

# *Straight from the "Hart"*

July 17, 2022



**A Modern Affirmation** (P – Pastor, LC – Lay reader with congregation)

P: Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is one true universal church, whose holy faith we now declare: Do you believe in God the Father?

**LC: We believe in God the Father, infinite in wisdom, power, and love, whose mercy is over all his works, and whose will is ever directed to his children's good.**

P: Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

**LC: We believe in Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of man, the gift of the Father's unfailing grace, the ground of our hope, and the promise of our deliverance from sin and death.**

PC: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

**LC: We believe in the Holy Spirit as the divine presence in our lives, whereby we are kept in perpetual remembrance of the truth of Christ, and find strength and help in time of need.**

P: [Do you believe in the God's faithful people?]

**LC: We believe that this faith should manifest itself in the service of love as set forth in the example of our blessed Lord, to the end that the kingdom of God may come upon the earth. Amen.**

(From the UM Hymnal # 885, edited and adapted to be responsive)

**Opening Prayer** Father of all blessings, your risen Son renews our hope. We respond to your divine love and unfailing promises -- in hope that others will be enabled to encounter you as we have experienced you. We have come because we know it is in you that we find our life. Teach us how to live lives that please you, just as your life brings joy to us. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

## **Call to Worship**

Lay Reader: We gather to worship today not only as God's created beings but as his covenant people. We look at the heavens, the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars



that he has established, and we come with grateful hearts, privileged to be a part of a universe that reflects his magnificent glory.

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in UM Worship and Song, Leader's Edition

**Music** Let's consider all his creation and what it says about the One who created it by singing.... "How Great Thou Art"

### **How Great Thou Art**

O Lord my God! when I in awesome wonder  
consider all the worlds thy hands have made,  
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,  
thy power throughout the universe displayed.

#### **Refrain**

Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee;  
how great thou art, how great thou art!  
Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee;  
how great thou art, how great thou art!

When through the woods and forest glades I wander,  
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;  
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur  
and hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze;

#### **Refrain**

And when I think that God, his Son not sparing,  
sent him to die, I scarce can take it in;  
that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,  
he bled and died to take away my sin;

#### **Refrain**

When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation  
and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart.  
Then I shall bow in humble adoration,  
and there proclaim, my God, how great thou art!

#### **Refrain**

CCLI # 2561297

Words and Music: Stuart K. Hine,  
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**Theme** Today's theme begins with a story about people's whose souls sang because of the way God works and answers prayer – often through his faithful

people. The story is based on a true historical story, but some details vary, and some tradition and legend may be mixed in, and it is really difficult to sort it back out according to what is verifiable and what was added. But this is the story:

Long ago there was a very wealthy couple who longed for a child. They prayed for many years, and when at last he was born, they were the happiest people in the world. They named him Nicholas. He was kind, gentle, and never any trouble. (We all had a kid like that, right?) But while still very young, an epidemic swept through the land and both parents died. He went to live with an uncle. Among what he inherited were 3 bars, or many versions say bags, of gold.

In that same town lived a nobleman with three daughters. He had fallen on hard times and lost everything. Because the nature of his life had not been hard labor, even though he was willing, people would not take a chance on him. The day came when there was not enough to eat. That evening, the daughters said, "Let us go out into the streets and beg (and most versions say something worse than that) so that at least we won't starve."

Father replied, "I can't bear to think of it. Not tonight. Let's wait another day and see if something can happen to save us from such disgrace."

Their window was open as this conversation was going on. You know how voices carry in the night air. As it just so happened that Nicholas was walking by on a stroll and heard the whole conversation. He was dismayed that any family would be so poor as not to be able to eat. He also knew they would be too proud; he would not be able to just give them something directly, they wouldn't accept it. He went home and prayed God would show him a way that he could help. As he prayed for guidance in his evening prayers that night, God reminded him of the three gold bars/bags of gold. He jumped up from his prayers to retrieve one of them and headed back to the house. As he had hoped, the window was still open. It was a high window, but on his tippy toes he could just barely reach high enough to slip to gold into the house -- then he left quickly lest someone see him.

