to follow the Lord's commands. (See Numbers 15:37-41 and Deuteronomy 22:12). It was a practical symbol, not a superstitious thing. In Matthew's account, he removes any "magical" moment because there is no secretive touch of a garment. Instead, Jesus feels her touching him and then he turns to her -- and then he speaks words to her that are especially appropriate for someone conflicted by her circumstances: on the one hand, hesitant to face Jesus head on, yet desperate enough to come to him regardless. He gives words of comfort and encouragement, and labels her as a "daughter". He plans not only on saving her physically but gives her a new set of meaningful social relationships in God's kingdom to replace the relationships destroyed by that culture. His word and her faith in him heals -- saves, as we already heard today. The root word for all those saving words about her healing and wellness is the word that is usually translated saved. And even though they were in a crowd, Matthew writes her story in such a way that it seems like nobody else is there -- Jesus' focus was completely on that woman, it was a very personal thing between Jesus and the one in need. Paraphrasing and expanding on one commentator: When she touched the tassel on his robe, Jesus halted, and it was as if time stood still -- like a movie put on pause. Background sounds all fall silent and everything else has faded from sight. Nothing exists -- except Jesus and that woman -- and her need.

Which is probably why, now that the "interruption" is over, Matthew mentions only Jesus coming to the official's house at the end of that trip. According to burial traditions, flute music and songs of lament from mourners were already taking place. Even the poorest were expected to provide at least one professional mourner and 2 flute players. Why flute, I don't know, but that was their tradition. The mournful music, somebody crying, it helped comforters as they came to find the proper mood of grief to comfort the family. And since this was a community leader, it wouldn't have been just "1 and 2", it would have been a good number of people. So we can imagine there was quite a cacophony from a large group of flutists (or floutists, whichever way you say it) and professional mourners. Jesus succeeds in putting them out even though they meet his original request with mocking laughter.

Here again we have a female who has much in common with the first one. Both are called daughter (but for different reasons). Both are associated with ritual impurity (one for bleeding, one for being dead). Both are lifeless, one symbolically, one physically. They both receive Jesus' personal attention and touch. One is

saved and the other is raised, and that salvation and restoration, like all the others being healed in these chapters, are based on a faith that brings one into an relationship, a personal relationship, a family like relationship with Jesus who then does the work.

Jesus went in alone to the daughter, again connecting him with the line of God's chosen prophets. Elijah (1 Ki. 17:19ff.) and Elisha (2 Ki. 4:32ff.) both went in alone when they restored someone's life. He took her by the hand and the girl arose (important word). God is about to show that in Jesus, death is not the final and absolute end of life. We know that, but it is good to be reminded of it once in a while, isn't it?

We have heard several healing stories now. We've seen a wide spectrum. People of power, secular and religious, that have come to Jesus for help. We've seen people that society had written off -- find help. Others called out, followed, interrupted, trying to make that connection with Jesus for his help. We've also seen that most healings went beyond the physical, and some had no physical issues at all. The healing was in a different realm. It tells us that no matter where we are with Jesus, we can come to him just as we are. We don't have to perfect ourselves, we don't have to perfect our motives, or perfect our understanding, or perfect our faith before we come -- the main thing is that we recognize our need and that we do come.

And to him, we are never lost in the crowd, and as we reach for him, time stops, and he focuses on us and receives us with love and open arms. Irish poet and writer W. B. Yeats wrote "The love of God is infinite for every human soul, because every human soul is unique; no other can satisfy the same [loving longing that God has for that soul]." God gives all of himself to each individual person.

He's shown it again and again in these chapters. Jesus breaks through powerful barriers of gender, he breaks through barriers of ritual impurity and social stigma associated with them -- he breaks through with his sacred power. Even now he is breaking down the power of death, whether it be physical (the daughter in the house) or symbolic (the women on the path). But it goes even beyond this.

Matthew is trying to teach us something about the core of our faith. To understand it, we have to go back to the banquet that he was at when he was interrupted and why Matthew chose to maintain the interruption of Jesus' journey to resurrection by the salvation of the woman on the way.

If you remember, Pharisees had already interrupted the banquet by questioning who was in attendance. Jesus said. "It is the sinners and tax collectors and

disciples and those who know they need, and trust me, these are the ones I came for.” Then today’s story began with the next interruption... John the Baptist’s disciples asked about fasting and Jesus replies that you don’t *mourn* when the bridegroom is present. And all of a sudden, this banquet at Matthew’s house is being used as a metaphor for the heavenly banquet. Where Jesus is sitting down with a whole lot of people we don’t expect will be there, and all kinds of people we expect to be there who aren’t. He says when Jesus is present, you don’t fast, and when Jesus is present, you don’t call out the funeral flutes, because he has overcome.

