

Straight from the "Hart"

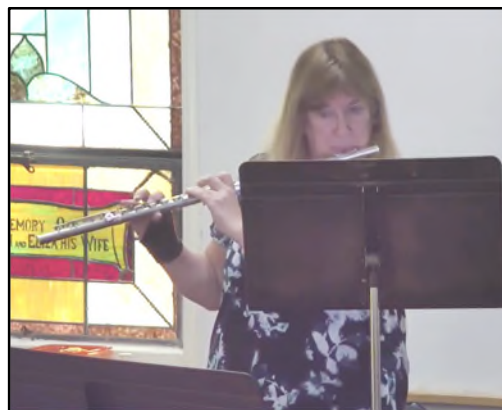
October 2, 2022

World Communion



In honor of World Communion, Kathy Novak and Donna Allmond (not pictured) played 8 national anthems from around the world before during and after the worship service.

Welcome Welcome to the Hartland United Methodist service script. This was World Communion Sunday when participating Christians from all over the world celebrate the sacrament as one.



Affirmation of Faith In honor of this special day, we will responsively recite portions of the confession of faith that comes from the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa.

(P – Pastor, **C - Lay Reader with Congregation**)

P: We believe in the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

C: From the human family, he calls, gathers, protects, and cares for the communion of saints, the one holy, universal Christian church.

P: We believe that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit and Christ's work of reconciliation has conquered the powers of sin and death, irreconciliation, hatred, bitterness, and enmity. Therefore, Christ's work of reconciliation is evident in the community of believers because they have been brought back into harmony with God and with one another.

C: This unity is both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ.

P: This binding force comes through the working of God's Spirit. Yet at the same time, it is a reality which must be sought and earnestly pursued. The unity of God's people must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is a sin which Christ has already conquered.

C: It is seen active in a variety of ways: in that we love one another; that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another, and that we give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be a benefit and blessing to one another.

P: We share one faith and one calling. We have one God and Father, filled with one Spirit, baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup. We confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope:

C: to know the height and breadth and depth of the love of Christ, to be built up to the stature of Christ, and to live the new humanity together -- by praying and by serving God in this world.

P: This unity cannot be forced. It can only be established in freedom. The variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures -- by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ –

C: are turned into opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God.

P: We believe that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people; that he wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek what is right. Therefore, the church must stand with people in any form of suffering and need,

C: so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

P: We believe that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in this new obedience of love which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world –

C: to the honor and glory of the one and only God -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- forever and ever. Amen.

Ab. and Ad. from The Belhar Confession, written in Afrikaans in 1982 and adopted as a confession of faith by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa, 1986

Opening Prayer Gracious God, you create more than we could ever hope to return. You share more than we could ever hope to deserve. And yet, we pray that you will accept the humble gifts of ourselves. May they honor and glorify you in all creation, and as we gather to give ourselves to you in worship, may we be empowered to live in service to you in our prayers, our presence, and our ministries formal or informal, for the cause of ushering in your peace, now and forever, in Jesus' name Amen.

Call to Worship Sing to the Lord, whose mercy is from everlasting to everlasting -- whose faithfulness renews us every morning -- who does not forget his salvation!

All week long, battles beat on in the night, injustice lingers in the morning, and busy-ness rumbles through the day. But now we gather on this holy day to quiet our hearts and still our thoughts... that we may see and know that God, like lightning, he will illuminate the darkness in which we walk – and we will see with our spirits the blazing bush that will not burn up. And touched by God’s presence, we will reach for the holy and be filled with wonder.



Ad. From [PGW} and blended with an ad. of © 1975 Central Conference of American Rabbis, in UM Worship & Song, Leader’s Edition.

Music And we can be confident that when our lives will be built on his forever faithful foundation, that the “Great I Am” has done all we need him to do and more, and he will always be whatever we need him to be to carry us through both the joys and storms of life. Let’s sing...

