

Straight from the "Hart"

Worship Service from June 13, 2021



Act of Centering (..... means pause to envisage)

You may be seated. I invite you to breathe deeply and slowly, relaxing your body and slowing your thoughts..... close your eyes and imagine this description. It was probably a decade or more ago, probably some place in the Upper Peninsula on the shores of Lake Superior. It was summer and warm, but not hot. A clear day, with a few white fluffy clouds..... It was a look out spot, and you have to walk down a well-groomed narrow path to reach it..... The space opens up and then walk to the edge of the wooden fence. It doesn't seem near like enough fence because just beyond it, the land plunged a long way down... straight down..... waaaay down. We are on an extremely tall cliff overlooking the great lake..... Because as we looked left and right the coastline angled out a little further into the lake, it was easy to see waves crashing against the narrow shoreline between the sea and the cliff. But it was so far down, we could barely hear those crashing waves..... Look a different direction and you can see the sun penetrating shallow water to a sandy bottom..... The shadowy silhouettes of fish could be seen swimming peacefully. From that distance, they must have been very large fish, or the water was magnifying their size..... we think about the cliff -- did it come from some catastrophic shift centuries ago, or the patient persistence of water constantly lapping against and whittling away into that shoreline. The Psalmist David did not see that view. The world is filled with infinite variety -- yet the message is the same throughout time and throughout the world is the same -- nature is a resounding voice representing the awe-inspiring power of God who directs it. David observed it in the more forceful events of nature (See Psalm 29): The Lord's powerful, majestic voice thunders over the mighty waters..... breaking cedars..... striking like flashes of lightning..... shaking the desert..... twisting oaks and stripping the forest bare..... he is enthroned above the [raging] flood as king forever... Use these images or out of your own memory to envision God's power displayed around you..... Affirm the Lord's glory and strength..... Worship him in the splendor of his holiness..... Meditate on this in silence while the music plays... **Silence ...**

Prayer Lord, we have come because you give strength to your people, and you bless your people with peace. Amen.

It is because God combines his power with gracious love that we trust him to know what is best and that we strive to do it. Let's stand as comfortable and sing:

Music Trust and Obey

Call to Worship (L - Leader, C - Congregation)

L: We have gathered to pray and be heard by the Lord. We patiently wait for his answer. In his time and way, he pulls us from the slimy pit, from the mud and mire of our lives.

C: He sets our lives in a solid place to make sure we don't slip away from him.

L: He teaches us how to sing a new song that praises our God.

C: Many will see this, and they too will revere the Lord and put their trust in him.

L: Blessed are you who turn your back on what the secular culture worships in order to give your lives to God.

C: For the earth is filled with God's wonders, the things he has done, and the plans he has for us.

L: No one compares to God. We could talk for ever and never finish describing your marvelous deeds. We could try by bringing ritualistic sacrifices and offerings.

C: But such rituals are not what you desire.

L: What you desire is that we are available, trusting, listening and obeying. This is when God's Word enters our lives and becomes a part of our very being.

C: We do desire to please him by doing his will, and his will is written in our hearts.

L: But we aren't to keep it in our hearts, our lives are to proclaim God's faithfulness and salvation and love and truth.

C: His passionate mercy and love will always protect us.

(Inspired by Psalm 40:1-11) (NIV, CEV, MSG)

Theme

Today we are recognizing God's power and how he uses it to exhibit his loving care for his people who recognize they need and can depend upon him.

I don't remember where this story came from, but imagine with me if you will a strong, healthy grandfather taking a walk with his grandson, let's call him Bobbie.

The toddler walks well, inside on level surfaces, but he hasn't yet mastered the skill of adjusting balance on uneven terrain.

One afternoon grandfather and Bobbie take a walk in the woods near home. The terrain is rough for a toddler and so Bobbie reaches up and latches onto his grandfather's index finger as they walk. Of course, he doesn't have a very strong grip but he is hanging on. It wasn't too long before Bobbie stepped on a 1/2 unburied root that set him stumbling and down on his stomach. Grandfather pauses and waits for Bobbie to get back up and grab his finger again. They move forward again. A few yards later, a small pothole sent Bobbie to his knees. Again the grandfather waited for Bobbie to get up, dust himself off in ways that only toddlers can do -- probably adding more dust than less to his pants. Again, he grabs his grandfather's finger. This repeated several more times, the grandfather always waiting, the toddler doing his best, hanging on, moving forward, but stumbling, tripping, or mis-stepping -- which yanked his weak grip away from his grandfather as he fell forward, backward, or sideways.

Finally, a thought came to Bobby. A thought that his grandfather had been waiting for him to discover on his own... He said, "Grandpa, I am not strong enough to hold on to you when I stumble -- but if you hold on to me, then I won't fall." Bobby reached up his small hand and his grandfather engulfed it with his strong yet gentle grip. And every time Bobbie stumbled, he didn't fall because he was held up by the strong arm and grip of his grandfather.

