


Straight from the "Hart"

Worship Service from May 9, 2021



HARTLAND



Sharing the journey
to know, love, and serve God

Act of Centering (with soft background music, '.....' means short pause for reflection)

I'm going to tell a story of my childhood, in hopes that it will trigger a visualization -- of it -- or something similar in your past. I again invite you to close your eyes and breathe deeply as we calm and center ourselves for worship. [Music begins.] My mother's side came from a Finnish heritage. When we visited up north, on Saturday nights, most of the local relatives would gather at the home of my toddler years, which now belonged to one of my uncles and his family. Nearby was an abandoned house, not fit to live in -- but they were using the two front rooms -- the front one was a place to throw clothes and towels; and large metal bowls. In the next room they had built some ascending benches along with a wood stove filled with stones on top -- turning the room into an old-fashion-ed Finnish sauna. The relatives gathered at my uncle's on Saturday night to fulfill the traditional custom of preparing for church the next morning by having a sauna that night. So, all the women and girls would go while the men and boys talked and played at my uncle's, and then when they returned, the men and boys would go. But here now we get into the spiritual metaphor to which we are headed. It was no simple walk from the house to the dilapidated house that contained the sauna. It was already dark.... It was through woods which blocked most of the moon and stars.... Only a few carried flashlights. I was not one of them. -- I had to look around one or two looming dark figures to see the light on the path held by someone several people in front of me I were even to get a glimmer of what lay before it was a very narrow and winding, and unfinished path... small, low hanging leafy twigs sometimes hit you in the face, if accidentally stretched by the person in front, sometimes fairly hard... they had placed narrow planks at some place where rains would sometimes flood and mud the dirt... in those wetter nights, other parts of the path were also soft and squishy to our bare feet ... even where there were planks it was easy to misstep in the dark... our feet would be cleaned by the sauna, but muddied again as our feet touched the earth on the way back home... This modern picture of the spiritual journey amplifies an ancient picture (paraphrased) from Psalm 25 [Loosely inspired by Psalm 25: 4-15, 20-22]. The Lord shows us his ways by his light as he leads us... He shows us how to live... He takes us by the hand and leads us step by step down the path of truth...

Because he is good, he forgives and forgets the sins [that slap us in the face, the temptations that cause us to stumble off the plank, that would reach up and drag down and muddy up our lives. He marks the milestones of his mercy and love... Because he is leading, every road we travel will take us to him, as long as we follow the covenant signs and read the charted directions. He points us in the best way for us to go. If we only keep our eyes on God, we won't trip or fall into traps. In the next moment of silence, think about your lives before God -- with what imagery may he want you to connect and speak to you in *your* experience? ... is there a temptation or sin pulling you off the path, are you plodding through muddy circumstances? Are you sensing God's love reaching out for you hand as you move seek to move forward? **SILENCE**

[As the music ends], Lord, we come to worship because we trust in your breath of goodness, your protection, your deliverance, (Loosely inspired by Psalm 25:4-15, 20-22) and your peace that you breathe upon us. Amen. Open your eyes, and if you are comfortable, let's stand and sing through our masks....

Music Breathe on Me Breath of God

Theme - (Mother's Day)

I browsed some of the classic stories about pure heart of mothers (and grandmothers) to honor them this day. They have a different tone than I expected, less about sentimental gratitude and more about lessons that encourage us to aspire to excellence.



One is an abbreviated form of a Frances Jenkins Olcott's retelling of *The Magic Cavern*. Once upon a time, a woman lived in a little hut near a mountain on which was a forest. She had one little child whom she loved dearly.

The forest grew many large and juicy strawberries, and one Midsummer Day the woman took the child to pick some. They climbed the mountainside and picked the best ones. As the woman put them in her basket, she saw the door of a large cavern open before her. Great heaps of gold lay glittering on the floor, while three white maidens sat guarding the treasure.

They called to her, "Come in. Take as much gold as you can grasp at once." The mother, holding her child by the hand, entered eagerly. She stooped and grasped a handful of gold and put it in her apron. But the touch of it filled her with greed, and, forgetting her child, she gathered up two more handfuls. Then she turned and ran out of the cave. Instantly the cave door began rumbling behind her, and she

whirled to see her child shut inside and the voice of a maiden: "Unhappy woman! You have lost your little one until next Midsummer Day."

The poor mother wrung her hands and wept, but in the end, she had to go home without her child. She returned to the place often, but she could never find the secret door. Early on the next Midsummer Day she hurried to the spot and found the door was already wide open. Great heaps of gold lay glittering on the floor. The three maidens guarded the treasure. Near them stood her little child holding a big red apple. The maidens called to her, "Come in. Take as much gold as you can grasp at once."

