

# *Straight from the "Hart"*

November 20, 2022 – Thanksgiving

Reign of Christ the King Sunday



Welcome to the Hartland United Methodist Church Service Script.

**Opening Prayer** Lord, we know that your love will make more of a difference than our planning. May your love guide us to make good decisions to accomplish your purposes and spread your love. Now may our prayer and praise rise to you like the sun rises in the sky. As with each new dawn, in each new time of worship together, may you renew our trust in you, our delight to offer mercy, and our gladness to be in your presence, and an eagerness to fulfill you purpose. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Adapted from 2 prayers Herb Mather © 2002 GBOD  
and © 2006 Larry Peacock (ad.) Upper Room Books;  
both in UM Worship & Song, Leader's Ed. [W& S]

## **Call to Worship**

Lay Reader: We have gathered because God's mercy goes beyond our weaknesses and unearths the good; -- transforming us so that when all is said and done, our personal, temporary, treasures will mean nothing compared to what we have done in the name of God's eternal love. So come and worship, that we may do our best to live our lives for God. Let's begin with an affirmation of thanksgiving for God and his creation.

**Affirmation** (L - Lay Reader C - Congregation with Pastor)

L: Give thanks for the people gathered around us today. Give thanks for the things of the earth that give to us the provision of life.

**C: We give thanks for the plants, animals, and birds that we use as food and medicine.**

L: Give thanks for the natural world, in which we find the means to be clothed and housed.

**C: We give thanks for the ability to use these gifts of the natural world.**

L: May God guide us to see our place among these gifts, not to squander them or think of them as a means for selfish gain.

**C: We will respect the life of all God has made. Our spirits will be strengthened by using only what we need, and by using our strength to help those who need us.**

Ad. from Sue Ellen Herne, Mohawk, 20th cent., alt. in UM Book of Worship

**Music** A couple weeks ago we mentioned Saint Francis of Assisi. Among other things, he emphasized that it is our duty to protect and enjoy nature both as stewards of God's creation and as his creatures ourselves. His hymn rejoices in the environment in which God has placed us and encourages us to unite with nature and each other in worship of God's loving care. Let's sing...

### **All Creature of Our God and King**

Words: Francis of Assisi, ca. 1225 trans. by William H Draper 1925. Ad 1987  
 Music: Geistliche Kirchengesane, 1623; harm. by Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1906  
 ad. © 1989 The UM Publishing House

1. All creatures of our God and King, lift up your voice and with us sing,  
     O praise ye! Alleluia!

O brother sun with golden beam, O sister moon with silver gleam!  
     O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

4. Dear mother earth, who day by day unfoldest blessings on our way,  
     Alleluia! Alleluia!

The flowers and fruits that in thee grow, let them God's glory also show!  
     O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

5. All ye who are of tender heart, forgiving others, take your part,  
     O praise ye! Alleluia!

Ye who long pain and sorrow bear, praise God and on him cast your care!  
     O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

7. Let all things their Creator bless, and worship him in humbleness,  
     O praise ye! Alleluia!

Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son, and praise the Spirit, Three in One!  
     O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

**Theme** One of my favorite parts of nature is the night sky. One of the ones who had the privilege of venturing out into it just a very little bit, Astronaut James Irwin said -- The earth reminded us of a Christmas tree ornament, hanging in the blackness of space. As we got farther and farther away, it diminished in size. Finally, it shrank to the size of a marble, the most beautiful marble you can imagine. That beautiful, warm, living object looked so fragile, so delicate, that if you touched it with a finger, it would crumble and fall apart. Seeing this has to change a [person], has to make [them] appreciate the creation of God and the love of God.

I think most of us have gathered today out of an appreciation for who God is, and how he has designed us to be with him, and for the general gifts that he has given us in loving limitations, ample provision and a meaningful purpose, for which he

has given each of us specific gifts and abilities. And it is by his grace in Christ that we find our purpose in seeking to reclaim, as close as we can get to it -- the paradise he wants to bring back to in our life and in our world.

