

Straight from the "Hart"

October 16, 2022



Welcome to the Hartland UMC worship script. We are glad you are reading.

Apostle's Creed

Opening Prayer Lord, we give with thanksgiving in the hopes that our faith will grow more and more and that our love for each other will continue to increase. We offer ourselves to you in worship so that you can sustain our perseverance in faith and be among those counted worthy of the kingdom of God. We pray this according to the grace of our God and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Inspired by 2 Thessalonians 1:3-5, 12b

Call to Worship

Lay Reader: Come from the troubles that surround us and into his sanctuary of safety. Give thanks with all your heart. Praise him for his unfailing love, for his promises are backed by the honor of his reputation. When we call, he answers. He encourages us with strength. He will work out his plans for our lives because his faithful love endures forever. Let us worship him together, for the words and the ways of the Lord are great and caring. Inspired by Psalm 138



Music We return to walk in Paradise where we can call on him and he answers us and we are surrounded by his beautiful creation and each other. Let's sing...

For the Beauty of the Earth

1. For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies,
for the love which from our birth over and around us lies;
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.
2. For the beauty of each hour of the day and of the night,
hill and vale, and tree and flower, sun and moon, and stars of light;
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.
3. For the joy of ear and eye, for the heart and mind's delight,
for the mystic harmony, linking sense to sound and sight;
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

4. For the joy of human love, brother, sister, parent, child,
 friends on earth and friends above, for all gentle thoughts and mild;
 Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

Review and Theme

In the Garden of Eden, God created humanity not because he needed to, but because he wanted to have friendship with us. In that garden he gave us a vocation (a purpose). He calls us to responsibly participate in his activity.

He also gave us permission (or provision). He has blessed us with resources to use and to enjoy, so that we may gratefully fulfill that purpose that he gives us.

And he gave us prohibition – (or rule) We obediently *trust* the one who created us all and knows what is best for us and how we should live.

These three gifts must be kept in balance, or it will distort our picture of God and of life. If we focus only on purpose, without the provision, or the trust of rule, life may become dutiful work – only, and for which we may even cut moral corners to accomplish. If we focus only on provision without the purposeful work or trust of the rule, all life may become self-centered greed. If we focus only on prohibition without purposeful work and freeing provision, life may be reduced to a rigid legal code, and God is seen not as a close, trusted friend in relationship, but as an impersonal spy, jury, judge, and executioner.

Do you remember that old Sunday School song “Oh be careful little hands what you do”? and as I child, I learned that song and thought “Hmmm, “Oh be careful little hands what you because God up above is looking down” and I thought “It sounds like God is waiting just to “get us”. ... and I had a hard time justifying that lyric “be careful what you are doing” with God is looking down “in love”. I couldn’t figure that out as a kid. I was unable to jive those two ideas. But it wasn’t the song’s fault, it was because I had learned primarily the “rule”, and missed the family connection and the freedom and the provision that goes along with that – I got it out of balance.

And when we get out of balance for too long, we get authors penning these kinds of words in their fictional characters. “Violence would be a natural extension [of belief]. The Bible features a vengeful God who capriciously slaughters the creatures he creates. [A psychologist] would characterize [God] as a sociopath.” (Bones: The Memories in the Shallow Grave S7 Ep1) I hope we have a better view of God than that.

Today's theme encourages us to chase the kind of knowledge that helps us to keep our lives balanced and to learn as much as we can so that we can be better friends with God and with others. That means getting to know God and others by spending time listening, talking, reading, learning, all we can -- so we can be better with each other, this short story lifts up the danger as well as the resolution of this knowledge used wrongly and rightly.