The woman eagerly ran in. She ignored the gold and gripped her child in a strong hug. The maidens said, "Take the little one home. We give him back to you, for now your love is greater than your greed." So, the woman took her child home with her, and loved him better than gold all the days of her life.

Hopefully, we have all had mothers and grandmothers who didn't need to learn a lesson to love or find the proper priorities and balance of life, or at least -- when they needed to, they did learn the lesson. This is even more important because children learn what they see.

Aesop tells us: A mother crab and her son went scurrying over the sand. The mother chastised her child: "Stop walking sideways! It's much more becoming to stroll straightforward." And the young crab replied: I will mother dear, just as soon as I see how. Show me the straight way, and I'll walk in it behind you."

An unknown author says it in a more direct, but poetic form:

There are little eyes upon you,
And they are watching night and day;
There are little ears that quickly
take in every word you say.
There are little hands all eager
to do anything you do;
And a little [child] who's dreaming
of the day he'll be like you.

You're the little child's [hero],
you're the wisest of the wise,
In his little mind about you,
no suspicions ever rise.

He believes in you devoutly,
holds all you say and do;
He will say and do, in your way,
when he's grown up to be like you.

There's a wide-eyed little fellow
who believes you're always right;
And his eyes are always opened,
and he watches day and night.

You are setting an example
every day in all you do,
For the little child who's waiting
to grow up to be like you.

We give thanks for our mothers and grandmothers, or/and other women (sometimes men) who took on that role for us -- their lives, their examples from which we learned how to grow up. Women who have, for the joy [of children] set before them, endured their daily cross; scorning the **alleged** shame of domestic engineering, and will receive the reward due them. See how they have persevered, consistently laying down the discipline of truth against the opposition of self-centered ones; thus inspiring us to also not grow tired and lose heart. Thank you for making your world better by making your home better by who you are and what you do. Pause.

Now let's shift gears... and begin talking about our journey toward God's coming kingdom, and his will for us. Gary will lead the reading of the white font, I'll join the rest of you on the yellow font...

Call to Worship Responsive Reading (R1 - Reader 1, C - Congregation)

R1: When our failures never escape our focus.... When we are crushed under the heavy guilt sin.... When it feels like we are far from God's presence..... If we thought it would do any good, we would give traditional sacrifices. But what God desires is godly sorrow for sin and an aspiration to be revitalized.

C: We offer our sin-distorted lives to God.

R1: In his mercy, God restores our salvation. He wipes away the guilt of our sin and cleanses us as white as snow. He creates in us pure hearts.

C: Therefore, we surrender our self-centeredness, and set our lives apart for God.

R1: Worship to renew of your minds, and transform you lives, from the inside out. Then you may discern that God's will is good.... for us, and for all.... and we will form our lives around his sacred standards.

C: We refuse to be shaped by selfish, non-spiritual values.

R1: He bolsters our pledge by giving us strong, willing spirits.

C: We will once again praise God and rejoice with gladness.

(Loosely based on/inspired by Psalm 51:3,7-12, 15-17 and Romans 12:1-2)

Prayer Music

Change My Heart, O God

Change my heart, O God, make it ever true.

Change my heart, O God, may I be like you.

You are the Potter, I am the clay.

Mold me and make me, this is what I pray.

Change my heart, O God, make it ever true.

Change my heart, O God, may I be like you.

Prayers

Heavenly Father, you watch over us. Like trees, you plant us solidly in fertile soil, you provide ample water, you give us every opportunity to remain green and flourish, to be productive in our season. Therefore, it is our desire to submit to your cultivating hand by keeping in step with you and your people, with those who honor you, who delight in your rule, and who consistently meditate on your will to guide their lives. Your will watch over us in love and cause us to prosper.

You especially made this possible by what you have done through your Son Jesus, and many of us have learned much of him through our first teachers, our mothers. We pause to pray our thanksgiving for those who have given us life, who have loved us, who have blessed us, and who have taught us by their example. Bless the strong women of faith who have nurtured us along our journey with a love both gentle and fierce, strong and humble, kind and true; loving hands that have worked so hard in raising us, cared enough to correct us, blessed us in ways we, as children, could not have fully realized. Where we have been so blessed, we give our grateful praise.