Inside the house, the man sat, worried sick and out of hope, yet in deep in prayer -- praying earnestly that heaven would send help. He decided that tomorrow he

would knock on every door in the city until he found work and hoped against hope that God would help them through these hard times. It was at this point that he



heard something fall at his feet. He looked down to see the gold laying there on the floor. He showed it to his oldest daughter and said, "God has heard our prayers and sent this from heaven!" They turned it into the bank and not only had plenty to live on for quite a while, they also had enough for a large dowry -- [different times, you need to understand] -- and soon his eldest daughter was happily married.

When Nicholas saw how much joy he brought to the family, he did it again. This time the man was sleeping happily and so did not find the gold until morning. Soon after, the second daughter was married. The father also grew suspicious that human hands were involved in this miracle. He started keeping watch for the drop of gold for his third daughter. And sure enough, it wasn't that long before the gold dropped, and he rushed outside and caught Nicholas by the cloak. Then he fell before Nicholas and began to kiss his hands, but Nicholas helped him to his feet and told him instead to thank God, and to tell no one the story.

And tradition has it that Saint Nicholas -- not just for this family -- but to many, and especially for children -- was a frequent and generous and stealthy (although I wouldn't say he was very good at it because we have all heard about it still thousands of years later) -- stealthy giver of gifts through open windows under the cloak of night.

It was faithful obedience that put Nicholas within earshot to hear the conversations and prayers of this family and listening in prayer that showed him what to do about it. God just has a way of weaving things together in "coincidences" bringing lives together to fulfill what he wants for his people..

There is a poem based on popular Greek mythology that compares life's destiny to the "threads of time" Picking up that theme, this unknown author talks about the wondrous tapestry of our lives...

### **The Loom of Time**

[For those who are like me and don't know much about looms — they weave together threads cross ways, and a part called a shuttle is what carries the cross wise threads across the length wise threads... ]

Man's life is laid in the loom of time to a pattern he does not see,  
while the weavers work and the shuttles fly till the dawn of eternity.

Some shuttles are filled with silver threads and some with threads of gold,  
while often the darker hues are all that they may hold.

But the weaver watches with skillful eye each shuttle fly to and fro,  
and sees the pattern so deftly wrought as the loom moves sure and slow.

God truly planned the pattern: each thread, the dark and fair,  
is chosen by his master skill and placed in the web with care.

He only knows its beauty, and guides the shuttles which hold  
the thread so unattractive, as well as the threats of gold.

Not till each loom is silent, and the shuttles cease to fly,  
shall God reveal the pattern and explain the reason why.

The dark threads were as needful in the weaver's skillful hand  
as the threats of gold and silver for the pattern which he planned.

It is kind of like cross stitch. You look at the backside, and it can be just a gobble-de-gook of messes – strings going everywhere – but it takes all of that mess to turn it over and see that beautiful blessing that the back, that each mess created in our lives. We may not understand or “see” everything — but God sees it and we can trust him... as Emily Dickinson said in her quick poem, and again I have to explain a few words for some of us who may not be familiar – just in case -- a moor is an uncultivated land, usually on higher elevations (mountainsides and hills), and a heather is the greenery and flowers that so prevalently grow on moors.... so now the poem...

I never saw a moor, I never saw the sea;  
Yet I know how the heather looks, and what a wave must be.

I never spoke with God, nor visited in heaven;  
yet certain am I of the spot as if the chart were given.

William J. Bennett, edited with commentary, *The Book of Virtues*,  
\* “I Never Saw a Moor” by Emily Dickinson; \* “The Loom of Time”,  
\* and brief sum of “St. Nicholas and the Golden Bars”  
(along with input from other sources).

Biblical faith is as certain as a solid stool holds me up. It isn't wishful thinking “I hope the stool will hold me” no, you just know it will. Now some stools are not solid. But biblical faith and who we are trusting in is solid. We can lean on him and trust on him, “sit on him” when we need to.

It was Abraham who by faith, moved fearlessly into what some of us might call a terrifying situation — trusting what he didn't know and couldn't see — and in faith and trust — that God would answer prayer, and fulfill his promises, and weave his life together into a beautiful tapestry that he could not yet see. And hopefully, by God's grace, we can muster the same kind of faith for our lives...

**Responsive Reading** (LR – Lay Reader, **P/C: Pastor with Congregation**)

LR: It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God promised to give him.