How Firm a Foundation

1. "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?
2. "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.
4. "When through fiery trials thy pathways shall lie,
my grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply;
the flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.
5. "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."

Theme Today’s theme story is told by Jesus, and we will read it responsively in just a moment. William Barry writes that we are created to love God. Everything on earth exists to help us fulfill this pursuit. But it all hinges on whether we experience God. If we pay attention to these experiences, then at least in those

moments, everything else fades from our attention as we get caught up in his presence. This helps build the firm foundation upon which we enter a deepening relationship with him.

But it is also true that when we look at creation, and we look at ourselves; we realize that we have fallen short of God's dreams of how he wants to relate with us, wants to be with us. We've lost focus and don't always seek the spiritual experiences we crave. Instead, we take his blessings and run. We exhaust his gifts to us. Then exhausted and depleted, we run, we are afraid to return, we feel shame and unworthy. We seek all other avenues until we realize we have no other choice. But even then, we fear the repercussions of the errors of our ways. We don't feel worthy of his friendship. We hope against hope that he will accept us as a servant and are received into heaven by the skin of our teeth.

(Paraphrased from "A Friendship Like No Other: Experiencing God's Amazing Embrace")

Into to Responsive Bible Reading The experience is so common that when Jesus tells this story it isn't even the main point. His main point is about other's attitudes about those who find themselves in this situation. But for now, the focus is narrowed to this: When we fail, and then come to our senses; will God still love us? Hear the text:

Responsive Bible Reading (L – Lay Reader, C – Pastor with Congregation)

L: "A man had two sons. When the younger told his father,

C: 'I want my share of your estate now, instead of waiting until you die!'

L: His father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons. (TLB) Soon after that the younger son took all that had been given to him and went to another country far away.

C: There he spent all he had on wild and foolish living. (NLV)

L: About the time his money was gone a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him to feed his pigs. The boy became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the swine looked good to him. And no one gave him anything.

C: "When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired men have food enough and to spare, and here I am, dying of hunger!'

L: "So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming, and was filled with loving pity and ran and embraced him and kissed him. "His son said to him,

C: ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and you, and am not worthy of being called your son— (TLB)

L: “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’

C: So they began to celebrate. (NIV) (Selections from Luke 15:11-24)

Music So let us also celebrate, for while we ourselves were yet sinners who had lost our way and enemies of God, God demonstrated his unfailing love for us in this – Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And the salvation we receive is not something we earn, but something that God gifted to us – and what in turn we are expected to gift to others. Let’s remind ourselves of that amazing grace by singing... .



There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy

to tune of Jesus Calls Us

- 1 There’s a wideness in God’s mercy, like the wideness of the sea.
There’s a kindness in God’s justice, which is more than liberty.
- 2 There is welcome for the sinner, and more graces for the good!
There is mercy with the Savior; there is healing in his blood.
- 3 But we make God’s love too narrow by false limits of our own,
and we magnify its strictness with a zeal God will not own.
- 4 For the love of God is broader than the measure of our mind;
and the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.
- 5 If our love were but more simple, we should rest upon God’s word;
and our lives would be illumined by the presence of our Lord.

[Prayers]

Quick Story: Parents took a little girl forward to receive Communion, but she was disappointed with the small piece of bread she was given. She cried loudly, “I want more!” The congregation was amused, (as you are) and the parents were embarrassed -- but this little girl’s cry accurately expresses the feelings of many... We want more! No, we don’t need bigger portions of bread and cup, what we really

long for is more of Jesus, more of his love, more of his compassion, more of his hope, more, as the wayward son experienced, more of his grace and mercy.

