

Straight from the "Hart"

August 21, 2022



Sharing the journey
to know, love, and serve God.

Opening Prayer Our heavenly Father, we faithfully give ourselves with gratitude because as one way of praising you for what we you have done and with a confident hope of what you are will do. We remember how you faithfully fed your people in the wilderness in the days of Moses, and the crowds by the sea in the days of Jesus. As we worship, we ask that you, Lord, the bread of life, will nourish our souls today. Amen.

(Adapted from Herb Mather © 2002 General Board of Discipleship and © 2009 Lorrinda H M Hoover in UM Worship & Song, Leader's Edition [W&S])

Call to Worship

Lay Reader: We have gathered here at the personal invitation of Jesus Christ, the living bread who has come down from heaven to give the abundant and everlasting foods of faith, hope, and love. Never again will we need to hunger for a relationship with the living God, for he welcomes us into his presence as we worship him today.

(Adapted from © 2011 Robert D. Ingram, W&S, Ibid.)



Music Let's enter the presence of our God and worship by recognizing his holiness by singing

Holy, Holy, Holy

1. Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

3. Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see,
only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,
perfect in power, in love and purity.

4. Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy name, in earth and sky and sea.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three persons, blessed Trinity.

Intro to and Responsive Reading (L – Lay Reader, C – Congregation)

L: God saw the misery of his people in Egypt and how cruelly they were oppressed. He heard their cries for freedom from their suffering. He comes down to deliver them to a good land with wide-open spaces, lush with milk and honey. To do so, he came to Moses who was tending his father-in-law's flock near Mount Horeb. He appeared to him in a blazing bush that wouldn't burn up. Moses went to investigate... (Summary of Exodus 3:7-10, 1-4)

L: God called to him from within the bush, "Moses!, Moses!"

C: "Here I am. Who is it?"

L: "Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. I am the God of your father: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

C: Moses covered his face because he was afraid to look at God.

L: "I'm sending you to Pharaoh to demand that he let you lead my people out of Egypt."

C: "But why me? Who am I? I'm not the person for a job like that!"

L: "I will be with you. And this will be the proof that I am the one who is sending you. When you have led the people out of Egypt, you will worship God at this very mountain."

C: "If I go to the people of Israel and I tell them, 'The God of your fathers sent me to you.' And they ask me, 'What is his name? Who are you talking about?' What do I tell them?"

L: "I-AM-WHO-I-AM. Tell the people of Israel, 'I-AM has sent me.' Tell them, 'Jehovah, the God of your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has sent me to you.' This has always been my name, and this is how I will always be known. This is the name you shall call me throughout all generations."

(Exodus 3:4-6, 10-15 (TLB, MSG, NIV))

Theme (Introduction to Series) We are beginning a new series on the "I Am" statements of Jesus. But what we just heard is when it really started when God approached Moses in a routine moment of everyday life to call him to a mission to which he was suited. But Moses was skeptical about that suiting, and questions his own worth. But God replies by saying, "I'll be with you." It is not ability, but availability that God needs. Moses needed to learn to not rely on his natural strengths, but on the preparation and gifts that God would give to him. As Paul says in the New Testament, "When I am weak, then I am strong because it is God's

grace and power that works through me,” and that “it is through Christ that we can do all things.” (See 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 and Philippians 4:13)

But in the light of being called to mission in impossible times, (freeing people enslaved by a powerful empire isn't exactly a simple task) Moses was honest — he wondered if God would be enough. So he asked — in a very tactful way, by saying, “what if they ask who you are, then what should I say?” when put bluntly would be, “Who are you God?”

“I Am — will always be my name”, God answers. It is not very translatable into English, but the essence of it is — you can trust me to be who I am, and I will always be there with just what you need. I am the same God you've always known, who has never let anyone down. The same God, the same covenant, but now doing a brand-new thing.