**P/C: He went without knowing where he was going.**

LR: And even when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith as well —

**P/C: for he was like a stranger in a foreign country, living in tents like a mere visitor ...**

LR: If they had wanted to, they could have gone back to “the good things of this world.”

**P/C: But they were looking and living for a better place, a heavenly homeland designed and built by God.**

LR: That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God and has prepared a heavenly city for them. It was because of his faith in God’s promises that God counted Abraham as righteous and fit for heaven.

**P/C: The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God.**

LR: Through the redemption of Christ Jesus, we are all children of God through faith in Christ. He has blessed us with the same blessing he promised to Abraham. God gives you the Holy Spirit and works miracles among you because you believe in the message you heard about Christ, and you fully trust him.

**P/C: We receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith, so that “all nations will be blessed through us.”**

Inspired by Hebrews 11:8-10,15-16,  
Galatians 3:7,14a,5,14b,8 (NLT, TLB, NIV)

**Music** And all nations will have the same opportunity as Abraham, to look forward to that heavenly city built on eternal foundations. God has not only laid a foundation in creation that reveals his character, but he has also laid a foundation for our faith that we can build on. Let’s sing

***How Firm a Foundation***

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
is laid for your faith in his excellent word!  
What more can he say than to you he hath said,  
to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

"Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,  
for I am thy God and will still give thee aid;  
I'll strengthen and help thee, and cause thee to stand  
upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand."

"The soul that on Jesus still leans for repose,  
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;  
that soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,  
I'll never, no never, no never forsake!"

**Music** Let's begin to prepare our hearts for prayer by giving him thanks for all these things he has done for us.

### To God Be the Glory

To God be the glory, great things he hath done!  
So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,  
who yielded his life an atonement for sin,  
and opened the lifegate that all may go in.

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the earth hear his voice!  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the people rejoice!  
O come to the Father thru Jesus the Son,  
and give him the glory, great things he hath done!

**Special Instrumental Music** It is because of the things he has done that we don't have to fear tomorrow — we can know that God is working and he will never forsake us. We can always come to him. Let's prepare our hearts for prayer by listening to a song by Michael Stevens called *Never Be Afraid*. Close your eyes and feel the calm peace as they play... *Never Be Afraid*



**Prayer** Life-giving God, we thank you for all the wonderful deeds you have done generation after generation, inspiring music about your great works. You invite us to reflect on what you have done and increase our faith in you. May we always live aware of and welcoming your presence -- in us and among us.

You don't ask for mere worship rituals, but to express and experience them in a way that transforms our lives and builds our trust and faith in your power and mercy that we may better serve you. You hear our prayers, and so we offer to you the requests of our hearts on behalf of ourselves and our neighbors, and friends and people across the world -- that we all may discover your peace, comfort, and

courage. **Praises and Petitions** Today we ask for the small and large farmers in the country and world, \* the daughter of Jan Martin's friend Reba, Sabrina Alred who had a second breast surgery this week, \* and for Jan Martin's friend Darlene, who fell and broke her wrist and will be in a cast for several weeks, \* we pray for Mike Sharlow's nephew Angelo, who suffered a major head trauma and remains in a coma now for a couple weeks, \* we pray for Jerry Weaver's niece Lauren Weaver, who has breast cancer, and for her healing, continued prayers for Janice Larsen, recovering from her lung removal that went well \* and for Rick Talbot with an aortic aneurysm; \* We also pray for Joan who is recovering from covid and Chris who is caring for her. \* Jewell with health concerns, \* Marty Hansen is doing better but has a way to go, \* and for Don Hansen – who had reverse shoulder replacement this week, \* and for those we have only named in our hearts and minds, for our church, our nation, and for our world. There is so much going on in our personal lives and in the lives of people all around us. Now sustain us with grateful hearts, renewing us so that we can soar like eagles, enabling us to live as you taught us to pray. **LORD'S PRAYER**

**Introduction to Bible Reading** The prophet reminds us that covenant living with God includes a lifestyle of faith that is demonstrated in compassionate justice and goodness. Its absence, in God's eyes, will render invalid, useless, and distasteful -- even our most meaningful worship. But even so, God continues to arbitrate -- to plead -- with his people to live faithfully so that he may forgive and cleanse and bless them again.