Once upon a time, a new math teacher came to town, and a new student too. The teacher tried to make math as fun as math can be. The class learned very slowly because it was really hard for them, but the new student didn't seem to get it at all. Because he had such a hard time learning, some of the other students began to laugh and make fun of him because he wasn't as smart as they were, even though they weren't all that smart themselves. But they stopped trying to be smart and started becoming smart alecks because they found someone not as smart as them, by their perception, in that one area. But the teacher then developed a strategy in which those who were making fun of the new student were assigned the task of helping that student figure out how to learn the math. And what is interesting is that in trying to teach him how to learn, they began to understand it better themselves because they had to teach it to someone else. And they all got a lot smarter because of it.

Ray Bradbury wrote a classic novel about what happens when knowledge gets out of balance to the extreme. It takes place in an age when the job of firemen was not to put out house fires but to gather books and burn them in order to restrict people's knowledge to only what those in power wanted them to know. A resistance movement arose who memorized the great authors so that they could preserve knowledge and pass it on from one generation to the next. They became living books. Today's theme talks about the healthy pursuit for the right kind of knowledge and dangers of a wrong kind – having a “*knowing* attitude” rather than knowing. What kind of book are we going to be? There is an old saying – “Be careful how you live. You may be the only Bible some person ever reads.” (William J. Toms)

Intro to Bible Reading

This was especially true during the early days of Christianity when it was beginning to spread. This is why Paul wrote to his trainee Timothy how important it was for him to keep learning, and growing, and teaching, and living true to the message of Christ.

Bible Reading (L - Lay Reader, C – Congregation)

L: Physical fitness is good and has a certain value, but spiritual fitness is much better.

C: It is essential and promises benefits for this life and the life to come.

L: It is because of the paramount importance of the spiritual life that we work and continue to strive.

C: For we place our whole confidence and hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of all believers.

L: These convictions should be the basis of our instruction and teaching and insist that everyone learn them.

C: We will be an example in what we say, in how we conduct our life, in our love and faith, in purity and sincerity.

L: Devote yourself to reading the Scriptures to the church, to encouraging the believers and teaching them. Do not neglect your spiritual gift...

C: We will give our complete attention and all our energies to these matters, so that everyone may see our progress.

L: Watch your life and teaching closely. Persevere in staying true to what is right for the sake of your own salvation –

C: and the salvation of many hearers as well.

(Inspired by blend of 1 Timothy 4:8-16 NIV, PHILLIPS, NLT)

Music And what joyful and meaningful days that can be when we choose to be spiritually fit and live accordingly, let's sing

O Happy Day, That Fixed My Choice

1. O happy day, that fixed my choice on thee, my Savior and my God!
Well may this glowing heart rejoice, and tell its raptures all abroad.

Refrain:

Happy day, happy day, when Jesus washed my sins away!
He taught me how to watch and pray, and live rejoicing every day.
Happy day, happy day, when Jesus washed my sins away!

3. It's done: the great transaction's done! I am the Lord's and he is mine;
he drew me and I followed on, charmed to confess the voice divine.

(Refrain)

4. Now rest, my long-divided heart, fixed on this blissful center, rest.
 Here have I found a nobler part; here heavenly pleasures fill my breast.
 (Refrain)

[Prayers]

God Moments (these testimonies were not scripted here)

Music Now let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing

Breathe of Me, Breath of God

1. Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do.
2. Breathe on me, Breath of God, until my heart is pure,
until with thee I will one will, to do and to endure.
3. Breathe on me, Breath of God, till I am wholly thine,
till all this earthly part of me glows with thy fire divine.

Pastor's Prayer – Let's start with a moment of silence. Breathe deeply. Relax our postures, feel the peace and presence of God. (Pause) Lord, we are thankful for the answers to prayer that you have given. With health, with finances, with whatever is going on in our lives – and you are there, through it all, for you being with us is the most important of all. So, we come to this place of sanctuary in hopes that you will give us discernment and peace. Our world is filled with strife, greed, violence and oppression - we pray for those who suffer under them. Help us to be a people who make a difference through our prayers and actions, bringing hope by treating others as we would want to be treated. In our zealously for the task at hand, always keep before us that the people you created and love are at the other end of the desired actions and words.