As we go through life, it is good to hold on to God, it is better to realize our strength is poor, and to trust and allow God to hold on to us, for he can lift us from the muddy mirey pitfalls of life and keep us standing firm, increasing our trust, our listening, and our desire to please him... and realizing that every successful step we make is made because of his grace. Let's prepare our hearts by singing.

Prayer Music

Grace Alone

Every promise we can make, every prayer and step of faith,
every difference we can make is only by His grace.

Every mountain we will climb, every ray of hope we shine,
every blessing left behind is only by His grace.

Grace alone which God supplies,
strength unknown he will provide.

Christ in us our cornerstone;
we will go forth in grace alone.

CCLI # 2561297

Prayers

Lord we celebrate the wonderful things you are doing in our life. We are grateful that when we stumble you keep us from falling -- and falling away. Some of us, or others among us, or loved ones, or people around us -- are experiencing the full joy of your presence and of life that is full and good, and we give you joyful thanks for those good experiences. But we also know that for some of us, or others among us, or loved ones, or those around us -- are experiencing dark struggles. We wait for you. We put our hope in you, knowing that in your time, you will clothe us with joy in the brightness of the morning.

We desire to reverently and wholeheartedly serve you. Provide for us the ability to continue to be a generous people, chosen to be a light to the world and to love you forever. Remind us that when we take pride in relying only on our own strength we may be heading for trouble, but when our security is in you, you spare us, heal us, and enable us to stand firm, that we may praise you for the answers you will provide to our prayers. (Psalm 130, 30, Lamentations 3:22-23)

Intercession Today, we don't know details, but we lift up Pat Harton for her health today. She is in the hospital for high blood pressure and additional tests and consultations. We pray for Vivian Lemon's brother who just received a cancer diagnosis, for Bret Honour's friend Dennis who has stage 4 lung cancer, and hoping to get into a clinical trial, and Lord, we are at that time of year that people are graduating, and we know some graduates are related to this local church family. Therefore, Lord, we give you thanks for creating a world in which there are opportunities to explore and to learn. And those who are leaving school for higher education or jobs or careers, we give thanks for the family members and friends and teachers and staff in school, church, and other organizations that have helped them come to this step in their journey.

And we know that because our world is still reeling and recovering from the pandemic, it can be an uncertain time to enter into a new phase of life; so we pray you continue to guide them into their future, that they can gather all their strengths and skills to fulfill your purposes and help make our world a better place. Help them to always lay their cares into your strong loving arms, as well as all of us, enabling us to hear anew what you would speak to us in these days. For your word is *always* fresh, a message of life and hope for those who seek to know and do your will, and who strive to live as you taught us to pray **LORD's PRAYER**

It is a privilege to carry our praises and burdens to the Lord in prayer. We are going to listen to an instrumental that carries that theme for us...

Special Music *What a Friend*

Bible Reading Intro and Reading **Matthew 4:23-5:2a**

In uncertain times caused by sin and grief.... in tough times of trials, temptations, and troubles.... in times we feel weighed down by cares and deserted by others.... Jesus knows our weaknesses, yet he offers himself as a faithful friend.... He enters our sorrows with us and gives us peace and relief and encouragement. He'll be for us a refuge, taking us into his arms to protect us and give us comfort. It is no wonder then, that Jesus attracted many people.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him. Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. (NIV)

They came flocking out to him because Jesus was seen as a good friend who accepted and supported people whatever their situations happened to be and made their lives better for knowing him... may people think the same of us... If you are comfortable to stand, let's stand and stretch before the sermon and sing

Music # 273 **Jesus Hands Were Kind Hands**

Sermon **"Recognize Our Place"**

Adele Gaboury disappeared. Concerned neighbors informed the police. A distant brother said he thought she had gone to a nursing home. Satisfied with that information, Gaboury's neighbors began watching the property.

Then neighbor Michael Crawley noticed the mail slot in the door was piling high with mail. He opened the outer door and 100s of pieces of mail drifted out. He notified the police, and they discontinued her mail.

Another neighbor, Elieen Douglass hired her grandson to mow the lawn. Later, the grandson's dad noticed that frozen water pipes had caused water to spill out the door. They called the utility company and got the water turned off.

But then when no one came to fix and clean up the damage, so the police were again called to inspect the home. They discovered that Adele Gaboury had not gone missing at all. She had passed away when they first noticed her absence 4 years prior. Thanks to her well-intentioned and helpful neighbors, the overall respectable appearance of her property outside hid the reality of what was going on inside.

The same can happen to people. Outwardly, they can appear respectable while spiritually dead within. All sorts of external activity can conceal their internal situation. We need an inner life, not just an outer facade.