When Lord Jesus came to earth, he picked up on the same statements — the front of the bulletin captures the sentiment — Jesus says, “Abraham looked forward to the day I'd be here”, and when that was met with disbelief, Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, I am.” Throughout the New Testament, Jesus issues several I statements, but elaborates with a more specific qualifier depending upon the context in which he utters the phrase, but it always resounds back to this overarching I AM. I will be here for you, I will be what you need.

Music From the foundations of the world, he always has been, is and will always be the great I AM who is present for everything we truly need. Let's sing...

O God Our Help in Ages Past

1. O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home.
2. Under the shadow of thy throne, still may we dwell secure;
sufficient is thine arm alone, and our defense is sure.
3. Before the hills in order stood, or earth received her frame,
from everlasting, thou art God, to endless years the same.
6. O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come;
be thou our guide while life shall last, and our eternal home.

Music When God comes to us to be what we need and calls us to be the answer for other's needs -- we find we are in a holy place. Wherever God's presence is, is a holy place because he is holy — since he promises to be with us when we worship him, we are in a holy place now — let's prepare our hearts for God moments and prayer by singing...

Holy Ground

We are standing on holy ground, and I know that there are angels all around.
let us praise, Jesus now, we are standing in his presence, on holy ground.

(Repeat)

God Moments Now is your opportunity to share our God has been you help, how you have experienced him recently... Just raise your hand, and if you are comfortable, stand, and I will come to you. [The testimonies were not transcribed to this writing]

Instrumental Special Music We haven't done this for a while, but make sure you are in a comfortable posture, if your hands are clenched, relax them. Begin breathing deeply and slowly. Exhale the busyness of the week, inhale the quiet peace of the moment. Exhale the stress, inhale compassionate understanding. Exhale the pains and struggles, and inhale his healing. Settle your hearts into silence while Donna and Kathy softly play... [One time through of "Come Away with Me"]

Pastor's Prayer Lord, we are thankful for what we have just heard. Not only in the music – your desire to ask us to come away with you in a quiet time and just be with you and sense your presence. But we thank you also for what we have heard in testimonies, how we've been working in the lives of your people in this church. We are so grateful, from the small things to the big. And even "small things" can be really big things when it is we who are experiencing it, it can make or break our day, sometimes, and we are just thankful for the way that you watch over us.

We turn to you to light our way, as we do, fear dissipates. When we seek your joy, you become our strength. When we are tempted and evil advances against us, you will faithfully hold us and keep us from falling. We seek your beauty today. We recognize in you that you are abundantly more than we need. So we lift up our needs and the needs of those surrounding us, in the community, in the nation, and in the world – whatever you have placed on our hearts. **Praises and Petitions** Specifically, today we pray for a request from Cheri for Joyce who had just had surgery. * for Fran Warthman, who had a stroke and is now in a rehab center. We pray for a complete recovery for her. We continue to pray for * Ann Martin and * Bill Wyckoff, both recovering from surgery, * for the Heathcock family dealing with a father with cancer and a loss of car * and for Valerie Carpenter who needs a new heart. Lord, there are so many requests on our hearts and minds.

Now, according to your patient timing, we ask you to intervene and bring your kingdom values to us and to your earth — just as they are in heaven, just as you taught us to pray: **and Lord's Prayer**

Introduction to and Bible Reading:

Jesus traveled among the villages teaching and healing. He gave authority and instructions for the disciples and sent them out to do the same. They did. News came to them about the horrific death of John the Baptist, and they gathered to lay his body to rest.

The disciples told Jesus about their exciting, but exhausting experiences. But so many people were coming and going, they didn't even have time for a leisurely meal. Jesus told his disciples to come with him to a quiet place to rest a while. They took a boat to a deserted place, but people saw where they were headed and rushed on foot to arrive ahead of them. Jesus saw the crowd and had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He began to teach them many things.



Late in the day his disciples came to him. They interrupted, “This is a remote place, and it’s already very late. Pronounce a benediction and send the people away so that they can go to the nearby villages and farms and buy themselves something to eat.”