Gayle Carlton Felton, "This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion"

Music When we experience that kind of mercy and presence of our loving Lord, we just want to experience more and more of him. So on this World Communion Sunday, let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing

Fill My Cup Lord

Fill my cup, Lord, I lift it up Lord.
 Come and quench this thirsting of my soul.
 Bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more;
 fill my cup, fill it up and make me whole.
 (Repeat)

Pastor's Prayer Lord, it is so easy to want to receive your grace as a prodigal, as the one who has wandered away and wanting to come back. It is also easy to accept your grace as someone who wants to go deeper in our relationship with you. But sometimes, we find it very difficult to turn and do that same thing for others. We ask for your grace for us, that if we have failed you in some way, or failed others in some way; that we may come and lay it at your feet, and let you deal with it, and guide us in what we too should do -- so that in time we may find a fuller friendship and become more whole by your healing. Help us to realize that the same author who wrote "what a dreadful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God" also told us to "approach your throne boldly" through Jesus Christ who has paved the way for us. And we can bare all in front of you because of what Christ has done for us....

Therefore, let us set aside our hurts, our angers, our disappointments, our fears and doubts. Heal us with your tender touch, that we might be cleansed of all negative thoughts. Open our eyes to the power of love by showing us once again the unselfish sacrifice of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

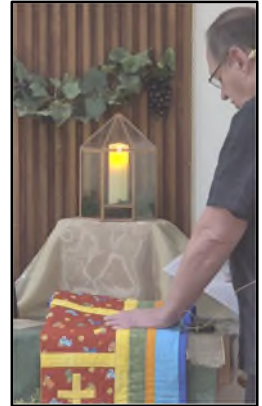
Lord, we have come here after experiencing a wide variety of weeks – from fantastic to miserable. And when we leave here, we will be facing another week that will have unknown happenings that could range just as widely. Therefore, we ask that you guide us to rely on you in good times as well as in the challenges.

Praises and Petitions Specifically we pray for these who we know are facing challenges: those in Florida and the Carolinas that were and will continue to be

impacted by hurricane Ian, for those who are there or are traveling there to help...

* Randy Melville requests prayers for the persecuted Christians in Nigeria, * and Joyce Schloss's sister-in-law Lynne – who was in ER again last night and will have a third open heart surgery this week. * Hear our prayers for these, and for our praises, and our intercessions for a variety of situations, for ourselves and for any others that are on our hearts and minds...

Quilt * And we also pray for Brantley Call, 4 year old with unexplained seizures, for whom we now dedicate this quilt. God of creation, redemption and sustaining grace, we praise you for the opportunity to take part in this ministry so that we might see a world beyond ours. We thank you for putting those in need on our hearts and in our minds so that we might fully live out your call to love and serve. We ask that you bless this quilt for Brantley Call and his family. Through it, may they feel the love, comfort and peace of your presence, and as a tangible sign of the prayers of this congregation.



We don't always understand what it is you have planned, but we do have the faith to know that it is you who holds each fragile life in your hands, and we can know that we are never alone—you are with each of us -- always. So through this quilt and beyond this quilt, wrap your arms around little Brantley and his family -- surround them with your love, and let them sense the peace and hope that only you can give. It is through your loving grace we offer this blessing. [Pause]

Now strengthen each of us to shine out your light in us, so that people will see you at work, and glorify you in heaven. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.

Intro to Bible Reading The Hebrews were enslaved in Egypt. They became so many that the Egyptians feared they would no longer be able to control them. They oppressed them with hard labor but that only made them grow even more. Pharaoh ordered that Hebrew baby boys were to be drown in the Nile River.

One Hebrew mother hid her son for three months. He became too big to hide. She made and sealed a basket so that it could float and hid him among the reeds on the shore of the Nile. The baby's sister watched from a distance. One day Pharaoh's daughter went down to the river, spied the basket, saw the crying baby boy, and felt sorry for him. His sister approached and asked if she should go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse him. After the baby was weaned, he was returned to Pharaoh's daughter, and she named him Moses.

Moses grew up and went out to watch his own people at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and thought there were no witnesses when he killed and hid the Egyptian. The next day he saw two Hebrews fighting and he went to arbitrate, and in their angry rejection of his help; Moses discovered to his terror that what he had done to the Egyptian had become known. Pharaoh also heard. He tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled to Midian.