But then in the next line Jesus changes all of that to predict his absence -- and then they will fast, and then they will mourn. And what started out as a reason for not fasting suddenly becomes an omen about his very near future. The present bridegroom of joy becomes the absent bridegroom of woe. And the reason he will be taken away is because the new thing that God has been doing in Jesus -- things never seen before in their faith history of the people of Israel (we heard that last week) -- a new covenant of grace that included things like breaking down the barriers that religious and secular life had so effectively built against those who needed it most -- things like mercy and grace and forgiveness and acceptance and restoration of what was rejected -- these new things were not compatible with the old (for them, current) way of doing things. Jesus throws out two images: a new patch on an old garment, and new wine in old wineskins, both that rip away, the later spilling wine.

It is then that the powerful father charges into the heavenly banquet attended by many sinners and comes to Jesus and asks him to provide a resurrection. Jesus *rises* up (is the word), but on the way to *raise up* the daughter, (which anticipates and points forward to his own resurrection) is interrupted by someone who needs to be saved. The wine is spilt, the woman’s blood is spilt (for 12 years now), and salvation will come because Christ, like the wineskin patch, will be violently ripped and torn apart and his blood would be spilt on the cross. One commentator suggests that the daughter’s body (in the house) signifies Jesus’ resurrected body, while the woman’s body signifies his crucified body.

Resurrection can’t happen without going through the salvation Jesus offers through his crucifixion. New life is only possible through dying out, through death. But death does not have the last word, for Jesus’ death is represented in the middle of the story -- it continues to move forward to the end of the story where the resurrection happens. Matthew uses these events in the life of Jesus to

foreshadow the fulfillment of Jesus' whole purpose for coming. And it is to offer us eternal life, and a vitality of new life even now -- restoring vigor and creativity in covid (or other) life-draining times.

Commission

So often, when life gets us down, it is easy to feel like there is no coming back from it. In one town I served the news came out that the Optimist Club was disbanding. It led to a lot of jokes about, "if *those* people can't do it, have given up... maybe our laughter should have had some mourning flutists in the background. And yet Jesus insists above the laughter that this is not the end of the story. We do not need to be deterred, we can forge ahead and enter the "house of sorrow", which, at least at times, may be our own soul, and yearn for healing, and be awakened, and dare to proclaim that we can come back better than ever before, creatively reborn with vitality and vigor for the days ahead -- all made possible by the work of Christ on the cross which will never forsake us no matter what, for it emanates with peace and joy no matter what bane (what stresses we must endure) and what blessings we may enjoy... Let's sing about that...

Music # 295 (all vv 1,2,4) *In the Cross of Christ I Glory*

Prayers of the People

Let's Pray: Healer of our every ill, including exhausted spirits, we come before you to make our petitions known. Hear our cries for healing of body, mind, and spirit. We know that already you are at work among us, showing us the way to recovery from the griefs of our time. You remind us that we do not have to shoulder everything alone. We give you thanks that all we must do is orient ourselves toward your divine spirit to accompany us, touch us, inspire us, heal us. We pray especially for all who feel opportunity and possibility is cut off from them. Whose spirit is continually dampened and damaged by those who fail to see value in their contributions, who steal away rights to the fullness of expression. We give thanks for communities, churches, other groups and businesses that are supporting the flourishing of all voices, especially voices that have been silenced. We give thanks for the courage of innovators who use their resources and creativity to make more good things happen in the world. We ask for courage and encouragement -- to creatively play our part in our circles of influence. Today we specifically pray again for Bill and Jan Martin, the former who is seriously ill in the hospital, for Fran's niece Sherri, who remains weak as they give comfort measures, and her mother Judy at her side. For Mary Jo and her child Scotti who have covid, for Mary Jo's

manager Summer and her daughter, and any others who may have contracted the disease in their circles... we give thanks for caregivers and hospital staff for the dedicated work they do. And for Karen Nowak's sister Rita who is in the hospital for reasons not yet known. And again we thank you for Jesus, the healer who lifts us up and strengthens us for every opportunity that you bring our way, and who teaches us to pray **LORD's PRAYER**

Ritual Action

And so this week, I remind you to find that hobby, that craft, to something creative that you can do at home, to have fun and play with this week. For those who have Lent Kits at home, if you are like me, you made it look as good as your thought you could make it look, and there it sat. In front of us, yes, but there it sat. Maybe there is no room for improvement -- but there is always room for variety. So as a challenge this week and to stretch your creativity, find another good way that it can look for you, to remind you what it is all about -- as an exercise in creativity and newness. Rearrange it into something new and fresh, metaphorically symbolizing new possibilities -- a "new vision" for life within us and with each other, that there can be new images of what our life might be like as we continue to envision Jesus as the Lord of our lives.

Music # 451 *Be Thou My Vision*

Blessing Now go with confidence that we will awaken, and seek out and reach for the healing solutions that our neighbors, our communities, our world needs, recovering our depth of love for all and our joy of living in this world. May the words of Jesus ring in your ears: "You are not dead" and we take his hand and arise. And may the Spirit hover, move, and deliver salve to your souls and a spring into your steps. **Amen.**