**Bible Reading** When you come to worship me, who asked you to parade through my courts with all your ceremony? Stop bringing me your meaningless gifts... they are all sinful and false. I want no more of your pious meetings. When you lift up your hands in prayer, I will not look. Though you offer many prayers, I will not listen, for your hands are covered with the blood of innocent victims. Wash yourselves and be clean! Get your sins out of my sight. Give up your evil ways. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows. "Come now, let's settle this," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool. If you will only obey me..."

Isaiah 1:12-13a,c; 15-19a (NLT)



**Music** It is refreshing to remember that if we believe God, his grace will wash away any failure. Let's stand before the sermon and sing...

### **Grace Greater Than Our Sin**

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!  
Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured, there where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.

#### **Refrain**

Grace, grace, God's grace, grace that will pardon and cleanse within;  
grace, grace, God's grace, grace that is greater than all our sin!

Sin and despair, like the sea waves cold, threaten the soul with infinite loss;  
grace that is greater, yes, grace untold, points to the refuge, the mighty cross.

#### **Refrain**

Dark is the stain that we cannot hide. What can avail to wash it away?  
Look! There is flowing a crimson tide, brighter than snow you may be today.

#### **Refrain**

### **Sermon Covenant Reminders**

Isaiah says we tend to forget what we are doing. We just go through the habitual motions, and those motions are very meaningful for us, but we've lost the meaning behind them -- even when we worship. We need to be reminded that worship, no matter how well executed, is only valid when it is accompanied by a heart and life actively aware and devoted to living a positive, obedient response to God's will. When we turn to learn to live a good life, our failures will be wiped out like fresh snow blanketing the dirt. Up north, in the winter, when the snow wasn't there -- it was dark -- it seemed like all day long, and it was *never* sunny in the winter. But when the snow blanketed the earth and it reflected the sun that you could never see -- it just brightened up everything. You need to have that and it is refreshing to our lives as well. It is *then* that our prayers and ceremonies will mean something to God. But if we think rituals and prayers are an adequate *substitute* or can help tip the right-wrong balances for an errant way of living, Isaiah tells us that that isn't how it works. God isn't keeping score. He isn't looking to condemn us for isolated doubts or errors and those kinds of things. But he is lovingly watching our pattern of living and if it is less than our potential best, he is eager to encourage our transformation and growth -- so that we can be more of who he wants us to be and that we want us to be. Genesis beautifully illustrates the connection of worship and a heart striving to be devoted.

Abram didn't go to God and say, "I want to be a great nation -- so bless me." No, before 75-year-old Abram did anything, God told him to leave his

**God initiates the promise, the enabling, and the call**

homeland and go to a land he would show him, for he would make him a great nation through which all the nations would be blessed. God initiates the promise before we do anything. That tells us that we didn't earn it – it is graciously given to us. (By the way, "promise" comes from a Latin word that means "to send forth" -- so a promise is declaring, "You can count on it so much it is as if it were already done". And that is why sometimes the prophets were so sure of what God was going to do that sometimes they expressed God's future actions in the past tense, as if it were already done.

God promises what he wants to do for us -- (in Abram's case - to become a great nation), and then provision is given (Abram's wealth and an heir) in order for us to be able to do what God wants us to do (to live in such a way that all the earth is blessed).

Abram began with positive obedience. He left home and when they set up camp, he built an altar of worship, reminding him of God's call on his life. But as he enters Egypt, he forgets about God's protection and errantly decides that *deception* was the way to play it safe. He got into deep trouble and was lucky to only be exiled. (Genesis 12:1 ff). Then he became wealthy, and moved to Canaan, where God promised him the land as far as he could see, and descendants as plentiful as the dust of the earth. And as Abram moved from place to place, he continued to build altars of worship, reminding him of his covenant relationship with his God – the promises God made to him, and his obedience to do what God says. (See Genesis 13:14 ff)

As we come to Genesis 15, Abram has come to a place where he is kind of doubting things again, and he is getting pretty old, and he hasn't got an heir yet, so he begins to doubt where he is going to get all God's promises. So God begins the motion again, to remind him of what he has promised. God begins with assurance,

