

Straight from the "Hart"

Worship Service from January 23, 2022



Opening Prayer

Lord, Your Word is filled with many examples of sharing love; sharing time, sharing abilities, sharing resources, sharing faith. Grace us, that we are not overwhelmed by needs, but transformed by sharing ourselves by proclaiming the glory of your marvelous works in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Apostle's Creed

Call to Worship (Lay Reader)

All who are thirsty, come...listen to his word through readings, prayers and song; that as we worship together, our thoughts may become focused, and our hearts warmed, that we may be filled with the grace to willingly and wholly answer his call, so that we may better live out our salvation with renewed energy.

We are here because God hears us, and calls us, and we want to answer God's call on our life. Let's sing.

Music (vv 1,3) Here I Am, Lord

A part of that call on our life is to continue receiving and sharing the message of life in Christ -- let's continue singing...

Music Wonderful Words of Life

Theme

Good words can give us life - IF --- we follow them. Expanding and rewriting a story from Pedro Sacristán...

Once upon a time there was a jar of fresh, clean water... Every drop of the water in that jar was very happy because they were clear and pure and beautiful. One day one of the droplets got bored with his ultra-clean existence and wanted to see what it was like to be a dirty drop. When he declared his intentions, the others used many words trying to warn him out of it, but the lure of not being transparent was too strong and he left the jar... He joined a mudpuddle for a while, but he discovered no happiness there. Little kids would come along. They were intrigued by the brown water and wondered how deep it might be, and they stomped on him.

The droplet wished he had listened to those who had warned him about the consequences of impurity. But it was too late.

One day a child came along and a particularly vicious stomp. The droplet went flying so far that he could barely make it back to the puddle, only to discover the other dirty droplets were still laughing at the hilarious sight of his sudden painful flight away and slowly slinking back. They had no compassion at all for his humiliation and pain. He had had enough, and he returned to the jar. The only problem was much as the drops of the jar forgave and welcomed him back, his dirtiness rubbed off and the jar was no longer fresh and clean, and the whole jar became sad. One day a kind adult noticed and washed the jar inside and out, running enough fresh, clean water through the droplets until they all became clean and happy again. (I wonder who that might be).

David, the Psalmist and king, recognized how important his influence was on others and he took it very seriously. Like the pure water, he wanted his words and thoughts and actions to be clean and pleasing to the Lord. He looked to nature, but especially to his Scripture as an invaluable reference to keep him on course.

Responsive Reading (L – Lay Reader, **C – Congregation**)

L: The heavens declare God's splendor to the ends of the world.

C: The skies speak as a marvelous display of his craftsmanship.

L: God's Word is perfect in every way. It restores the inner person and refreshes the soul. It challenges us to keep close to God's heart.

C: His instructions lead us to truth and make us wise.

L: His teachings are radiant, enlightening spirits, and giving joy to hearts.

C: Revering the Lord is pure, trustworthy, and firm, enduring forever.

L: His Word is more desirable than gold, sweeter than honey dripping straight from the honeycomb. By them we are warned from errant ways.

C: There is great reward in following them.

The hymnwriter also saw great reward in trusting in and following God's instructions. Let's sing....

Music (vv 1,3,4) Trust and Obey

We trust and obey because when we do, we not only find joy, but we also find confidence in how we should live, and that if we happen get off target, we know

that Jesus and Scripture will light the way back into his presence and guidance...
let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing...