So each week we gather to ask God's blessing, to remember him and he us, to be at our side to guide us and defend us and praise him as he makes us free. Listen to Donna and Kathy and they play for us the tune that contains those kinds of requests in the song, "We Gather Together"

### **Special Instrumental Music We Gather Together**

#### **Intro to Responsive Bible Reading**

Lay Reader: Paul was very thankful for his close friends in Philippi (Fah lip eye), and he encourages them to be thankful for the grace that they have received. Yet some began to teach them that if they were going to be God's people, they would have to follow Jewish laws. Paul saw this as a defiance of grace and faith and a futile attempt to earn God's salvation. He lists for them all the laws he had fulfilled, the lineage he had, and passionate pursuit of faith



that he had lived. If anyone could be saved by heart motivated accomplishments and a spotless record, he could. Yet this is what he concludes –

#### **Responsive Bible Reading (L: Lay Reader, C: Congregation)**

**L:** But Christ has shown us that whatever we used to count as our greatest accomplishments, we've written them off as a worthless loss.

**C:** **We now realize that all that we gained, and thought was important, is counted as nothing but yesterday's garbage compared to knowing Christ Jesus our Lord.**

**L:** It is for him that we have given them all up and thrown everything aside [as] a pile of waste.

**C:** **For all we want is to gain Christ and to know we belong to him.**

**L:** We could not make ourselves acceptable to God by our own righteousness based on law, but we are made good by believing in Christ and actively relying on the faithfulness of Christ.

**C:** **God accepted us only by our faith in Christ.**

**L:** We want to know Christ [intimately] and the power that raised him to life.

**C: We want to be like him in his suffering and death that we may arrive -- safely raised to life.**

L: We have not yet reached our goal or become perfect.

**C: But Christ has taken a hold of us and won't let go.**

L: Therefore, we keep on running hard to gain what Jesus has in store for us.

**C: That is why Christ saved us.**

L: [If this is so, that it is not by our plans and accomplishments, but by faith in the God who displays through his Son his power over the affairs of this world and over death and life, then] --- you should know better than to make your plans and say, "In the next few days, we will go to this city. We will stay there for a year and buy and sell and make a lot of money."

**C: The reality is, we do not know what will happen to us tomorrow.**

L: How can we be so sure about our life? We are like a mist that appears for only a little while and then vanishes. Yet in our pride, we arrogantly brag about the big things we will do.

**C: We do not acknowledge the One who controls the Universe.**

L: This kind of big talking is the epitome of evil. [Instead], you should say,

**C: "If it is the Lord's will and we live long enough, we hope to do this project or pursue that dream."**

Philippians 3:4-12, See James 4:13-14,16,15

**Music** Paul and James make it clear that our time and our plans are in the hands of our timeless creating God. Let's recognize that truth by singing.

### **O God Our Help in Ages Past**

Words: Isaac Watts, 1719 Music: Attr. to William Croft., 1708  
harm. by WH Monk, 1861

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.

**[Prayers]**

**God Moments** (were not scripted)

**Music** Let's celebrate his loving leadership over our lives on this -- "Reign of Christ the King Sunday" -- as we prepare our hearts for prayer. Let's sing

### **We Will Glorify the King of Kings**

Words: Twila Paris Music: Twila Paris © 1982 Singspiration Music  
CCLI # 2561297

1. We will glorify the King of kings, we will glorify the Lamb;  
we will glorify the Lord of lords, who is the great I AM.
3. He is Lord of heaven, Lord of earth, he is Lord of all who live;  
he is Lord above the universe, all praise to Him we give

**Pastor's Prayer** Lord, You have been at work in our world since its conception. Your light shines brighter than the sun, and your power outlasts the strongest of nations. We see you in nature, we see you in children, we see you in people of all ages. And when we see you, we give thanks to you for the wonders that you have created. Shine in our hearts, in our worship, and in our dealings with others.