In Midian, seven daughters of the priest Jethro were trying to draw water for their father's flock. Shepherds drove them away. Moses intervened and rescued them. He drew water for them and their flock. He ended up marrying one of the daughters.

Later, Moses is tending Jethro's flock near Mount Sinai.

Meanwhile the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned to God about their slavery. God remembered his covenant with Abraham and was concerned about them. Now we pick up the story...

(Summary of Exodus 1:8 - 3:1)

Bible Reading Suddenly, the angel of the LORD appeared to [Moses] in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn't burn up. He went over to investigate.

God called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

"Here I am!" Moses replied, "Who is it?"

"Do not come any closer," the LORD warned. "Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. I am the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Moses covered his face because he was afraid to look at God.

Then the LORD told him, "I have certainly seen the oppression, the misery, the deep sorrows of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress and their pleas for freedom from their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of and concerned about their suffering. I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey... Now go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to demand that he let you lead my people out of Egypt."

Exodus 3:2-8,10 (NLT, NIV, TLB)

Music And so the call to make the world a better place for hurting people begins, and it continues to this day. Let's sing ...

Rise Up, O Men of God

1. Rise up, O men of God! Have done with lesser things.
Give heart and mind and soul and strength to serve the King of kings.

2. Rise up, O men of God! The kingdom tarries long.
Bring in the day of brotherhood and end the night of wrong.

3. Rise up, O men of God! The church for you doth wait,
her strength unequal to her task; rise up, and make her great!

Sermon I am...: Yeah, But...

We know and love these stories. Whether it be the Old Testament story of a nation that was enslaved in crisis due to no fault of their own, or the one Jesus told of a self-inflicted personal crisis. In both cases, we hear how eager God is to restore the fortunes of his people. In Jesus' story, it was the only place God is portrayed as being in a hurry -- to run out and greet a son who had thoroughly failed him. We love what that says about God. That he will willing to refrain from punishment, forgive and even more importantly, restore us to friendship and to family. We need to see ourselves as God sees us -- through friendly, loving eyes. He doesn't give up on us. He is eager to welcome us back, even though we may very well reject and offend and fail and hurt him all over again, yet he just keeps bringing us back again and again.

Even with the assurance of God's slowness to anger and patient refusal to give up and his rush to forgive and embrace us, we may still fear coming home. We may be too stubborn to confess our failure. We may not be as compassionate with ourselves or others as God is with us. Or even in that national story, we know that rather quickly the nation was reluctant to leave the comfort of their miserable circumstances of slavery and wanted to go back – afraid of what that new thing that God may be leading them to – even though it was a place of promise. Sometimes we are more comfortable in our misery than risking doing something new – because we don't know what it is or how it is going to play out.

For those who struggle to overcome our fears of coming home to God (with our sins and failures) or launching out with God into something radically new (like those leaving Egypt for the better land), William Barry inspires these steps so that we can more easily take *our* next step with God.

First, admit to God your hesitant to reveal ourselves to him, be it the shame of sin or the fear of obedience. Pray that we can experience the openness and transparency required for a close relationship. Know that Jesus is a true friend, and true friends know all and love anyway.

1) Admit how you feel

Second, It is natural and appropriate to think of God and turn to him

2) Connect prayer with pure pleasures

when something bad happens. But if that is the only time that we turn to him, we begin to associate God with bad things because that is the only time we are connecting with him. And then that negative-ness gets reinforced, our fears and negative thoughts about him and about life – which will encourage us to stay away from him. To counter this, begin to be intentional about associating good, positive parts of life and connect those with God. As you pray or meditate, do it in conjunction with something you really enjoy. Walking in the woods, listening to non-distracting music, out on a boat, praying and talking with good Christian friends. The list could be endless. What is your favorite thing to do? Invite God into whatever that activity is. If you remember a time in the past when you felt really close to God, (that wasn't a crisis type of thing?) What were you doing that made you feel close? Can you recapture those activities? And know that he is enjoying these times with you as well.