People heard the stories of Jesus' healings and came from all over to see him. Jesus goes up on a slope ascending from the Sea of Galilee. He sits down and from that natural amphitheater, begins to teach. Rabbis informally taught all the time by conversation and example while they walked along; but official, authoritative teaching was given from the seated position. Jesus sat down, so this was an authoritative teaching. He delivers what we now call the sermon on the mount – the essence of Jesus' teachings throughout his ministry – delivered to his disciples – and overheard by the crowds.

He begins with what are called the beatitudes. Beatitudes are not commandments! The first one, "Blessed are the poor in spirit..." is not "Thou shalt be poor in spirit!" Nor are they considered the "work duties" of the faithful person. Nor are they "Nine steps to happiness". And they are not "Instructions to earn God's approval and rewards."

Beatitudes are not
- commandments
- A job description
- how to steps
- way to *earn* God's joy

On the Prairie Home Companion, Garrison Kellior talked of taking a trip to Hawaii. He ran into an unhappy, coveting preacher at the airport. He knew this because the preacher said (sardonically), "I guess we who pay our tithes cannot afford to go to places like Hawaii..." Kellior goes on to say, When you went to the ticket counter, did you fill out your approval application -- you know, the one that asks how many sacrificial deeds you did this year to deserve a trip to paradise? That's not what it is about. We aren't *earning* our way anywhere.

Beatitudes are not a prescription to earn what you want from God, they are descriptive of natural, ever-growing, inner qualities

In short, the beatitudes are not a **prescriptive** list of what you must do to earn what you want from God. Instead, Christ's beatitudes are **de**-scriptive of the ever-

growing inner attitudes and qualities (and their resulting actions and benefits) that happens naturally within those who agree to be children of God (meaning, people who enter a relationship with him and strive to take on his nature) and they do that by receiving, trusting, and following Christ as the Spirit leads them. Jesus says these people are blessed.

“Blessed” means happy, blessed means congratulations to, blessed means lucky are, blessed means well off, wholeness, privileged (not in the sense of better than others, but in the sense of humbly honored with the opportunity to participate in) Blessed are you...

Blessed

We don't always feel that way. The beatitudes certainly aren't meant to imply that once we've agreed to become a child of God that *everything* that comes our way will be joy inducing. If you read down the first phrase of many of beatitudes, poor in spirit, mourners, meek, hunger and thirst, persecuted --- it becomes obvious that the garden of life has thorns as well as roses. The trick is to not be overcome by the prickly parts – maybe even become stronger by them, so that we can experience the wonderful aroma and beauty of life.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - poor in spirit - mourners - meek - hunger and thirst - persecuted
--

I know some of you hate sports, but here goes: On a balmy Oct. afternoon in 1982 the MSU Spartans went to Badger stadium. Over 60,000 Wisconsin supporters were there, but it was quickly obvious that that year, that day at least, MSU had the better team. Even as the score became more and more lopsided, there were still oddly placed bursts of cheer that didn't seem to have anything to do with what was going on down on the field. The reason was that many fans had brought portable radios and were listening to the Brewers beating the Cardinals in game 3 of the World Series. Despite what the Badgers were failing to do right in front of them, they responded to what the Brewers were doing 70 miles away. They were responding to something beyond their immediate circumstances.

We too, are encouraged to fix our focus beyond the immediate circumstances that surround us and is in front of us, onto what is not seen, and on what is not yet -- but can yet become. (See Colossians 3:1-3, Hebrews 11:1 ff). As we do, we may begin to experience "blessed-ness", even in hardships, because we can see a bigger picture, Christ's ultimate and larger victory. It is what allowed disciples to sing and praise while they were jailed and stoned. Finding that joy does not come easily for most of us. What Jesus promises are not mental gymnastics, nor goose-bump-giving gimmicks to pump ourselves up. The Beatitudes describe God's

radical (and most often, long term) transformation of our heart.

Some scholars see this as the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament rite of Blessings and Cursings. The Luke version of this sermon (Luke 6:20 ff). reinforces this idea (because it also includes a list or “woes” (of warnings). Those rites attempt to drive home what we agreed to when we took God as our God -- and therefore take on his characteristics, to feel and act as God would act; and if we do, if we take on his characteristics -- in general and ultimately, it will go well with us – but if we defy the Source of all life and go our own way, then in general and ultimately, it will not go well with us, so it is best that we choose to become one of God’s children and allow him to work his characteristics into us.

Jesus uses the first beatitude to describe that choice when Jesus began to teach them Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven Say it with me, **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

The poor in spirit

To put it simply, we will become blessed if we recognize that we need God in our life. God is not trying to make us weak and dependent, or leaning on him as a crutch, as some people derisively put it.