But Jesus answered, “You feed them.”

They replied, “With what? It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy food for all this crowd!”

“How much food do we have?” he asked. “Go and see.”

When they found out, they said, “Five loaves and two fish.”

Jesus directed all the people sit down in groups of 50 or a 100. They looked like a patchwork quilt of wildflowers spread out on the green grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven in prayer, he gave thanks for the food, blessed, broke and gave it to his disciples to distribute to the people. They all ate until they were satisfied. The disciples gathered up twelve basketfuls of leftovers. More than five thousand were at the supper. Immediately after the meal was finished, Jesus insisted his disciples get in the boat and go ahead of him to Bethsaida where he would join them later. He would stay and dismiss the crowd. After sending them off, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

(Mark 6:34-46 NIV, TLB, MSG)

Special Music It was the desperate cries of the people enslaved in Egypt that brought God to Moses, and it was the desperate urgency of oppressed people that brought them out to hear Jesus speak that day. It was that same of kind of desperation that inspired James Rowe to write the words of Love Lifted Me. I grew up singing this hymn – let me remind you of some of the lyrics [below]... Now listen to Donna and Kathy play it as you think about how God has lifted you in his love...



Love Lifted Me

I was sinking deep in sin far from the peaceful shore
 Very deeply stained within sinking to rise no more
 But the master of the sea heard my despairing cry,
 From the waters lifted me now safe am I

All my heart to him I give: ever to him I'll cling,
 In his blessed presence live, ever his praises sing.
 Love so mighty and so true merits my soul's best songs;
 faithful, loving service, too, to him belongs.

Chorus

Love lifted me! Love lifted me!
 When nothing else could help Love lifted me
 (Repeat)

Music Like the people who came out to see him that day, Let's also seek the Lord and allow him to feed us that we too might find freedom and peace. Let's sing before the sermon.

Break Thou the Bread of Life

Break thou the bread of life, dear Lord, to me,
 as thou didst break the loaves beside the sea;
 beyond the sacred page I seek thee, Lord;
 my spirit pants for thee, O Living Word!

Bless thou the truth, dear Lord, to me, to me,
 as thou didst bless the bread by Galilee;
 then shall all bondage cease, all fetters fall;
 and I shall find my peace, my all in all.

Sermon I Am... the Bread: The Disciple who Refused to Believe

This is an unusual sermon. It is the only one that I do like this. I'm not a dramatist, so I am going to have to ask you to stretch your imaginations a little harder than if one of the more talented dramatists like Mary Jo or Charles or Terri were up here doing this. But



try and put yourselves into the shoes of.... now if I had it in my inventory, I would have worn carpenter's pants with a hammer, and a tool belt, and maybe carrying a saw, and flannel, and maybe suspenders -- to represent a modern version of the average person who would have gone out to see Jesus that day when he fed the crowds; and who has now come back to share his story with you of that event. (I'm going to play a character for the rest of the sermon)... The events that this man is reflecting on is recorded in John 6. So hear the story of this disciple, this fringe follower in the crowd. (Pause)

We'd been hearing many hopeful stories about Jesus. When we heard that he was coming to the Lake of Galilee we went to check him out. It was a blistering hot, dry day. But we so were fascinated with the way he spoke with such authority, we ended up listening to him almost all the day. We were in the middle of nowhere with no nourishment to help us fight the heat. They found a kid who had brought a typical lunch. Some small loaves of barley bread and a couple pickled sardines to wash down with. Jesus took that lunch, gave thanks, and fed us all. (You heard that earlier).

We knew he was something -- someone -- special. We went to make him our king. As our king, he could do anything we wanted him to do, he could feed us, he could heal us, lead us to political freedom, take care of any problems we that we thought we had. Well, yes, it is true that many of us had heard about how tired they all were from exhausting mission trips, and about the added grief of John the Baptist's violent passing, and how they were trying to get away to re-coop themselves, but we were afraid this might be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity -- we weren't going to allow them to --- we weren't going to go home just because they were tired. We wanted to have what we wanted to have. We need him to serve us, to help us, on this day.