Prayer Music Thy Word

Pastor's Prayer

Our Heavenly Father, it is in you that we find our joy. We thank you that you have revealed yourself through your law and the prophets, but now especially through Jesus Christ and your Spirit. You shape us, freeing us to live in mercy, and in justice, and in right relationships. You surround us with a glorious and powerful nature that speaks to us night and day, and we continue to receive your joyful promises as you pour out your Spirit on us, that we may we may live with others in the good news of your grace; and with all who seek you. **Praises and Petitions**
For you welcome all in love, so we continue to pray for the good of your church, for the good of our community, and for the good of our nation, and for the concerns of those in need. We've pray for * Jan Martin's brother's friend Roy who has covid and is on a ventilator. * Pat Schleh asks that we pray for the friends and family of Michelle Matthee, who has cancer and MS, * and Pat Coleman requests for the healing for her brother-in-law Don Foreman. We've also recently named * Reba Alred, whose grown children Sabrina and Michael have covid, * for the family and friends of Jack Kelly (esp wife Nancy) as he passed away recently * and for Jan Jepson who is on a ventilator and not expected to survive, * and we also ask for Jackson Pratt who is only 28 and awaiting critical surgery on his brain, and does not have a positive outlook. And there are others who are experiencing the effects of covid, either having the sickness themselves, or mourning those lost, or who are seriously ill, and we continue to lift up this plight on the nation and world. There are other things we have not mentioned but are on our hearts, and we simply pray that you would continue to work and bring about answers according to your will and your timing and your way -- so that we may experience the power of your love and the greatness of your name. We ask all of this in the name of the one who taught us to pray **Lord's Prayer**

Bible Reading Introduction

Luke has written that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. It was customary that at a certain point in a synagogue service, a visiting rabbi was given opportunity to officiate. The rabbi would stand, receive, and read the Scriptures – first in the original Hebrew, and then he would translate it into the current common language of Aramaic. Then the guest would sit and plainly instruct

the people on his understanding of the reading. Listen as Luke describes Jesus' return to his hometown where everyone is anxious to see and hear their homegrown star.

Bible Reading

[Then Jesus, armed with the Holy Spirit's power, returned to Galilee, and reports about him spread throughout the [region]. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone respected him. Now when he went to [Nazareth], where he had been brought up, on [the Sabbath] he went to the synagogue as usual. He stood up to read, and he was given the scroll of the prophet [Isaiah]. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of [the Lord] is upon me; therefore he has anointed me to announce Good News to the poor; he has sent me to proclaim freedom for the imprisoned and renewed sight for the blind, to release those who have been crushed, to proclaim [the message of Jubilee, for the time of God's great acceptance has begun.]" After closing the scroll and returning it to the [attendant], he sat down; and the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him. He started to speak to them: "Today, as you heard it read, this passage of the [Scriptures] was fulfilled!" [Everyone was impressed by how well Jesus spoke], marveling that such [beautiful words of grace] were coming from his mouth. [But they also said among themselves, "Who does he think he is? Isn't] this [Joseph's] son?"

(Luke 4:14-22 (CJB with [TPT]))



Jesus' claims about himself and his mission began to raise questions in the minds of his fellow townspeople, and eventually many more, but we have the benefit of hindsight and have learned that we can trust his words as much as David trusted his Scripture. Let's sing

Music (vv 1,3,4) 'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus

Sermon Called to the Word and Mission

Two weeks ago, we heard God promise that the Persian Empire would liberate his people from the Empire of Babylon allowing them to return home to Jerusalem. Last week we heard about panicked reaction when Persian control had a brief bumpy blip of chaotic violence in Palestine. This week, more details emerge about that time period.

Ezra was a well-studied, practicing, and teaching Jewish priest whose lineage traced back to Aaron, the original chief priest. He was among those in Babylonian exile when the Persian king freed them. That liberating king gave to Ezra a written decree declaring the Jews were free to worship their God, teach his wisdom and enforce his laws, and to provide resources to support the people and their house of God. That's pretty good isn't it? The refugees are coming home and the emperor grants all this and all around people around are expected, by written decree, to support their efforts. Of course, law is one thing and actuality is another.

The returned community prepares, now, to observe a sacred festival during which Ezra would formally present God's Law and its application. They built a tower --

we'd probably call it a high platform because it was wide, not just tall -- but it stood there, outside of the ruins of the eastern city wall. This choice of location did two things: For one, it provided a powerful visual backdrop, so as you looked at the platform you would see in the



background -- the rubble of the city's wall, reminding the people of city's predicament and the intense work that lay ahead.

Secondly, by being holding the festival away from God's house, it was a reminder that God's teachings were not for just what happens at "church"; but is something that is to be lived out everywhere that they went. His words and rituals were to be learned from childhood (in the homes, actually, was the emphasis) and their meanings lived out throughout the land.

Word is Important

When the time of the festival arrived, everyone who was old enough to understand gathered on the slope of the Kidron Valley facing the platform in front of that wall of rubble.