**Praises and Petitions** Today especially we pray for those who are hurting in any way and are in need of healing or continued healing. We are thankful for the praises that we have heard from our congregation, and the joy we have from just being together in this house, and watching from home. We pray for Jim Mallot who went to the hospital this week. We continue to pray for \* Mary Jo Bell's friend Denese for recovery from broken bones, \* for Brian and Judy Holmes, \* for Linda Gordonier's cousin Ray, \* and for Becky's cousin Julie and her husband Brian, and \* for Kathy Novak's friend Beverly Wilkinson and those who are surrounding her \* and there are others that are on our hearts and minds as well, so we pause a moment, to lift these up to you as well. [Pause]

Lord, teach us how to honor you in our lives, to forgive others and ourselves by your grace, to do your will, to rely on you for our daily bread, and follow you away from temptation and evil. In short, to let our lives get traction in living out the prayer you taught us to pray. **Lord's Prayer**

### **Intro to Bible Reading**

Lay Reader: So on this Thanksgiving and Reign of Christ the King Sunday, Paul gives thanks to God. He quotes a hymn that celebrates the reign of Jesus, first as the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, and also as the head of the church, as the one who restores our peace with God by what He accomplished on the cross. Paul reminds them



of their journey to God and that their true purpose as his people is to make known the secret of true faith. He writes:

### **Bible Reading**

At one time you were far away from God. You were at odds with God, wicked in your ways, and your evil thoughts made you his enemies. But his Son became a human and died on a cross and has brought you back to God. So God made peace with you... This message is about the mystery of the ages! It was kept secret from people who lived in all the past times of the world. But now it has been revealed to God's people. God decided to make known his wonderful and glorious blessing to the nations. The mysterious plan is that -- *Christ – lives - in - you*. He is your hope in sharing in all the wonderful things that are to come. [Therefore] we announce the message about Christ. We warn everyone to be careful to live the right way. We teach everyone so that all of Christ's followers will grow and become fully mature in Christ. This is why I work so hard with all of the strength of God's amazing power and energy that surges within me. (Colossians 1:21-22a,26-29)

**Music** As God's people, then the goal is to reveal to others that Christ lives victoriously in us and can be seen in us as by our words and actions, we reveal who we worship and what he can do in a person's life. Let's stand and sing.

### **Ye Servants of God**

Words: Charles Wesley, 1744 Music: Attr. to William Croft, 1708

1. Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim,  
and publish abroad his wonderful name;  
the name all-victorious of Jesus extol,  
his kingdom is glorious and rules over all.
2. God ruleth on high, almighty to save,  
and still he is nigh, his presence we have;  
the great congregation his triumph shall sing,  
ascribing salvation to Jesus, our King.
3. "Salvation to God, who sits on the throne!"  
Let all cry aloud and honor the Son;  
the praises of Jesus the angels proclaim,  
fall down on their faces and worship the Lamb.
4. Then let us adore and give him his right,  
all glory and power, all wisdom and might;  
all honor and blessing with angels above,  
and thanks never ceasing and infinite love.

## Sermon

It is fitting as we come to the end and pinnacle of the Christian year – Did you know that next week is the new year for Christians? The beginning of Advent is the beginning of the Christian year. And so the end of the year, today, culminates in Christ's ultimate victory over all, so it is fitting that we have one walk in Paradise today. By God's Spirit, we receive the gifts he gave us in the garden by once again following his loving limitations, finding the peace of relying on his provision, and today we receive again the final gift -- exchanging the difficult emptiness of toiling labor for the joy of purposeful work in his strength. But most of all, the restoration of all these gifts come by God's grace in Christ through whom we can receive a renewed and growing relationship with God, All of these things were said or implied in what we just heard Jerry read for us... Let's build a picture of that relationship between us and God's energy within us.