I know you are not like we were. You'd never condition Jesus' leadership in your life based on whether or not he makes your personal dreams come true. You'd

never follow Jesus only for what he will do for you. You'd never say, "IF you do this Lord... THEN... we'll believe and follow you." But we did. I guess that is why when we went to crown him king, he had disappeared into the mountain. He won't let us condition our following him based on whether or not he will do what we want. He was about pleasing God, not people pleasing. He refuses to submit to being a king of our own making rather than a king who remakes us.

God refuses to be our God based on our "IF... you do this, then we'll follow." He wants to be our God no matter what happens. It reminds me of when I was a child and my first rabbi talked to me about three men who went and told the enemy king, "Our God can surely save us from your fiery furnace. But even if he chooses not to, we will still not worship your gods or your gold statue." (Daniel 3) It reminds me of *your* old Sunday School songs. "Give me oil in lamp, keep me burning." Remember that song? It was a great theme for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. ♪ "Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning, give me oil in my lamp, I pray. Give me oil, in my lamp, keep me burning, burning, burning, keep me burning till the break of day." ♪ And that is what they had to do, wasn't it?

I wonder how many of us on that green field that day eventually came to know Jesus as God even if all their personal and national issues were **not** resolved the way they were expecting and hoping Jesus would resolve them.

Well, I digress. Where was I? Oh yes, Jesus had disappeared up into the mountain and we were waiting for him to return to us, but he never did. We knew his disciples had been sent away to a different town, and some boats from Tiberius had arrived, so many of us piled into the boats thinking if we followed the disciples over to Bethsaida, then we'd eventually find Jesus again. When we arrived we discovered that Jesus had already arrived ahead of us. That was not possible. He would have had to walk across the lake to do that. We asked how he managed to get there first, but he said it was not important.

He said we had chased him down just because he had filled our stomachs. Instead, we ought to be asking about food that endures eternally. So we did. We asked him what work we had to do to earn God's favor. He said, "Have faith in the one that God has sent."

But to us, that was not even a work. There had to be more to it than that. It flew in the face of everything that we believed. It had to be more than only having faith in Jesus. We had to add a birthright, or some sort of work, or ... at least we had to demand proof that God loves us in Jesus. So, we tested him. We said, "Moses

gave manna out of heaven to eat, and when the Messiah comes, he would give that heavenly manna again. So, Jesus, what are you going to do to prove you are the Messiah and you can do that? --- so we can believe in you?"

He didn't answer the question. In fact he tore the question apart – and our misunderstanding of our own history. He said "First of all, it wasn't Moses who gave manna, it was God. Second, manna is not the true bread of heaven, the real bread of heaven gives life to the world."

Well, in light of the fact that he had just fed over 5,000 people with some kid's lunch, we figured he had the power to give us that heavenly bread, so we asked him for it: "Give us this bread." But when he answered, that is when I, and many others around began to wonder just who it was we were trying to hook up with.

He said, "I - am - the – bread - of - life." He seemed frustrated with our challenges. We kept asking him for the bread, prove the bread, and how is your bread better than manna? And all he said was "I *am* -- the bread."

And it was like he was saying, "Here I am, right here in front of you. Look at my life, my words, my deeds. What more could I live? What more could I say? What more could I do than I have already lived, said, and done? Can't you see that I am the one who gives life?"

We had to ponder that for a minute. He said the bread came out of heaven. He said he was the bread. But we know he didn't come out heaven, I mean, we knew who his parents were, right? (You can look that up later, if you didn't get that twist). Some of us started muttering under our breath and grumbling. But that didn't slow him down, he kept right on after us. We wanted him to prove he was superior to Moses and what Moses did. He said our ancestors ate the manna, but they still died. But anyone who ate him would live forever. Well that is a funny twist of phrase, isn't it? Eat him?!?! Now that's just going too far. He got carried away, he was claiming too much for himself, and demanding too much of us.