Ezra got on the platform centered between 14 others, 7 either way -- we won't go through their names. We

Word is for all people

assume they are community leaders. It does not say exactly what their role was in the community or on the platform. They may have assisted in the readings, they certainly added clout to Ezra's agenda, but mostly, it made it clear that the Torah,

God's teachings; were not for just a few privileged by birth or special ability to interpret, but it was for all the people.

Ezra unrolled the scroll. The people stood as a sign of respect. In those days, they believed there was an important interplay between body posture and spiritual attitude. We tend to downplay that connection, saying, "it is what is in the heart that matters." And there is some truth to that, but then -- attend a basketball game and find out what happens when it is a close game, and it is coming down to those last couple of minutes. Watch peoples' body posture and see if it doesn't react to what is happening in front of them. Yes? The ones who came to the game because they are interested in it will, at the very least, be on the edge of their seats, leaning forward, focused on the court. In the crucial seconds, they may stand up and cheer and clap. Sometimes an organ or other instrument might try to help them -- but they probably won't need that. They certainly don't need it announced, "Everybody, stand up and cheer now!" They don't need that clue; it is just automatic. Their body posture reacts to what is going on in front of them, and within them. Sometimes body posture is important. And for those who don't feel it -- for peer pressure or the ability to see anything, these people stand up with all the others.

Word is respected

The people rose to their feet. Ezra offers a brief blessing of praise. All the people raise their hands -- symbolic of their need and dependence on God. They say "Amen", and they say it twice for emphasis. It means they concur with Ezra's blessing and expect that their need would be met through the reading that they are about to hear. And then they lay face down, demonstrating an attitude of humble adoration and worship for God and his Word. You can't have a whole lot of pride when you lay flat on your face. They humbled themselves.

And unlike us who can barely tolerate 5 minutes of listening to a public reading -- 2 is what we usually go for -- they spent the next 5 to 7 hours like this: (It doesn't say whether they stood back up again at this point, most people assume that they did stand up again for the reading). Therefore, we'll say they stood, and they heard the Word read, and then translated, and then explained. Then the Levites (the priests) roamed among the people on the hills while the people stayed there, ensuring everyone was able to understand what was being read and explained to them, making it relevant for their lives right then among the ruins of Jerusalem, and as the word sunk into their hearts, they wept. Some experts think that this was just the natural emotional energy connected with the festival, like the cheering at a basketball game. But even if it was, the author included it because the returning refugees *felt* something much more than "Crying is what we are

Word is listened, relevant, grasped, and felt...

supposed to do". They cried because they realized they needed to mourn for their sins, the sins of those who went before, and the sins of the nation. They wept and grieved as they heard God's Word, because they had not lived up to their expectations in the covenant and that is why God's promises were not yet realized. They wept because they saw the broken city walls and saw it not only as a tangible consequence for their actions but as a symbol of their broken covenant with God, and like the covenant, and the walls, and many of their homes which would still war-torn, and at least in a state of dis-repair, it now also broke their hearts.

As the festival neared its end for the day, Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites did not want them to go to their homes with broken spirits. It was from Governor Nehemiah that they heard the words, but all of them were saying to the people: This is a holy festival to the Lord and to not weep but to have joy for this was a month filled with festivals, it was the Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah, or Jewish Year) the Covenant Renewal Ceremony, which would lead to the Day of Atonement (when they recognized their sins forgiven), and the festival of Tabernacles (when God saved them into the wilderness from Egyptian slavery). All these festivals speak to God's saving work through which he repeatedly reveals himself in a gracious covenant word which repeatedly offers us opportunities to begin again... to start over fresh! because we are a part of that covenant family.

While the Word (and festivals) may challenge our lives and consciences, they are first and foremost a declaration of God's grace, inspiring us to step up to the challenge of moving deeper into his Word and higher into his joy.

The people are dismissed to share in a special meal to end the day, splurging for the best food and sweetest drink, and ensuring sharing so that those who weren't prepared (for whatever reason – because they couldn't, because they didn't bother, or they didn't know) people shared with them so that they could also participate.