I remember reading that someone had gone to a seminar someplace on this topic of being close with God, and they were having a very hard time doing it. The leader of the seminar asked her, "What do you really like to do?" "Well, I like to do jigsaw puzzles." Well, there happened to be a puzzle in the lobby, so they went and started working on this puzzle, and she began praying as she did the puzzle; and it was a life changing experience for her.

Third, as you read the Bible, put yourself in the shoes of God's people and relive those passages,

3) Read God's love for us

especially those passages where the Lord declares his love and friendship. Feel God's craving to relieve the suffering of his people in Egypt, for example. Experience the father's joy in welcoming back the son, the shepherd finding the lost sheep, the poor person who found the lost coin... feel with them their celebration and learn how to celebrate well.

Build on these bible images to reflect on how God feels about us – how he is eager

4) Imagine how God feels about you

for us to be aware of his presence, and his love, and to know how interested he is in each of us. But also, be aware that this isn't only about God and me, and God and you, it is about God's world. Knowing how he feels about us, then how does he want us to feel about others?

We touched on this in the opening worship of this series, for it is the source of the

“I am” statements of Jesus. But let’s dig deeper now into the call of Moses, where God tells him his is, “I am.”, and see how Moses deals with all of that, it is interesting and I think we can relate to how he felt, at least a little bit. It is really nice to think that our hearts and open and our hands are ready to work the call of God, but more often than not, we and many of the Bible characters, there is a lot of reluctance and doubt, at first, at least; that had to be overcome. We already heard how the story started.

Who am I?

Moses is shepherding when God, in his unending love and compassionate care, through a burning bush, calls Moses to lead his people out of their misery in Egypt. Now Moses, remember, grew up in the palace. But he connected with his true people Moses. So now Moses protests – “**who am I** to do such a thing?” (Exodus 3:11) and I get it – we heard how he was for the people, but we also heard how the people were not really for him (“Who made you an arbitrator between us.” And that was often kind of a drum beat mantra throughout the whole of the Exodus story. God’s answer to when Moses says, “Who am I?” is, “**I will be with you.**” And the proof of all of that will be that after you had brought them out, you will worship me on this mountain. Well, is that how we like proof to be? No, we like proof up front, don’t we. “Prove it now, and then I’ll go with you on this.” No, the proof is after all the decisions have been made, and THEN we get to the proof. We need to learn to take our focus off of what we think are our inabilities and trust that God will work through us because he has called us and he has gifted us with what we need – not what we think we need (we’ll get to that in a second) but what we really need, and what we really need, actually, is – him. And that is why God says that he will be there for him in every moment. (Ex 3:12)

Who are you?

You’d think that would be enough. Moses protests, *Yeah, but...*” In essence, he says, Moses protests, in essence, “Who are you, God?” (Ex 3:13) He actually says it in a much more tactful way, he says, what if the people come up to me and say, “Who sent you to say this to us, to lead us?” I think what Moses is really saying is, “I know you’ll be with me, but who are you that you can work with a person like me? God this is where God answers, I am who I am -- I will be whatever you need me to be, I will be your source of power, your source of comfort, your source of strength, I will be there for you. I am, who I am. and then he added, I am also the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, because they know those people, and then gave more precise instructions about who to gather

and who to tell the message to, and how it would play out with lots of reluctance from the Egyptians, but eventually they would see God's power and he would bring them out. (Ex 3:15-21)

What if they don't listen?