I have here a nail. Nails penetrate and become the “glue” that holds things together. The problem with nails is that, unless they are powered, they can't penetrate much of anything. They might join a box of nails. The nails in the box may inspire each other about what they can become, they can talk about what they ought to do, and they can dream about what their future may hold. But ultimately, none of that in and of itself fulfills the purpose of the nail. Until they are chosen by the builder, they cannot fulfill their purpose. (In John 15:16a – Jesus says you did not choose me, I chose you and appointed you that you might go and bear fruit that will last) , or in our imagery – “go and -- hold something together”, and we cannot fulfill that purpose until it is powered by some -- hammering force. But before that happens, the best they can do is huddle together (box up) and show off how shiny they all are -- and perhaps even get a little rusty while they lay around.

Even when the Creator picks one up for some purpose, nails still have a choice, don't they? They can disobediently duck away – you ever have that nail that you just can't seem to ever hit? That causes great pain to the empowering creator. Sometimes the nail is too forceful, pushing its way through the material and splinters it at great frustration to the Creator. Sometimes, the nail refuses to be used, bending to their own will (you've had those nails that flop over or bend sideways rather than going in and becoming an instrument of the Creator's reconstruction of his creation.



But all this laying around, boxing oneself up, ducking, forcing, and bending -- leaves nails empty and unfulfilled because they have not found the purpose of what they are truly created to be and do. True joy comes when the nail chooses to cooperate with the hammering force of God and is driven into some meaningful purpose in his constructive plan...

### Restoring our Purpose

- \* ~~Box up~~
- \* ~~Lay around~~
- \* ~~Duck away~~
- \* ~~Force through~~
- \* ~~Bend over~~
- \* **Cooperate**

We start moving back to Paradise when, as Ian Thomas describes it, we believe that Christ died to forgive us from our sins, not only to change our destination when we die, but we that he rose to life to change the way we live here and now. Jesus wants to re-inhabit us, giving us a lifetime of allowing him to live in us and do his work through us. That's why I chose this particular "box" of nails – they aren't ordinary nails – you can tell because they have an orange thing on the end of them. These are special nails that aren't normally used directly with a hammer. There is a power-nailer that goes in-between. Do you know how these things work? You put the nail in one end of the power nailer, you put – for lack of better word, I'll call it a bullet in the middle of the nailer, then you put the nail where you want it to go and you hit a button on the other end of the nailer, which triggers the "bullet" which drives the nail into – with that kind of force, pretty much anything. I used it to connect wood to concrete, and it holds really well. But my point is – there is a lot of power in the hammering force of God that makes the nail fulfill its purpose. (Not usually a negative nailing force.)

Jesus can powerfully restore us to our true humanity and purposeful function. So, the degree that his redemptive purpose is accomplished in us is the same degree that we are what he is. We are like him. We say is what he says, we do is what he does. The more we are like him the more we are redeemed.

**His life lives in us**

Christ came to earth to reveal what God is like and how humanity is supposed to be. He surrendered his will and work to the Father's wishes. This is what Jesus did: "Not my will but thine be done". And because Jesus desired to fulfill God's purposes most thoroughly through him, Jesus' life gives a true reflection of the nature of the heavenly Father. In the same way that Jesus did this with his heavenly Father within him; our lives become an expression of the life of Christ who is in us. So people look at our lives and they see our lives, they see Christ.



So as Jesus did, we do – we surrender our will and work to Christ’s wishes, and in so doing fulfill God’s purposes through us. Have you recently offered yourself to God’s transforming will? (Romans 12:1-2)

The Spirit equips us and empowers us (E.g. 1 Corinthians 12:4 ff) to fulfill our purpose just as the hammer and bullet equip and empower the nail. But the force of the heavenly hammer is rarely painful (I’ve never heard a nail yell back, have you?) even when in resistance, even when boxed up, even when we lay down, even when we duck away, even when we use splintering force, or bend away from God’s intended direction for our life. He is still gentle with us and still tries to bring us back to where we need to be so that we can be purposefully used again.

In the long run, God’s presence and power, while he is indeed a driving force, he is also a hopeful force and a healing force and gives a purpose which leads to true joy.