The next day, the priests, Levites and heads of family gathered again to study the Word of God, **Word is studied and applied** ensuring each family had an awakened ability to fulfill the covenant. And so this is the pattern: (a) The Law is read, (b) the Law is explained so all understand it in a way that is currently relevant (c) the people respond willingly to its demands, (d) and this obedience will end in joy! This is how the Word of God is applied to our lives. [Pause]

So now we have our Bible reading. Jesus returns home. On the Sabbath he goes to the synagogue. At the appropriate time, he stands, he reads, he translates, and

explains a passage from Isaiah in way that is currently relevant for all of them -- do you see how he is following the same pattern? Customs didn't change much. We get only one sentence of Jesus' teaching here. It is like Luke authored one of the first sound bites. But that sentence means that the day of the Messiah had arrived, that Jesus came, sent by God, not to simply to preach solutions, but to be the solution -- the person through whom God's redeeming work would ultimately be accomplished. He was the one who would fulfill the mission of helping and healing those in need and that God is announcing, not as in Isaiah's day -- a geographical and political salvation, but his gracious spiritual salvation from sin, the ultimate source that leads to all of those other problems, political, geographical, and all the rest.

Now the proper pattern is that the people respond willingly to the demands of the teaching, and this in turn will end in joy. Therefore, if we are Christ followers, then it seems that our calling and application should be along the lines of continuing Jesus' work of graciously and lovingly helping set people free from the damage and power and effects that sin has had in this world. It makes sense.

But in the Bible story, the pattern is broken. While they were duly impressed by Jesus' gracious words, they also dismissed his words simply because they knew him as the good boy who grew up among them as a builder's son. They did not take Jesus' words or his interpretation seriously. Even a secular show ended one episode with a quote that says, "True redemption doesn't come with a change of body, but with a change of heart" (paraphrased from Outer Limits: 1:12, *The Conversion*). These people did not weep with grief or with joy, more importantly, their hearts were not moved. In fact, when Matthew and Mark tell this story, they add that Jesus could perform only a few miracles there because they were familiar with him and didn't believe who he really was. Sometimes Chaucer's saying is true -- "familiarity breeds contempt". And in this impressed but unchanged group we get the first hints of people turning a different direction from that early summation of Jesus growing up -- in favor with... man. They turned away from that favor -- it begins with doubts here, but eventually grew and became resistance to God's covenant salvation which will ultimately lead to a loss of true joy.

Today's application, then -- for those who for a long time have lived with and false or true impression of what the faithful are like, or for those of us who have grown up, or at least been around faith circles, around the Bible, around God's covenant family -- for a long time: What has that familiarity done for us? Has our familiarity

dulled our senses to the Word's convictions, corrections, and challenges? Have we lost a sense of the wonder of its grace? OR, like David in the responsive reading, and those refugees in the days of Isaiah and Ezra and Nehemiah: Are we still stepping up to the challenge of moving deeper into applying God's Word to our lives and reaching higher into his joy as we live out his call on our lives?

Prayer

Lord, it is only by your grace that we experience the joy of your omnipotent -- (your all powerful) strength that protects us from the penalty and power of sin. And that is something we all need and can depend on. We thank you for choosing to reveal yourself through Moses, through the prophets, and the priests, and through kings and governors; and especially through Jesus, who promised that if we apply your instructions to life, and his instructions to life, we will remain in your love, we will love each other, and our joy will be complete -- because your word restores our soul and brings wisdom to how we live life, warning us away from destructive and self-destructive attitudes and actions and toward the great reward of constructive and purposeful living.

Like the people of Nehemiah's day, sometimes the task seems overwhelming as we look at the brokenness all around us. But grace us to faithfully build our lives on the solid foundation you have laid out for us in your Word. You will give us help and we will not be overwhelmed nor destroyed -- for as we lean on you, as we rely on you, we know that our joy and our peace will come as we follow your ways and your enduring strength will hold us through every challenge of life. Amen. Amen.

Music (vv 1,2,5) *How Firm a Foundation*

Blessing

Now as you go, be strengthened, comforted, and inspired to live lives worthy of God, who calls you [to his Word and to his Mission] and who covenants with you to participate in his kingdom and family. Amen.