**God encourages growth and transformation**

***"Do not be afraid, Abram, for I will protect you, and your reward will be great."*** Genesis 15:1b(NLT)

This gives Abram the opportunity to express his doubts, "All these blessings of wealth to become a great nation, but no child to leave my legacy -- it will all go to

a servant". The Lord reassures him that it would not be a servant, that he would yet have a son who would fulfill his promise. Then he took him out to look at the starry night sky and reminded him how many descendants he would have. (See Genesis 15:2-5)

God confronts us with the incredible rather than the expected. Do we make current circumstances determinative of our life? Or dare we step out in trust? Abram believed this powerful starry visual (See Genesis 15:6a) and

**Circumstantial predictors  
or trust in God?**

***"The Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith."*** Genesis 15:6b (NLT)

**Are we continuing to pursue  
our relationship with God?**

Because he believed, because he trusted. Righteous is not so much a personal quality of how good we do good things as it is a relational reaching out, a following after, a chasing after a right relationship with God, a trusting in God -- loving him with all our heart and with all our being, giving the best we have to offer, lifting our lives to him, knowing that even when we fail, he continues to be in covenant with us. He keeps his promises to us, rescues us, adopts us as his children. And we respond in light of what God has done, and is doing, and will do for us.

Then, I'm guessing this was the next day, the Lord reminded him that he brought him out of his homeland to give him a new land. Apparently, Abram wasn't very convinced of this either because he said, "How can I know it is true?" (Genesis 15:7-8) (Sounds a lot like me 😊). The Lord uses another powerful visual to increase his faith. For us, it is quite graphic and messy and perhaps even offensive. Just remember they lived in a very different time and place and culture and a very different way. But we can still learn something from the underlying message.

God has Abram play out an ancient traditional method of covenant or contract making. Participating parties didn't just exchange handshakes and pens with their company names on them and go away happy. Nor were they satisfied with what was written down even in stone. No, a binding agreement had to be "cut in blood" to seal the sanctity of the promise and symbolize the life and death seriousness of the commitment. They would take animals (in this case, a heifer, goat, ram; and they would cut them in half and arrange the halves opposite of each other, so you kind of have this path with animals on both sides - then they also added a dove and pigeon. Abram protected the carcasses from the birds of prey.

Now what is *supposed* to happen is that the superior party of the contract would

proclaim the conditions of the agreement as the inferior party walked among the pieces of animals, in essence saying, “May I become like these animals if I don’t uphold my part of the covenant.” That is a pretty vivid reminder of your obligations, right? And scary, since it is this great bible hero who had some difficult doubting (and miss-acting) periods in his life. If *he* had those kinds of stumbles and struggles, then how could we even begin?

As the sun was setting; and the night deepened, Abram fell into a sleep, in which the Lord told him about the struggles his descendants would endure, but that in the end, he would restore them. (See Genesis 15:12-16) Then

***Abram saw a smoking firepot and a flaming torch pass between the halves of the carcasses. So the Lord made a covenant with Abram that day and said, “I have given... [ -- my promises] Genesis 15:17b-18a (NLT)***

So, the smoking firepot and flaming torch is a representation of God’s presence and he was the one who moved among the animal pieces. Now that is backwards of how it was supposed to be. It was the inferior party that was supposed to be walking among the pieces, but it was God who was walking among those pieces. Knowing that we cannot keep our side of the covenant, he takes our place and declares he will keep his promises to his people – (he will give them the promised land...)

This is the wonderful essence of God’s interaction with those who answer his call. The all-powerful, the one who is clothed in majesty, the one who reigns above all, who demands and accepts praise from all the nations, the one who is our shield, our strength, our provider, our deliverer, our shelter, our strong tower, our very present help in times of need -- the one who is rich in love and slow to anger -- he comes and does for us what we are not able to do for ourselves. What we cannot earn, what we cannot fulfill, God, in his grace, takes our place, first among the pieces -- and then upon the cross – to move among the broken pieces of our lives, Christ becoming as the carcasses to mend the covenant we have broken by our sins, bringing healing and hope and increasing our faith and equipping us to better fulfill our calling -- to be a people through whom others are blessed. He does it all!

Our part of the covenant? To believe in God and the promise that he makes and to do our best to cooperate with his direction for our life.