And with all of these reassurances, you'd think that would be enough. Moses hears all this and then says, "Yeah, but..." "What if they don't listen or believe that you have spoken to me?" (Ex 4:1) God answered by telling him to pick up a staff, which Moses did, and then through that staff, there were three different miracles that Moses conducted and so there is a reassurance of real power right then. (Ex 4:2-9)

I can't speak

And you might think that this was enough. Moses says, "Yeah, but..." "I'm not a good speaker." In fact, some theorize that he was a stutterer. (Ex 4:10) In essence, Moses is now saying, "God you have called me to do this but you have not gifted me in the areas I imagine I would need to do what you called me to do. We think we know better than God what gifts we need to accomplish a certain task. But more, we hide behind our weaknesses so can avoid doing what we know we don't want to do. (Ex 4:11-12) What is interesting is that God never says that Moses' self-evaluation of himself is wrong. Instead, God simply challenges him for making excuses and hiding behind his weaknesses. Not because Moses wrong about his weaknesses but because God -- well, this is what he said: I created you! This is how I made you. And I made you sufficient for what I want you to do. And I will teach you what to say. I made you. I will help you. We never think we have the right tools, do we? And sometimes we don't think anyone else does either. Modern day parable:

Imagine the carpenter's tools holding a conference in the work shed. [Did you hear about the blind man who picked up a hammer and saw? 😊] Back to the story. Brother hammer was presiding at the conference but several suggested he should not be the leader and should leave the meeting because he was too noisy. [knock on something as if hammering] He replied, "If I must leave, so must sister screw because you have turn her around and around and around to get her to accomplish anything." Sister screw said, "I'll leave if you want, but so must brother plane because all his work is on the surface, he had no depth to anything he does." To which Brother plane says, "Then sister rule will also have to withdraw because she is always measuring folks as if she is the only one that is ever right." Then sister rule complained about brother sandpaper, saying he was abrasive and always rubbing people the wrong way. And in the midst of all this discussion, in

walks the carpenter to start the day's work, and he went to his work bench to make a pulpit from which to proclaim the gospel, and he employed every one of the tools in different ways. And when it was all done, he had this beautiful pulpit, and then the carpenter left for the day. And sister saw rose and remarked, "I see that all of us – [did you notice it was the saw that saw?] "I see that all of us are workers together for the Lord." He has given us a great variety of gifts that complement each other, if we only allow it to happen in his hands, instead of getting all bent out of shape about our differences. He made each of us just as he needed us to be made to accomplish what he wants us to accomplish – together. Moses thought he had to be a gifted speaker to do this job that God had called him to, but God knew better what Moses really needed – a passion for relieving the pain of his people, and a plan that is guided by God's purposes.

I can't

God has now peeled away all the layers of Moses and got to the core, like good friends can do – and Moses finally ran out of excuses, ran out of all his God-doubts that were centered in his own self-doubts. So, he finally bottom-lined it: "Yeah but... Lord, forgive me. Send someone else." (Ex 4:13) Then God got mad, as friends can sometimes do with each other; and also note that in God's response that he says he was *already* sending Moses' brother Aaron who would help Moses speak for God. Already doing that. (Ex 4:15-17) And then Moses finally relented, and then led the people out of Egypt.

God doesn't give up, gets to the heart

God didn't give up on Moses. God didn't give up on his people. They were able to have an open, honest conversation, and survived the rough spots, and the rough spots that were to follow. Moses and God became so close that the people could see God's radiant presence on Moses' face after he prayed with him. (Ex 34:33-35) Moses came to care for – what were so often characterized as – "those stiff-necked, rebellious people" – so much so that he said he wouldn't go when God said he wouldn't go. Moses instead interceded for them. He loved them so much. And we didn't read this part of Jesus' story in the New Testament, but it was actually the main point of the story -- the wandering son had an older, always good and faithful brother, who unlike Moses, at least as the story ends had not come to love and celebrate the return of his stiff-necked, rebellious brother; but rather he resented him. The father told him he should celebrate because he has come from death to life, but they story is left open ended – we don't know if the older brother ever felt that way or not. And the reason it is open ended is because the author of

the story, as he recorded it, was leaving it to his readers – what are *you* going to do? What is *your* attitude going to be?

As I mentioned, Moses learned to care for the people so much that when God told him he wasn't going to go with them to the promised land, they are so awful, you just go take them. Moses said, "If you don't go, I won't go, and then this whole mission is going to be a bust.