Praises and Petitions Therefore we pray continue to pray for Brantley Call, his family, and all who know him well -- a young boy who remains in the hospital and they are still trying to figure out why he is having seizures. We pray for a special touch on him. * We pray for Beckie Wren and she recovers from her broken hip and from covid.* we pray for Joyce's sister in law Lynne and her heart issues, * we pray thanksgiving for Carl and Patti and their blood pressure issues, * and we are still remembering those who are affected by the hurricane in Florida.

Quilt and today for a friend of Karen Tabaka, whose name is Denise, who is a primary caregiver both for parents and an adult child, and is now dealing with her own advanced cancer...and we now dedicate this quilt for her today.

Dear Lord, today we ask for a special blessing on Karen Tabaka. We pray that she will feel the strength of your loving arms as you wrap them around her, and it will encourage her faith and perseverance through the health challenges she faces for her family and herself.

In quiet times, as she wraps this quilt around her, let your peace reign within her, and your spirit calm her. Let the love and prayers of this church bring comfort to her heart, and rest to her body. Even in the darkest of nights, remind her that God is there, always awake, keeping watch, holding her close, reserving a special place in His heart for her and for each one of us every moment of every day...reminding us that we are never alone. We pray this blessing on this quilt and for Denise, in the name of our ultimate healer, Jesus Christ our Lord.



Now Lord, grant us the power and the wisdom to make a difference in the lives of others just as you have made a difference in us each day as we strive to live the values expressed in the prayer you taught us to pray. **Lord's Prayer**

Music Last week, we were walking closely with God, in Eden, in the cool of the day. Though the song was inspired by a different story, today, let's use it to recapture that blissful time... Let's sing before the reading and sermon

In the Garden

1. I come to the garden alone while the dew is still on the roses,
and the voice I hear falling on my ear, the Son of God discloses.

Refrain:

And he walks with me, and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own;
and the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.

2. He speaks, and the sound of his voice is so sweet the birds hush their singing,
and the melody that he gave to me within my heart is ringing.

(Refrain)

3. I'd stay in the garden with him though the night around me be falling,
but he bids me go; thru the voice of woe his voice to me is calling.

(Refrain)

Intro to Bible Reading

Lay Reader: The third verse of that song seems to take on a darker tone of sadness. Since we are using it in the context of Eden, we can use that verse to describe what happens next in our Genesis story...

Bible Reading

Now the serpent was the craftiest of all the creatures the Lord God had made. One day he came to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must eat *none* of the fruit from *any* of the trees in the garden?’” The woman replied, “Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden. It is only the fruit from the tree at the *center* of the garden that God says we must not eat or even touch it or we will die.”

“That’s a lie, you’ll not die!” the serpent replied. “God knows very well that the instant you eat it you will be like God, distinguishing between good and evil.”

The woman was convinced that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious and that it was desirable for gaining wisdom, so she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband and he ate it too. And as they ate, they became aware of their nakedness and suddenly felt shame. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid themselves among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”

Genesis 3:1-9, (NIV, NLT, TLB blended)



Sermon Walking in Paradise: Abandoned

When purpose, provision, and prohibition are kept in their proper balance, we experience a joyful close connection with God and with each other. So close that God walked with them in the cool of the day. So close that the writer wrote in the verse prior to our reading, “They were both naked and they felt no shame.” The phrase means more than a lack of clothing. It means that before they were able to bear their souls, to be open and transparent before God and each other. And suddenly, everything is turned upside down. Shameless baring of the soul turns into shameful hiding. We have just *one* prohibition. Just one. “You can eat *everything* in the garden except this one choice tree.” (Pun intended -- *choice* tree you can choose, you shouldn’t choose – if you trust that God knows what is best for you -- but you chose it anyway)

People want to know all the details of this prohibition. Why was there even a prohibition in the first place? Why did God make it that way? Why did we even have a choice? Why? Why? Why? The questions just keep coming and coming. The details of the nature of the prohibition is not important.