Abram was certainly not perfectly faithful or obedient. Even after this event, he cycled in and out of doubts, became impatient; took things into his own hands, and fell short of the covenant. I’m not criticizing -- we all do it – we all fall short. But by

God's grace, over the long haul of his life, God and Abram remained connected and true to each other... and he became the father of faith.

A brief comparison between the old covenant and the new covenant. In the Old Testament, God went to great lengths to fulfill his covenant promises -- to create a nation, a legacy of heirs, and the promised land -- Abram's role was to receive these blessings and act on his trust in God's covenant relationship by being a blessing to others. It was for the fulfillment of this covenant that God brought the people out of the slavery in Egypt...

In the New Testament, God went to great lengths to fulfill his new covenant promises -- to create a heavenly-valued kingdom on earth, adopting us as his children (a new legacy of heirs), and the promise of heaven someday. Our role was to receive these blessings and act on our trust in God's covenant relationship to by being a blessing to others. It was for the fulfillment of this covenant that Jesus came to die on the cross, that we could be bought out of the slavery of sin.

Ultimately, Abram continued to move forward, striving to be what he was called to be. God demonstrates over and over again that he takes full responsibility for the relationship, for the promise he gives -- and then enabling us to be what we ought to be, and gracing us when we fail. He assures us that we will yet fulfill our destiny, our tapestry of life, for he will fulfill his promise to us. With that kind of a commitment from our God, how can we not keep striving to move forward with him and in his ways?

**Are we ready to move forward with God?**

Striving means moving forward under his guidance. It reminds me of the joke where a new downhill snow skier is speeding down the slope on a trajectory directly toward another person. This new skier was primarily a golfer, so he started to call out: "Fore!, Fore!, Fore!" But the person never moved and they crashed and they rolled, and they ended up in a heap. The first one apologizes, saying, "I'm just learning how to do this, I guess I haven't really figured out how to turn or to stop." The other replies, "That's OK, I'm just learning too, and I haven't figure out how to start moving yet." Moving forward in our journey with God may mean learning to start some things in our life and may mean learning to stop other things in our life so we don't end up in a heap.

Change may be necessary because, just like Abram, we're going to get it wrong from time to time.

**Are we able to adjust?**

Surrounded by a plethora of leaders and their diverse political systems, economic

systems, value systems and religious systems, it is easy to get mixed signals and become confused over the right path. Or, knowing the right path, we may be tempted and fail and fall from the path. But also, like Abram, we need to voice our concerns and doubts in prayer, find and/or return to living the right path, and discern how to best live out our covenant relationship with God. Sometimes Abram was successful and exemplary, other times he was a miserable failure. Over the course of our lives, aren't we all?

But ultimately, despite setbacks, Abram's faith climbed past circumstances, circumvented surrounding views, and he kept adjusting and realigning priorities in order to move toward his covenant God. He was able to do this only because God's consistent love, patient grace, and covenant promise. By that, Abram overcame his faltering trust and errant actions and he became the obedient "father of faith".

**He helps us overcome!**

And it is only because of God's consistent love, patient grace, and covenant promise that he overcomes our faltering trust and errant actions, and we can become the obedient "children of faith".

## **Communion**

**Invitation** Just as Abraham needed reminders and refreshers, (he built an altar wherever he went) he saw the dust in the ground and the stars in the sky. In the midst of doubts and fears, God kept reminding him of his covenant promises – and Jesus established a perpetual reminder of the new covenant God has established with us -- through Communion...

We'll begin with prayer, and then move to a responsive confession. Let's pray... Lord, when we consider our destiny, our spiritual paths; we sometimes wonder who we are -- lost in the midst of our circumstances, surrounded by pious sounding but conflicting points of view. Yet we are here because we desire to follow you. Once we were secure in familiar territory, in our sense of belonging, not questioning the norms of our culture, the values shared by our society. But you have called us out and away from home, and we do not always know where you are leading us, what our future holds -- but we trust you to hold on to us.