None of us are perfect, as so we ask for your compassion upon all of us who are in need of your grace, and especially today, we pray for. * Jo Campbell who has been to UofM for health concerns, * for their son David who has covid, * for the F/F or Terri's friend Hugh Jamison who lost his battle against covid, *for Elizabeth Harton - surgery, * for Pastor's Dad - cancer, for what is going on in India, for Pastor Deane and Nancy Wyllys (who were deans from the Methodist related Camp Michigamme) who have a 3.5 year old grandson diagnosed with leukemia. Jim Malott's brother-in-law who is on life support, and finally for Jim Malott's nephew Kurt Thomas who has cancer, and for whom we dedicate this quilt.

Lord, today, we lift before you this quilt -- and Kurt Thomas. May he be renewed in faith, in love and in the assurance offered by this congregation's prayers --- and by your blessing of the Holy Spirit's blessing. Let him feel your comfort as he wraps it around him, giving him the confidence that the promise of your presence in our lives is real, through difficult as well as joyous times.

We ask that you when he feels weak, you give him your strength in this journey. When his understanding falters, grant him your wisdom. Through this quilt, through prayers, and through



your Spirit, let him feel your care and the care of others. Bring to Tom's heart a sense of confidence and calm in you and in his future. We pray this dedication and blessing to the One who walks with us in our joys and carries us in our sorrows and lives forever. (Pause)

Now as the Scripture is spoken and your Word proclaimed, may we be comforted, convinced, and changed to the glory of Christ, who taught us to pray **Lord's Prayer**

It is on the solid hope of Christ that we lean. Hear Donna and Kathy play for us, Our Hope is Built on nothing less than Jesus, the solid rock on whom we can build our lives...

Special Music Instrumental My Hope is Built (The Solid Rock)

Bible Reading Luke 22:25-27

Intro: The mother of James and John asked Jesus for a favor. She asked that when his kingdom was established, he would place her children at his right and left hand (the places of highest power). Jesus replied that that was up to his Father, not him. The other disciples were offended by their audacity, which led to an argument among them about who was the most important – and about who would be given the highest rank in the kingdom of Jesus. Jesus interrupted them by explaining that his kingdom organized around a different kind of hierarchy. This is how he described it: (Brief Pause)

“The kings and men of authority in this world rule oppressively over their subjects, claiming that they do it for the good of the people. They are obsessed with how others see them. But this is not your calling. You will lead by a different model. The greatest one among you will live as one called to serve others without honor. The greatest honor and authority is reserved for the one who has a servant heart. The leaders who are served are the most important in your eyes, but in the kingdom, it is the servants who lead. Am I not here with you as one who serves?” (TPT)

Music # 421 (vv 1,4) *Make Me a Captive, Lord...*

Message “His Will Be Done Here as There” 1 Thessalonians 5:13b-25

Last week, we learned what a privilege it is to experience an intimate relationship with a Holy Father in Heaven who we honor and revere with awe -- not just with words, but with deeds. One mean of honoring His name is found in the next phrase of the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray. Thy kingdom come. Say it with me.

Thy kingdom come. God's name is most honored when the kingdom of God, the leadership of God, the culture of God's love -- is established on the earth as completely as it is established in heaven. (Pause)

I've read that in the chicken pen there is never any peace until it is clear who is the greatest and who is the least and who is at every rung in-between. We tend to think this hierarchy thing is reserved for kingdoms with kings and princes and peasants and serfs, rich and poor, powerful and oppressed. But while it takes on a different form, it is alive and well even in our independent, individualistic democracy. We've adopted the chicken lifestyle to such a degree that we have adopted the phrase "pecking order" for our own interactions -- from kindergarten to corporations. Richard Foster wrote that the world has [developed elaborate] games of promotion and authority... We can see it so easily in such things as where people sit, how they walk in relationship to each other, who always gives way when two people talk at the same time, who stands back when a job needs to be done and who steps forward... (adapted from *Celebration of Discipline*) This is nothing new....

It would be easy for us to get hung up on the word "kingdom". Jesus uses the word simply because that is the common word of the day to describe typical societal structures. But he also says *his* kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36) it is not a typical earth-like kingdom with human kingdom characteristics. When we pray that God's kingdom come, we are not asking for yet another social system be set up, but this time with us on top. The disciples didn't understand this and that is why they argued with each other about their pecking order. But Jesus clearly rejects the pecking order value system. He redefines leadership and rearranges the lines of power... While Jesus allows that he is indeed a ruling king, he also says that he came to explain the true nature of God and how humans are *supposed* to relate to each other -- and it is for this nature that we are praying when we ask his kingdom to come -- not in overwhelming coercive power, but in a simple proclamation of truth which people respect and will want to follow. This is the first difference between Rome's empire and Christ's kingdom. Rome often created "peace" through the powerful force of its legions of soldiers; they led by fear. Christ's kingdom creates peace through reconciled relationships, they lead by mutual respect and loving care.