Then people want to know all about the tree. What kind of tree was it? (It doesn't say "apple" in the Bible, by the way). Is there such a thing in the world yet? Can we find that tree? Why was that particular tree prohibited? And was there really something wrong with the tree? Seemingly, some verses almost sound like it was a pretty good tree after all... Don't get hung up on the tree. The tree -- (No pun intended there either 😊) The tree is not important.

Then people want to know about the serpent. Is it the devil, is it a personification of evil? Was it just in their head or an actual being? Is it a metaphor or literal? Was it an actual snake, or was that just a description of his character? and if it was a literal snake, how could it talk? and how did he have access to Paradise? The snake is not important.

To get caught up in the nature of all of these things is to distract us from what is really important in this story for us. For the original story writer, the story was always about one thing, and one thing only. The destruction of God's connection with his humanity. And it is still about his connection with you and me, so let's take a look at it.

The humans loved their time in the garden. You have to read between the lines a little bit but we can pretty well assume these things are true. They loved participating in their purpose. They loved their work -- caring for the vegetation and caring for the animals. They loved the innocent freedom and the resources provided to fulfill their purpose. They enjoyed life with each other, and with God. It was an innocent, safe, and a blessed place.

Being with / trusting God

They began by unquestionably trusting the wisdom of the Creator's prohibition. They loved walking with the Creator in the cool of the day. They loved being open and innocent and baring their souls before God and each other and talking about anything and everything. The prohibition was an accepted given.

Analysis about God

And then the snake hissed a new conversation into their heads. Instead of talking to God and with God; we have talk *about* God. And in this case, that God talk is not to move people toward him, but away from him. And now a "No" that was taken for granted and trusted

unquestionably is analyzed to distraction. Why is it wrong? Why that tree? If we do what we were told not to do, will what he said would happen really happen to us? And all of the questions distract and distort our reality of the simple “No.” Now, unquestioned trusting obedience with God is replaced by doubtful talk about God, about his wisdom, but even more, about his integrity, his honesty. Did he lie to us when he said what would happen to us if we touched or ate from that tree? What is he afraid of? What is his real agenda in denying us that choice fruit of the choice tree?

Faithfulness is no longer automatic but is first subjected to analysis and calculation and how this is all going to play out. God’s boundary of safety is no longer seen as something to keep us in joyful paradise, but as a barrier to work around. And they ate, and they find themselves outside of their destiny.

Inside the border

Think of a young domestic animal that wanders from the herd. Pick an animal. [cow] Okay. We have a young cow that is wandering away from the herd. Every night, the herding dogs and cattlemen – let’s do it this way: You are all the cows today. We aren’t literally going to do this but do it in your head. Every night they get you up on the platform, which is “the barn”, with its safe wall (the altar rail), and they are protected for the night. So imagine you are up here, in this place of safety, the edge of the platform is the wall of the barn, or a fence surrounding it. And outside of that are all the wolves and lions and bears (oh my), and snakes and rough terrain, all the dangers, all the temptations, all the things that are wrong in the world. But here we are up here, completely safe, protected by the One who owns the herd, and by the animals they trained to help the herd, and by the fence, and by all these things. And within this place, there is plenty of pasture, plenty of grain, plenty of water, plenty of provision to be comfortable and love life, and do what cows are supposed to do.

And yet, here we go -- looking at that fence and thinking, *How can I get around that wall?* Isn’t that how animals are sometimes? You know humans are animals, right? Do you remember that old Bill Cosby routine when he was talking about Adam and Eve? “And God said you shall not eat from the one tree”, and the first thing the human says is, [eagerly] “Where is it?” with an eagerness to go after it! We plot and plan and leap to where and what is wrong.

Outside the border

And once outside the fence, or back to the actual garden story -- once they ate, the prohibition is broken, and they

are outside the realm of this stable provision – [gesture to the platform] - because we are no longer up here -- we are out there -- where all the danger is -- outside the realm of stable provision and into a world of treacherous “freedom” that isn’t really freedom, and where they have no resources, or energy, or space to fulfill their purpose.