Bill Hybels explains it this way: When he was first learning to sail his dad's sailboat on Lake MI, his father would tell him, 'Go ahead and take the boat out, but take a friend with you.' A 42-foot sailboat on Lake Michigan is a big responsibility. But he'd find a junior high friend to go with him, and they'd sail past the breakwater, hoist the sails, and head out to open water. But as soon as he saw any cloud formations coming, or the wind seemed to be picking up, he'd turn back towards shore, take the sails down, and regain his normal breathing pattern only when they were safely tied up in the harbor. It was fun having a friend along, but in a storm he knew they'd be little help. Other times, however, his dad and he would go out together. When sailing with him, he'd actually hope for cloud formations and heavy air. He loved the feel of the strong winds and huge waves! His dad had sailed across the Atlantic Ocean, had endured five days of sailing through a hurricane. He was a veteran sailor, and Hybels was confident that his father would be able to handle anything Lake Michigan could throw at them. Everything changed when his dad was on board. The point is clear. When God is in our life, everything is different because he can handle everything the world can throw at us.

We need his expertise

With God as an experienced parent and Creator, he is no mere crutch helping us limp through life. It just makes sense to accept God's gracious offer to work in us according to his expertise -- guiding our life and transforming our heart.

As Max Lucado describes “poor in spirit” this way: "You don't impress the officials at NASA with a paper airplane. You don't boast about your crayon sketches in the presence of Picasso. You don't claim equality with Einstein because you can write H₂O. And you don't boast about your [self-sufficient] goodness in the presence of the Perfect.”

Yet some do. (See Matthew 7:21-23) and when they did, Jesus made it clear that God does not save us because of what we've done. God cannot be bought by money or motions. God does for His children what He does for them because He is a great loving God who does for them what they cannot do for themselves. We can't hang on to him, but he can hang on to us! To be inwardly alive requires God, the Source of all life, dwelling within, and the sooner we recognize that, the sooner we will be blessed and moving toward inner wholeness, regardless of what is going on outside around us.

The reward for knowing our need for God in our heart and asking for him to come in and lead us is to receive the **Kingdom of heaven** kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven, taken physically and literally or spiritually and metaphorically, simply means “where God rules”. As we follow him with our hearts, his rule is there; and hopefully it will not remain only deeply buried in our hearts but like our Call to Worship told us, it will work its way out into our attitudes and words and actions so that all will recognize his rule in our life and they too will reverence God.

A missionary to Laos, John Hess-Yoder says that before national boundaries were imposed, the kings of Laos and Vietnam reached an agreement on taxation in the border areas. Those who ate short-grain rice built their houses on stilts and decorated them with Indian style serpents were considered Laotians. On the other hand, those who ate long-grain rice, built their houses on the ground, and decorated them with Chinese style dragons were considered Vietnamese. The exact geographic location of the home was not what determined their nation. Instead each person belonged to the kingdom whose cultural values they exhibited." We are not Christian because of where we live or coming here, or wherever we go. We are Christians because wherever we find ourselves, we demonstrate and live His cultural values.

The first beatitude brings us potential for happiness as we realize our need for God and are willing to receive the benefits of his powerful expertise to rule our life. Both sides of the beatitude are needed. If we only see the first part, our poverty in spirit – without seeing God’s rule of loving grace -- the result is hopeless futility. If we see ourselves as a part of God’s rule (the kingdom of heaven) without humbly recognizing our need for God, we have godless arrogance and judgmentalism. But get them together in the same heart - poor in spirit and the kingdom of heaven (humble acceptance of Jesus Christ ruling within us) then all kinds of potential happiness will begin to burst forth.

Consider your spiritual status, your privilege, your blessing of being a child of God - Yours is the kingdom of heaven! Open yourselves up to hear God's *gracious* approval in your heart as you rely on Him.

Prayer Lord, we confess that we have looked for our ultimate hope in the confident and strong, who rely on things that are false, that are not you. Sometimes without even realizing it, we have sunk into a pit of muddy ooze. But now we cry out, “Do not withhold your mercy from us.” We patiently wait for you... You lift us up and set us on firm ground. Your grace and truth preserve us. Nothing compares to your wonders and your thoughts toward us. You put a song of praise back into our lives. We hold your desires at the heart of our being. Doing your will is our joy. Many will see and put their trust in you and be blessed because you will pour your victorious love into our hearts, burning up the dross, the wrong within us, making it flow out of us like lava out of volcano, leaving every part of us free and open to be filled by you that we may be fully focused on you as you cleanse every part of us. We ask this and we pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and our Lord, Amen.

Music **Jesus, Thine All Victorious Love**

Blessing Everything good comes from God’s hand. He fills your minds and hearts with his love. Love him above all things. Desire to please him. Receive the joyful blessing he has prepared for you. Amen.