None of these were surface-y relationships. They were able to be transparent before each other. They could express their disappointments, even their anger, and still be driven, especially on God's side – driven by the desire to love and forgive... and **we** need to hang on to that no matter what happens in our life, and compassionately live and intercede for others no matter how much we see them as "stiff-necked and rebellious people".

How does God see the news?

So, when we read the news, do we read it through what God feels for his world? Or do we look for something else? Barry says: Ask God to show you what you need to understand about the news you read. The deepest movements of our hearts, when we are touched by the joys and sorrows of others, may very well reflect the heart of God.

Does our life draw people to or drive people away from God

If God wants us to overcome fear to approach him and deal with the deeper issues in our life, then what does that say to us about how we should approach others in our world? Does our life increase or decrease people's terror of God? When they look at us and how we treat them, what does that make them think about our Lord?

In a classic sitcom from the 80s: A character was simply called "Coach". His best longtime friend has passed away in this episode. He accidentally discovers that that friend had betrayed him years earlier. This outraged because for him the pain is new and fresh, and it was a deep betrayal. He resolves to give an angry eulogy for his "friend". And as he stands in front of the people behind the podium and he glares at the man's picture that was right nearby, he can't even finish the first angry sentence. Coach's true character comes out and he continues his speech this way: "That man -- was a son of an immigrant. And like most immigrants, he was a human being. Human beings make mistakes. We're just not perfect. But I'll tell you what isn't a mistake. To love someone and forgive them no matter what their shortcomings. This is not a mistake. I loved that man. And I forgive him. And I know

that for the rest of my life, every day there is going to be a moment where I'm going to miss him. That's all I got to say." [But then we have the "older brother"]

Someone came up to him after and said, "That was beautiful. No, I mean it, Coach, that stuff you said could make me almost forgive him for what he did to me." They started talking about what he had done to him, and another overheard the conversation and very quickly the crowd changed from this idea of forgiveness no matter what to the idea of "this is what he did to me!" and before long, they had turned into an angry mob. They decided to take that cut out image and use it as an effigy and hang it to express their anger at this man. As they start to go out the door of that chapel, one of the main characters in the sitcom moves to behind the podium and simply begins to sing Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. / once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see. The mob stops in their tracks. They return and join in singing that verse again. And the show ends. (Cheers: *Coach Buries a Grudge* 2:19, 1984). If we want and expect to receive grace from God and others for our errors, does it not make logical sense that we'd also need to be able to offer that for others? just as we have received it?

Music As we prepare to receive World Communion, let's sing....

Amazing Grace

1. Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see.
2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.

Communion

Invitation Our Almighty God gathers us from the ends of the earth to feast around Christ's holy table so that by his mercy, his people may be united and renewed. This table is for all believers or those who want to become believers – both near and far. It is not a Methodist; it is not American. It is God's table of grace for all. We are called, invited, and welcomed home to share Communion together.



Confession It is because we can count on God's great loving compassion that we dare approach him with our confession of sin and failure. For our hearts are not so reliable as we would want them to be. We wander. We argue. We forget. We divide.

We have pursued our own course. God has promised us the abundance of all creation, but in greed and envy, the world goes without. He has promised us the bread of life, but in our pride and arrogance, the world goes hungry. He has promised us the waters of peace and justice, but in our violence and discord, the world goes thirsty. And now we are famished too (like the prodigal son). Almighty God, have mercy on us. Forgive us, again. Transform us again into servants of your love, by the power of your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Assurance When our plates are empty, God's generosity oversupplies. When our cups run dry, God's grace overflows. When our hearts feel barren, God's love overwhelms. We have been called and claimed by the abundance of God's grace, and by the power of God's love, our sins have been forgiven, and we may live in peace. Therefore,

Thanksgiving (Bold font – Congregation)

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is truly right and our greatest joy to give you thanks and praise, O Lord our God, creator, and ruler of the universe. Before all that is, you were there, your Word was there, your Spirit breathed into the lifeless void, and all creation sprang to life. You have made from one -- every nation and people to live on all the face of the earth. When we were in the wilderness, terrified, timid, you were there, your word was there, with manna for the day, with water from the rock, with the abundant grace upon which our story always rests. When we fell short, slaves to power and greed, you were there, your word was there, on the lips of prophets, in the rituals of the priests, and in the hearts of your people, calling us -- even now -- to acts of courage and witness and peace.