They found out the hard way that exchanging innocent trust and connection with the Creator for a *self-focused knowledge* wasn’t all it was cracked up to be. They found out that the rule wasn’t just an arbitrary rule that we need to try and break and get around -- but it was a limitation that was formed out of God’s wise compassion for our own best interest. Humanity wasn’t built for the pressure of taking life into their own hands apart from the safety of the garden and the Creator.

Now they knew the rule and the deadly consequences for disobedience. They hardly gave it a second thought, initially, before the serpent. Much like we walk in some big complex and pass a door that says “Dangerous Hazard Area, Authorized Personnel Only” – How many of you are really tempted to go through that door? [Laughter] Nobody. And yet when we walk in a group, there is often one who says, “I wonder what is behind that door? I wonder if it is really bad, I wonder if there is something else back there, and they just don’t want us to see and so they put that fake sign up there? And suddenly, what we hadn’t given a first thought, we can’t get out of our heads anymore. Analyzing, second-guessing, challenging, wondering, doubting. The serpent takes some minor thing we wouldn’t normally give a second thought and now we obsess over it like it was the only thing in life that mattered, and we feel like we have no choice but to break through that door and see if it is really hazardous or not. And we find out the door is just what it said, we find ourselves in a place where we experience all the hazards and terrors of life – in the New Testament Paul still called it the last enemy to be defeated - death. (1 Corinthians 15:26) But even more than death, a life of peace and safety and transparency has been exchanged for a life of anxiety, fear, and worry and shame. This story is not just a story of the first couple – only -- it is all our stories, born in innocence and making the fatal choice of living outside the boundaries.

More on that next week, but for now, we need to get to the good news. Even though we have chosen to abandon Paradise and live outside the fence, know that

God remains the true Gardener, and he has come out with us and he, in his wise passion is not undone by our failing and falling. He still cares for his garden and his people, and the world is still subject to living on God's terms.

He still gardens and herds. He still calls for us, still gives us a chance, still seeks to bring us back -- back into that kind of close connection with him again. Remember, this is what this was all about! Connection with God. We thought God was hiding something and keeping something from us that we deserved to have - - we knew different and better than God. Well, now we found out it isn't better and different, and we didn't know better than God.

God Restores us

Ian Thomas put it this way: we are no longer what God created and intended humanity to be -- we are alienated from our Creator. It is only God who can restore that right relationship, so therefore we are left with no option but to go after and find God and to *know* him again, and to let him be in us and work through us. We cannot do this in our own strength any more than a car can go without gas, or a kerosene lamp can give light without fuel. You'll go nowhere fast, and you'll stay in the dark if you try to do it on your own. To function properly, you need oil in the lamp, gas in the car, *and Christ in the Christian*. It is only by God's work (in Christ) that we can be fully human again and once again become the creatures we were created to be -- with purposeful work, provisional freedom and prohibitions that are passionately, wisely constructed by the One who created those rules for our own good.

So, let me sum this up by asking these simple application questions.

- 1) How well do we balance (a) tireless good deeds (our purpose) with (b) a grateful appreciation for his equipping and provision of resources to do those good deeds? and with (c) a willingness to obediently trust in his boundaries? Or do we overly focus on -- or ignore -- one of those three things?
- 2) Do our studies, meditations, discussions and questions about God, church and faith -- draw us into a closer personal connection with God, or do our spiritual conversations work to distract us from relationship to God and others, and so holds God at a "safe" distance? For example, Let's talk about the tree? Not about what that tree says about my relationship with God. Let's talk about the serpent and the problem of evil in the world -- but not about the evil that is within me. What kind of conversations are we having with ourselves, with God, and with each other? Do they draw us together or do they just kind of keep us apart because it is something abstract, out there, that doesn't really hit our lives?