Rome had a word for this type of leadership. Augustus claimed he ruled the Roman empire by means of his great *auctoritas* (authority). Of course we don't connote that word the same now. What the word meant is that a person possessed

an innate quality that made his or her values and opinions worthy of belief and obedience. An obedience not based on force, but on seeing the wisdom of the truth being proclaimed. Authority is not commanded, or for that matter, nor is service rendered to another – out of a spirit of legality.

And it can be very frustrating when others don't see the wisdom of the truth we believe, much less act on it. That is why it is easy to become impatient and resort to fear and intimidation. Let's be honest. Peace through truth and enduring committed loving relationships is a lot more difficult and takes a lot more time than simply legislating and (en)forcing it. This is why moms (along with dads) (because they have more opportunities than anyone else (the church only gets about 50 hours/year) to take on this role and style of authority (with their children and grandchildren).

Moms at their best are great at teaching children not only what they should or should not do, but they do it in a way that makes the child realize that it is in their own life's best interest -- not just to avoid punishment, though sometimes that is included -- but that they *want* to live by their true wisdom because they understand why it is good for them and their world. Of course, that doesn't happen easily or automatically. Children, even adults, often don't "get it" for many years, and outside Jesus, no human has ever completely gotten it.

A frog fell into a pothole – since it was a Michigan pothole, it was too deep and wide and difficult to *easily* get out of it by himself. Other frogs saw. They offered him much truthful advice. Some were willing, even eager, to offer to take any action to help him. They even offered to get him "toad".

For some of these "Good Samaritans", this helpful service was not a matter of obedience or required drudgery. Their love for God and fellow frogs helps them feel the great privilege that it is to serve the Creator and sustainer of the Universe. It is a service a joy. For others, who may well have offered the same words and actions -- their agenda was more about the rule of life and what was right rather than compassionate care for the frog who fell in the hole. These frogs said what they did was in the name of love, but it was not love for the fallen frog as much as it was the love of being seen as doing good, or even secretly loving the great satisfaction in themselves and their principles of their superior rightness as they pronounced to the hurting frog what he had done wrong and what he had to do to fix his life.

To the frog in the hole, he heard these say they loved, but maybe all he *felt* was condemning judgment and holier-than-thou attitudes along with a bunch of rules

being thrown at and forced upon him. Or maybe he was just too proud to accept any help or advice -- no matter how it was offered. Maybe he was too stubborn to admit that his foolish fall to failure had put him in a miserable place. He may even insist he enjoys the pit he is in, and encourage others to join him in this fun hole in the ground – shaded from the heat of the sun, a bit of a water pool from a recent rain – what’s not to enjoy?

All the frogs, whose help was refused, went away sad – some perhaps secretly feeling good about themselves that they were smarter, superior, in a better place than him (placing them higher in the pecking order). Others left truly grieving because they had sincerely spoken and freely offered unconditional help and service with true love; but were rejected and that person was left in his bad place.

Time passed. The frog in the hole was now out of the hole, jumping along. The frogs who realized who it was hopped over, “What happened!?! We thought you couldn’t get out!” The frog replied, “I couldn’t, but a truck came along, and I had to.”

We pray for the coming of the kingdom because we recognize that, ultimately, God’s authority rules. Christ’s kingdom is God's design. People's disorder prevents its full realization for now. Suffering and social evils are a persistent warning to us that God’s authority is not yet universally accepted or evident as he, or we, would like. Pits and potholes still fill our ways in this world.

And because, in the short term, it sometimes works; it is very tempting to get behind the wheel of the truck and seek to force people out of their chosen and/or unknown potholes. And because we still live in a fallen world – we must sometimes resort to that. That is why we have a police force and a military, or on more personal level – to take our frog metaphor almost literally -- we’d never let our young child play in a road’s pothole hoping that someday they will begin to accept our words and offered actions and learn that it isn’t a wise choice to play there. No, we’ll force the issue and yank them out of the road.

But in the long term, whenever it is possible, we will want to push peace enforced by the legions of rule **less**, and the acceptance of gracious, loving, respected authority **more**. God’s kingdom is meant to be -- not forced, but offered as an understanding, graceful, joyful act of gratitude from one pothole dweller to another.

The wait for people, like in the story of the prodigal son, to wait for them to (at least from our perspective) “come to their senses” about their potholes. It can sometimes be an unbearably long process. We get impatient in a week – but God patiently oversees generation after generation after generation.