Therefore, we praise you, joining our voices with choirs of angels, with prophets, apostles, and martyrs, and with all the faithful of every time and place, who forever sing to the glory of your name:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed are you, O Christ, our Lord, for risking yourself among us, vulnerable and rejected; for teaching the radical hope of God; for teaching grace to a world bent on vengeance, teaching love to a world bent on destruction, teaching peace to a world bent on tearing itself apart. You were there, your word was there, even to the point of death itself.

Faced with terror and hatred and the brokenness of the world, you rose again, to new life, to new creation, to resurrection, that we might know something other than the dust, that we might expect something other than the end, that we might work for something other than ourselves. You commissioned us to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth and to make disciples of all nations, and today your family in all the world is joining in your holy Communion. Speak to us again, with these abundant gifts of bread and cup, with which we mourn your dying and joyfully celebrate your rising, as we await the table of the Kingdom yet to come, and as we dedicate ourselves again to you, thankful, and transformed, as living and holy sacrifices, that our lives may proclaim the one crucified and risen and the great mystery of faith:

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

Gracious God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us, and upon these your gifts of bread and cup, that the bread we break together, and the cup we share together, may retell our common stories together and reshape our common bonds together, and remember our common grace together, in the communion of the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ, the one in whose life and death you have torn down divisions., that we may be one with all who share this feast. United in thirsting for justice, united in hungering for righteousness, united in hope, in vision, in purpose, in ministry in every place. Renew our communion with your Church throughout the world and strengthen it in every nation and among every people. Send your universal church to the world with a spirit of courage, of power and of love, that throughout all of your creation, we may be faithful witnesses in your name -- to the unending story of your word, breathing life into us, keeping us faithful, and fruitful, and hopeful, and peaceful, until we come at last to the one table of your Kingdom, to feast with all your saints in the joy of your eternal realm, through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church, all honor and glory is yours, almighty Father, now and forever. We pray this through your Son Jesus Christ and in Christ, the One who came for us, died for us, and rose for us, the One who even now prays for us, the One who first taught us to pray, saying: **Lord's**

Prayer

Receiving the Bread and Cup On the night in which he gave himself up for us, 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." 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."

Communion Prayer Gracious God, we offer our thanks, for the whole communion of saints past and present, who give witness to this feast, and for the ministry of churches around the world who gather with us today. By the bread we received, may we each be restored for the work yet to come. By this cup we drank, may we each be united as children of your promise, children of your word, dying and made new again, sent boldly together into the world as servants of your peace, to fulfill that call that is at least as old as Moses – whether slaves to powers beyond our ken, or slaves to the consequences of our own doing -- to intercede with compassion and help those who are hurting. Amen.

Music God heard the cries and called Moses, he still hears those who are crying today, and he is sending people who will answer the call to be his servants, Let's stand and sing

Here I Am, Lord

I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.

All who dwell in dark and sin my hand will save.

I, who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.

Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?

[Chorus]

Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night.

I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.

I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my people's pain.

I have wept for love of them. They turn away.

I will break their hearts of stone, give them hearts for love alone.

I will speak my words to them. Whom shall I send?

[Chorus]

I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame,
I will set a feast for them. My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send?
[Chorus]

Blessing

You were welcomed to Christ's Communion table. You were nourished and united by his presence. You are sent to go into your week and into your world to represent the One who represents us in the heavenly courts. May the Spirit of power and love attend you. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ uphold you. And may the great faithfulness of our God sustain you, now and forever. Amen.

* Note: All music: CCLI # 2561297