Let's pause for a 4th grade commercial. In this health-conscious day, one cannibal bragged to another about his catch of a trapeze artist. His friend asked, "Why is that so special?" Because it is a very well-balanced meal. Another caught a comedian, but complained it tasted funny. A last complained about the off taste of some monks that he had caught and boiled. The head cannibal chef said, "You *boiled* them? Don't you know they are friars?" Okay, enough commercial.

Well, of course, those outside of Jesus' followers and the early church heard rumors of this kind of talk of eating him, and about their love feasts which was

sandwiched (no pun intended) in the middle of the bread and the cup that you now call Communion. It led to a lot of negative gossip about those “cannibal Christians”.

But don't get me wrong, we knew exactly what he meant. In the mystery religions all around us, an animal sacrifice was burned on the altar, but only a small portion was actually consumed in that fire. A portion of it was given to the priest, and the rest was given back to the worshiper who then took it to another part of the temple to have a feast with his family and friends. Now when the animal was offered up on the altar, they believed the temple's deity (whichever god or idol they were worshipping) would enter into the animal, so when the people ate the rest of the animal, they were, in a sense, eating – taking in the presence -- of their god, and when they got up to leave, they would leave god-filled.

We understood the symbol-ism, but we were still confused. This man was equating himself with God, but even worse, he was connecting his Godhood and kingdom to a sacrifice, and our Messiah was not supposed to be a sacrifice, he was to rally the troops and lead us in political deliverance from Rome. So we argued about how he could give us his flesh to eat, for an ultimate sacrifice is not in our expectations of a Messiah at all.

And Jesus still didn't stop. He just kept piling it on. We were not only to eat his flesh we were to drink his blood. Well that is a no no. In Jewish thinking, the life of the creature is in the blood, and to drink its blood was to be united with its life. So if we consume the blood of a cow, we would be mixing our life with the life of a cow, that's why we don't leave any blood in our meat when we eat. And to drink the blood of Christ would be mixing our life with his life in an inseparable union. Can you even imagine?

We had heard him teach about the vine and branches and how his followers were to abide in him and he in them, and that that is the only way to have a fruitful life.

But even if symbolic of the deep kind of connection he desired with those who followed him, it was difficult for us to accept. That was *really* connected – a top priority kind of thing. We were still arguing about it when he added, “If you can't believe this now, how are you going to believe it when you see me being lifted up?

We weren't sure what he was talking about, but we thought it might have something do with that sacrifice he was talking about earlie – and we didn't want to have anything to do with that. So I, along with a lot of others, got up off of the grass and went home. We'd had enough. We wanted a king that was going to

powerfully serve us and achieve what *our* dreams were for *us* and *our* world, not one that would sacrifice himself for the world.

Of course, all of us who left didn't hear what was said later. We didn't hear Jesus turn to his 12 and ask if they were going to leave him too. I can tell you about it now because it is recorded. Peter spoke for them and said, "To whom else could we go? Only you have the words of eternal life." I wish I had heard that too, because it was true for me too. And you too. I didn't have anywhere to go except back into my own self and my own life and into all my activities that claim they will satisfy me but -- they don't. There was nothing eternal in those activities.

One of his missionaries, Paul, later wrote "If we have hoped in Christ for this life only, we are in need of pity." (1 Corinthians 15:19) We get so caught up in our daily living, that we don't have time to live for eternity. How true that was for us who left that day. Because that is exactly what we did. We wanted him to be our king in our kingdom. We wanted him to prove in some physical way that he was the Messiah – (for this life now). We demanded he give us bread that would satisfy us for our whole lives (now, here on earth). Then we argued about his flesh and blood. We were always arguing in the physical, rarely in the spiritual. It was always and only this life, this life, this life. Never our spiritual life, never our eternal need. Kind of ironic for a religious, God-fearing nation, isn't it?