So now we come to the story of today: Numbers 13 and 14. We are nearing the edge of the promised land. Remember we started in Eden (here on the platform), we got kicked out of Eden and went down to the other Hall, where we were slaves in Egypt. Then the platform wasn’t Eden anymore, but it was as close as we could get to it – the promised land, and now we are getting close.

God wants to give the people a foretaste of what awaits them in that glorious, divine land. He instructs Moses to choose one leader from each of the 12 ancestral tribes of Israel. They were sent as scouts to explore and observe the land for 40

**PROVISION**

days. They returned and reported to the assembled people. Joshua and Caleb understood that God was providing this paradise for them. They showed the people a grape cluster that was so large that two men had to carry them on a pole straddled between their shoulders, (reminds me of Peter and the Wolf near the end of the story when the wolf is hanging upside down, tied to two poles that were on the shoulders of two of his captors – this big, big cluster of grapes that had to be carried on a pole between two men -- not to mention the pomegranates and figs that demonstrated the lushness of the crops of the land. (There is God’s provision).



**PROHIBITION**

It was here where they could live out their covenant with God where he would protect them. (There is God's loving prohibitions meant so they could thrive).

**PURPOSE**

These two scouts boldly claimed that they should follow God's clear direction and enter the promised land and be his people for the sake of the world. (There is God's purpose).

**WITH GOD**

They could return to (a form of paradise) where they could live in loving relationship with their God. (There is God's relationship that is the essence of it all). So we have two promising reports.

Then there were 10 other scouts. They admitted it was a lush land flowing with milk and honey. But they saw heavily populated and massive fortified cities, filled with larger, stronger people – descendants of ~~WITH GOD~~ giants. A land that would devour them as a people. They said they felt like grasshoppers in the presence of these natives, and those natives probably looked at them like grasshoppers as well, just insignificant little insects. They did not see God's promise and presence. (Scratch the relationship with God)

They began to repeat to everyone who would listen this negative fear-building terror, and it spread throughout the people. The ~~PROVISION~~ people began to focus on circumstances rather than God and concluded that they would die by the sword, and their wives and children would be taken by the enemy, and become their enslaved property. (So much for God's provision)

And so, the chant of the people became, once again -- why did you lead us out of Egypt to here? Why couldn't we at least die in this ~~PURPOSE~~ wilderness? Why did we come all this way only to be slaughtered? (There goes purpose plummeting down the hillside)

Therefore, they decided they were not going to follow God's ~~PROHIBITION~~ direction and trust in his promises to enter paradise. Instead, they were going to elect a new leader to take them back to Egypt. (There goes the loving limitations – they disobeyed again, thinking they knew better than God). They were losing Paradise all over again.

Moses and Aaron fell face down in humble mourning. Joshua and Caleb also ripped their robes (that was a sign of mourning in their day) over this terrible decision and argued that it is in their best interest not to rebel against the Lord who was giving them this land, and to not be afraid of the circumstances but to rely on the Lord's presence with them. He has carried them all the way through the sea

and through this wilderness. The people responded to all of this message through Moses and Aaron and Joshua and Caleb -- by wanting to stone them -- to get them out of the way.

Then the Lord spoke to Moses. And God wondered how long he would put up with people who refuse to accept him and his paradise. Moses intercedes for the people, saying to God that his world-wide reputation for his miraculous working power that led them out of Egypt and all the wonders that he has done -- all of that reputation would fall flat and be destroyed if, in the end, he failed to bring his people into the promised land.

And then there is a declaration of God's eternal character -- slow to anger, abounding in love, forgiving sin and rebellion (but still suffering consequences for bad decisions). Moses asks God to forgive the people just as he has repeatedly done throughout the exodus journey. God does forgive, but he also leaves them to the consequences of their choices. They were not going to make it into the promised land. The children (that they claimed would become slaves) -- those were the ones who would inherit the promised land. The exception would be Caleb (and Joshua). They had a different spirit and had followed God wholeheartedly, and they would make it in.