3) Finally, I'll sum it up by two passages in the New Testament that have this distinction between good knowledge and bad knowledge. 1 Corinthians 8:1b-3 says, and it is on the front of our bulletin: *we all have knowledge, but knowledge puffs up* (egos). This is the kind of knowledge they looked for and found in the garden, and the Corinthians found – as a means of feeling superior to everyone else because they *thought* they knew better – “I’m not good at math, but I know math better than him, and that is all that matters!” (no)) It puffs up and it divides. Paul goes on to say: *If you think you know something, you don’t know as you ought to know -- but whoever loves God is known by God.* (That’s the kind of knowledge we need – knowing God knowing others – building closer relationships). So Paul tells the Romans (15:14) that he is convinced that the they are *full of goodness, filled with knowledge, and competent to instruct.* And he wrote to Timothy what we heard in the responsive reading to never stop striving to learn and know and grow.

Two kinds of knowledge 1) Puffs up walls

There are two kinds of knowledge. We all know people who know, or think they know, or pretend they know -- everything, right? And they use that knowledge to show off how much they “know”, or to argue with everything you say, or to needlessly correct others, or to change topics, or to divert and distract. I’ve already given you examples from the particulars of the Genesis story that get us away from what the real story is about. we talk in the abstract about the particulars of the Genesis story. Sometimes they do it brilliantly – there are theories and books on these things -- but with the consequence may be that we never get around to actually applying it to our lives because we aren’t paying attention to the heart of what the story means – only looking at little details and analyzing it to death. This is the knowledge that Adam and Eve discovered, and that some of the Corinthians proudly puffed themselves up with -- pretending to know it all -- and it detracted from the relationship that they had with God and others. It built walls.

Two kinds of knowledge 2) Builds Bridges

And then there are others who know what they know, but they use and present that knowledge in ways that others also become eager to learn and apply it to their lives. This knowledge leads to increased discernment and developing relationships with God and others.

So the final question of the day is, do we use knowledge to build ourselves up -- and sometimes to tear others down -- or to distract ourselves from God and others

– or do we use knowledge to better fulfill God’s calling us -- to our purpose, our proper use of his provision, and following his wise prohibitions, his rule and way and guidance? or do we use our knowledge to sidestep all of it?

Let’s pray.

Prayer Lord, we all know how we want to answer that question. We know what the right answer is in our heads. That we like to keep our destiny in proper balance, that everything we do will draw ourselves and others to you, that we desire to be more open and honest and transparent...we all want to humbly use our knowledge helpfully so that your world will be lovingly built, and relationships connected, and we all want to avoid those doors that lead to spiritual dangers and disasters.

But part of having to live outside the garden, outside of the fence, means that we do not always realize what we are doing -- so continue to teach us and guide us and illuminate us and call us to say and be and do what you desire. Remind us that it is as we return to complete trust and obedience that we find joy, your joy. And we know that that return is only possible because your compassionate, faithful, grace that is not deterred by our failures. We can yet again, and again, and if necessary, yet again -- turn to you and count on your gracious love shown in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, that we can press on, and move towards more maturity in you, and it is in the name of Jesus Christ that we pray this. Amen.

Music Paul told Timothy one of the most important things for us to know is spiritual fitness which comes by placing our certain hope in [the grace of] the living God who is the Savior of all, and that love and grace is proved by what Jesus did on the cross – it can and will save us from every setback and failure, and it is freely given to all who believe and trust in him.. Let’s sing

Grace Greater Than Our Sin

1. 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!

2. 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

3. 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

4. Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace, freely bestowed on all who believe!
You that are longing to see his face, will you this moment his grace receive?

Refrain

Blessing And so as we leave this place strengthened by God's presence, know he goes with us as we fulfill his purpose by his provision in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Some ideas were gleaned from

- ~ "The Indwelling Life of Christ: All of Him in All of Me" by Major W. Ian Thomas.
- ~ "Genesis" by Walter Brueggemann.