And we know that it isn't that Christ has no interest in this life. At another famous sermon of his, he said not to anxiously worry about those things because God already knows that we need them and they will be added to you. I guess our attention span slipped a bit when he said something about *first* seeking *his* kingdom and *his* righteousness above those other things. (Matthew 6:25 ff)

Too late for me. Once I left, refusing to believe Jesus that day, I didn't go back. Yes, I heard that he had died, even heard that he rose again, heard that he ascended, and heard about the Holy Spirit... fascinating stuff – but I had gotten so caught up in the busy duties of my life to do anything about it. I couldn't seem to create the space or time to get back to him. It is a dangerous thing to go away when Jesus calls. Maybe when things settle down, when the money is more secure, so many other things I got to get in order first in my life ... funny how that never quite seems to happen... but my life isn't over -- maybe I'll get to him right after.... [count up fingers while saying] I do this. and that, and oh I got to do this first, and then that, and then this – and that, and that, and this, and that... Fade to black...

Well enough of this disciple who ended up refusing to believe. In a different time and place, long ago, but not all *that* long ago: a neighbor - diabetic, alcoholic, under much stress. Bad combinations. She was in and out of the hospital, which put her in and out of jobs, which put her constantly out of money.

During one of her stints in the hospital, her eldest son, by her words, “the good one in the family” was working at a construction site, fell off scaffolding, and died one floor beneath her in the hospital.

The other son dealt with the grief the way he handled most of his life – with cocaine. Long story short, after many conversations, she turned to Christ. And her life was turned to great joy in the midst of all of that. She started out with him well. She turned to him for money, turned to him for food, for a job, for the grief process, for health, for emotional stability, for an apartment, for a car, and the list goes on and on... and she should have. Where else do you go to get your life in order? go? And over time, as Christ and Christians worked with her and her prayers began to be answered and the pieces of her life began to start to fall into place again, she concluded, “*I’ve* really got *myself* together.” And things slowly began to unravel as she began incorporating her old life back into her new one, thinking it would be okay to do now. And I couldn’t help thinking that *maybe* she *seemed* to be a lot like our disciple on the grass that day, like all of them who left that day. She kept looking to Jesus for this life, but not her spiritual or eternal needs. Only enough to do “the work” she imagined she had to do to get done what she wanted out of God – and his people. Christ had become nothing more than a resource to dispense temporary benefits to her, and when she began taking even that for granted, and some of them started dissipating as she began to return to old patterns, and following Christ toward a quality of life, a different life, a new life began to get harder, she drifted away.

And Jesus turns to us and says, “You don’t want to go away too, do you?” And I wonder what our business is in following Jesus. Is it to join his kingdom, or get him to join ours? Is He king to decorate our table with fancy plates and silver? Or are we willing to serve him -- as the main course of -- our life?

Jesus – the bread of life – the essence of what we need to live - fully -- continues to call us in the busy-ness of life, in the midst of competing priorities, in the dysfunctions of life, and also in its successes. He gives himself to us to bring us to a full and meaningful life, filled with purpose and satisfaction – and an eternal life -- but can we answer the call and give ourselves to him?

Music/Prayer Let's sing our closing prayer together as a confident commitment and promise that we will give our hearts and lives to him in service, and love him most of all.

Jesus Calls Us

1. Jesus calls us o'er the tumult of our life's wild, restless sea;
day by day his sweet voice soundeth, saying, "Christian, follow me!"

3. Jesus calls us from the worship of the vain world's golden store,
from each idol that would keep us, saying, "Christian, love me more!"

5. Jesus calls us! By thy mercies, Savior, may we hear thy call,
give our hearts to thine obedience, serve and love thee best of all.

Blessing And now, wherever you go and whatever you do -- do everything to the best of your ability, as if you were doing it for the Lord -- because you are. Bring him glory, praise, and honor by what you say, what you do, how you live... Amen.