Think about how hard that would be. Two out of twelve stood up to say, "Hey, this is a good thing!" While ten out of twelve said, "Be afraid! Be very afraid." We know even from modern politics that the message of fear is much more powerful than the promise of "let's work through this challenge and we might see a good thing at the other end." Right? That's why all we ever hear are negative things "Look out if they happen to get in -- or don't get in." Nevertheless, Caleb and Joshua did not give up.

Meanwhile, Moses came back and reported to the people about his intercession with God, how they would not reach the promised land, but their children would. When the people heard this, *then they* were the ones who began to mourn. Then they decided they would go capture paradise after all, once again ignoring the limitations God have given them, for God had already said this land was not for them anymore -- their children would inherit the land, but they were not to cross this boundary -- the line was drawn in the desert sand, and they were outside of it.

Moses tried to warn them against trying to force their purpose and gain provision by their own hands. This is the Garden of Eden story all over again. They were determined to do it their way without God's blessing or permission. They began to

go up into the hills where the enemies were without Moses, without the ark, which they understood represented God's presence and was to always lead the way. And those large powerful people living in the hill country came down and beat them back in a complete and horrific defeat. In essence, like Adam and Eve, they were evicted from Eden for thinking they could do it without God.

Oswald Chambers wrote in his book "My Utmost for His Highest", that the greatest thing, the most important thing for us to remember is that when we go forward into our future, we go to fulfill God's purpose, not our own. In the life of sin, our ambitions are our own, but in the Christian life, we have no goals of our own. Our goals are God's goals. We talk a lot about what *we* have decided for Christ, and about *our* determination to be his followers, *our* decisions for this and *our* decisions for that. But in the New Testament, the only aspect that is brought out is the compelling purpose of God. All our noble decisions and actions and what we think is right for us fades to nothing when compared to God's goals for us. (See James 4:13-16 Philippians 3:4-12) We heard that in the responsive bible reading earlier today.

Dr. David Aikman wrote, "Each of us has a purpose, a reason for being here, that no one else can tell you, but you can find out from God." In specific application, that is very true -- there may be individual roles and ministries according to specific gifts God has chosen to give each one of you for this time of your life. And you need to discover and rediscover what those things are.

But generally speaking, the purpose of every Christian is to enjoy God's presence and be so connected with him that we are eager to do his will, calmly rely on his provision to such a degree that when people look at us they see Christ. If we try to do it in our own strength, we will be as effective as the people who disobediently headed for paradise when the way was not yet prepared (or as the nail that just stayed in the box, or got out of the box and tried to force itself into something when it had no real power behind it). And they were splintered by trying to force themselves in when they were meant to stay out.

**Christ lives and works through us**

But when we are in tune with his timing and instruction, when we put forth every effort *by the strength of Christ working in our life*, then, when we are at our best, people whom God has chosen to open their spiritual eyes -- they will see this mysterious, yet rich and glorious truth -- that Christ lives in and through his people. Other people will see it, if the Spirit allows them to see it and they don't close their eyes

to it. We will experience a form of paradise in our life and maybe even a foretaste of paradise in our world, and a foretaste of what heaven might be like when all this takes place in our lives. So, the last question is, do we let Christ live and work through us? Can we grow with God even when it seems like everyone else seems to be against him? Can we still be bold enough to say, “this is a promised land?”

**Prayer** Let’s pray. Lord, it is so easy to hide behind what we like to think are important things ... but they are not important to you. When everything is removed but the core of who we are, what remains? Without your grace we are just another smile, another face, another fleeting breath, a grain of sand passing quickly through .... So, we give our lives, take it all, everything – take it as a living offering pleasing to you. Then when and who you choose, they will see you in each of us, they will hear you when we speak, they will feel you as we live out your purposes, and our lives will become music to those still seeking to find the rhythm of their life in you. And it is in the name of Jesus and for his sake we pray this. Amen.

**Music** So restored to our godly purpose, we bring Christ to his world by the (metaphorical) music of our life – I know some of us aren’t “music people”, but we all have a song to sing, so to speak (even if it is not “musical”)-- the melody that our lives proclaim by our actions and our words, inspiring others to see and receive the spiritual healing of Christ. Let’s stand and sing.