Journey with us, so that we may not become deterred by hardship, unfamiliarity, or doubts, but remain steady in you as our hope. You have been what we need from the beginning of our lives, and we live to tell the next generations of your promise, your strength, and your power. We give you our lives in trust, and strive to obey where you lead, that we may find happiness in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Confession – Assurance** (P – Pastor, C – Congregation)

P: And now our responsive confession. Our heavenly Father, who by your love has made us, and through your love has kept us, and in your love would make us perfect: we humbly confess that we have not loved the with all our heart and soul and mind and strength,

**C: and that we have not loved one another as Christ has loved us.**

P: Your life is within our souls,

**C: but our selfishness has hindered you.**

P: We have not lived by faith. We have resisted your spirit. We have neglected your inspirations.

**C: Forgive what we have been; help us to amend what we are; and in your Spirit direct what we shall be;**

P: that you may come into the full glory of your creation, in us and in all the people; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**C: Amen.**

P: The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. If anyone sins,

**C: we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;**

P: And he is the expiation – the One who takes the penalty for our sins so that we can be right with God, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

ad. from UM Hymnal # 892;

**Music** Now Lord, like Abraham looked to you in faithful belief, may we see in the bread and the cup the assurance of your promises, and lift our faith and love to you as we continue to prepare for communion by singing

### **My Faith Looks Up to Thee**

My faith looks up to thee, thou Lamb of Calvary, Savior divine!

Now hear me while I pray, take all my guilt away,

O let me from this day be wholly thine!

May thy rich grace impart strength to my fainting heart, my zeal inspire!

As thou hast died for me, O may my love to thee

pure, warm, and changeless be, a living fire!

**The Great Thanksgiving** If there is anything our faith can gain from today's message, it is that God, in Jesus, is ALWAYS with us, he will never abandon nor forsake us and is always willing to draw us back into the covenant no matter how far away we may have wandered. Therefore, it is always right to give our thanks and praise. We thank you, Covenant Creator, for you formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life. We are loved by you and called by you to be stewards that care for your creation and become a blessing to all the nations, which begins with the people we contact each day.

We thank you for the living presence of Jesus Christ, who takes the devotion of our hearts and transforms our human attempts at prayer and praise into a divine worship that is pleasing and acceptable to you.

We thank you for your Spirit who empowers our worship. So pour out your Spirit on all who have gathered here and at home, and on the gifts of bread and cup. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ that we may be the body of Christ together in ministry to the world until we feast together at his heavenly banquet. We give you glory for who you are, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and for all that you have done. **Amen.**

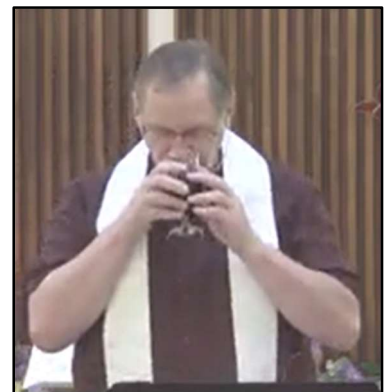
portions of The Great Thanksgiving ad. From Constance Cherry (Ibid.)

### Receiving the Bread and Cup



Jesus invited his disciples into an upper room on the night he was betrayed. he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." [Take and eat].

When the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." [Take and Drink]....



**Prayer** Now eternal God, we give you thanks for this holy mystery in which you have given yourself to us. Grant that we may experience your promised presence and live in the strength of Christ's covenant love. Amen.

**Music** Let's lift our faith and *stand* on his promises as we sing our closing song...



### **Standing on the Promises**

Standing on the promises of Christ my King,  
through eternal ages let his praises ring;  
glory in the highest, I will shout and sing,  
standing on the promises of God.

#### **Refrain**

Standing, standing, standing on the promises of Christ my Savior;  
standing, standing, I'm standing on the promises of God.

Standing on the promises of Christ the Lord,  
bound to him eternally by love's strong cord,  
overcoming daily with the Spirit's sword,  
standing on the promises of God.

#### **Refrain**

Standing on the promises I cannot fall,  
listening every moment to the Spirit's call,  
resting in my Savior as my all in all,  
standing on the promises of God.

#### **Refrain**

**Blessing** Go in peace. Go knowing your faith is the assurance of things promised. Go out like Abraham, not knowing where, but knowing that God is leading. Press on in faith, stepping back into the everydayness of life desiring to fulfill the call of being God's people wherever you go. **Amen.**

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