But our confidence is that this process, in whatever form God directs, will take place as John predicts – with heaven proclaiming that the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of his Christ and he will reign.

Given the stubbornness of evil and the sinful nature within each of us, it makes us wonder how and when this will all happen. The Bible is clear. The opportunity to be a part of the kingdom has already begun, for Jesus said when he began his ministry, “At last the fulfillment of the age has come! It is time for the realm of God’s kingdom to be experienced in its fullness! Turn your lives back to God and put your trust in the hope-filled gospel! ... [for] God’s kingdom has already come to you.” (Mark 1:14 (TPT) Matthew 12:28b (CEV)) and this coming and participation is fleshed out by the next phrase that Jesus taught us to pray. “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Say it with me, **“thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”**

His kingdom comes wherever his authority is recognized and respected, *and* his will *is* done. We have the opportunity serve, not by obligation, but with the same joy-filled service God receives in heaven. In every heart in which Christ leads by the Spirit, the Psalmist’s words can be echoed "I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." (Psalm 40:8 (NRSV)). It is willingly internalized, and we are eager to follow Paul’s advice where he says (in a modern paraphrase):

So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life — your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you [his will], and quickly respond to it [so it is done on earth]. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. (Romans 12:1-2 (MSG))

To pray “Thy will be done here as there” is to desire -- and strive -- to successfully live out his will, and to the extent we do, his kingdom is come – here -- in each of us, and among all of us who share in his salvation.

But the work of safely evacuating people from and then filling in the potholes of life seemingly never ends. Pause to think about what motivates our faith..... For the potholes that we are in, does it take the vibrating threat of a truck tire bearing down on us to get us out? And if we are out, do we feel obligated only by the threat of that same truck bearing down on us to reach out to others, or even

(inappropriately) use the truck ourselves as a tool of “motivating” others? Or do we desire to be transformed, grow, and encourage others to do the same by a passionate love for God and compassion for others? What might that look like on a practical level? Read responsively just one example that Paul gives to us when he wrote to the church of Thessalonica on how to live out his will on earth. Read responsively. (L - Leader, C - Congregation)

L: Live in peace with each other... speak to those who do not want to work. Comfort those who feel they cannot keep going on.

C: Help the weak.

L: Understand and be willing to wait for all men. Do not let anyone pay back for the bad he received. But look for ways to do good to each other and to all people.

C: Be full of joy all the time. Never stop praying. In everything give thanks.

L: This is [God's will]. This is what God wants you to do because of Christ Jesus. Do not try to stop the work of the Holy Spirit.

C: Do not laugh at those who speak for God.

L: Test everything and do not let good things get away from you. Keep away from everything that even looks like sin. May the God of peace set you apart for Himself.

C: May every part of you be set apart for God.

L: May your spirit and your soul and your body be kept complete. May you be without blame when our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. The One Who called you is faithful and will do what He promised.

C: Christian brothers [and sisters], pray for us. (1 Thessalonians 5:13b-25 (NLV))

A soap manufacturer was walking down a street in a large city alongside a faithful mother. The soap manufacturer casually said, "That gospel you teach hasn't done much good has it. Just observe. There is still a lot of wickedness in the world, and a lot of wicked people too." They walked on in silence. They passed some children in a filthy street gutter making mud pies. The kids did as kids do and were covered from head to toe in the mud. The mother gestured to them and said, "I see that soap hasn't done much good in the world, for there is much dirt, and many dirty people around." The soap manufacturer replied, "Well yes, but, soap is only useful when it is applied." And the faithful mother replied, "Exactly. And so it is with the gospel."

Prayer Let's pray. Dear Lord, the Lord's prayer - it is not just words we say – it is not just filled with sentiments we feel and hope for. It is a call to action, a guide for what those actions are, and a request for your Spirit to enliven us and empower us to apply those actions, allowing your kingdom, your will, your rule, to come to your earth, and to our lives.

Almighty, yet intimate Father, we desire that your name be honored in all the earth. We are convinced that as we seek you with our whole hearts, you will not fail to guide and direct us with your wisdom when we ask what you would have us do. Save us from errant choices, keep us from stumbling into the potholes of life, and as we offer our time, our bodies, our voices, our resources, our thoughts, our will, our hearts, and our love; lift all of us to experience our lives in your kingdom in new, smoothly paved pothole-less ways. Amen.

Music *Take My Life and Let it Be*

Blessing Now go in the name of the God who does not withhold his love, but faithfully listens to the prayers of those who reverently worship him in awe and call out to him in praise. Go in the name of the one who lovingly receives the offering of our lives to him in daily service of his kingdom. Amen.