### **Christ for the World We Sing**

Words: Samuel Wolcott, 1869 Music: Felice de Giardini, 1769

1. Christ for the world we sing, the world to Christ we bring, with loving zeal;  
the poor, and them that mourn, the faint and overborne,  
sinsick and sorrow-worn, whom Christ doth heal.
2. Christ for the world we sing, the world to Christ we bring, with fervent prayer;  
the wayward and the lost, by restless passions tossed,  
redeemed at countless cost, from dark despair.
4. Christ for the world we sing, the world to Christ we bring, with joyful song;  
the newborn souls, whose days, reclaimed from error's ways,  
inspired with hope and praise, to Christ belong.

**Blessing** God has given us new eyes to see Jesus Christ in others. May we also, by our openness to him, reveal him to others. By the limitations we respect, the provision we receive, and the purpose in which we rejoice, but especially by his ever-present relationship with us. Amen.

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**Music** A couple weeks ago we mentioned Saint Francis of Assisi. Among other things, he emphasized that it is our duty to protect and enjoy nature both as stewards of God's creation and as his creatures ourselves. His hymn rejoices in the environment in which God has placed us and encourages us to unite with nature and each other in worship of God's loving care. Let's sing...

### **All Creature of Our God and King**

Words: Francis of Assisi, ca. 1225 trans. by William H Draper 1925. Ad 1987  
 Music: Geistliche Kirchengesane, 1623; harm. by Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1906  
 ad. © 1989 The UM Publishing House

1. All creatures of our God and King, lift up your voice and with us sing,  
     O praise ye! Alleluia!

O brother sun with golden beam, O sister moon with silver gleam!  
     O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

4. Dear mother earth, who day by day unfoldest blessings on our way,  
     Alleluia! Alleluia!

The flowers and fruits that in thee grow, let them God's glory also show!  
     O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

5. All ye who are of tender heart, forgiving others, take your part,  
     O praise ye! Alleluia!

Ye who long pain and sorrow bear, praise God and on him cast your care!  
     O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

7. Let all things their Creator bless, and worship him in humbleness,  
     O praise ye! Alleluia!

Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son, and praise the Spirit, Three in One!  
     O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

**Theme** One of my favorite parts of nature is the night sky. One of the ones who had the privilege of venturing out into it just a very little bit, Astronaut James Irwin said -- The earth reminded us of a Christmas tree ornament, hanging in the blackness of space. As we got farther and farther away, it diminished in size. Finally, it shrank to the size of a marble, the most beautiful marble you can imagine. That beautiful, warm, living object looked so fragile, so delicate, that if you touched it with a finger, it would crumble and fall apart. Seeing this has to change a [person], has to make [them] appreciate the creation of God and the love of God.

I think most of us have gathered today out of an appreciation for who God is, and how he has designed us to be with him, and for the general gifts that he has given us in loving limitations, ample provision and a meaningful purpose, for which he

has given each of us specific gifts and abilities. And it is by his grace in Christ that we find our purpose in seeking to reclaim, as close as we can get to it -- the paradise he wants to bring back to in our life and in our world.

So each week we gather to ask God's blessing, to remember him and he us, to be at our side to guide us and defend us and praise him as he makes us free. Listen to Donna and Kathy and they play for us the tune that contains those kinds of requests in the song, "We Gather Together"

### **Special Instrumental Music We Gather Together**

#### **Intro to Responsive Bible Reading**

Lay Reader: Paul was very thankful for his close friends in Philippi (Fah lip eye), and he encourages them to be thankful for the grace that they have received. Yet some began to teach them that if they were going to be God's people, they would have to follow Jewish laws. Paul saw this as a defiance of grace and faith and a futile attempt to earn God's salvation. He lists for them all the laws he had fulfilled, the lineage he had, and passionate pursuit of faith



that he had lived. If anyone could be saved by heart motivated accomplishments and a spotless record, he could. Yet this is what he concludes –

#### **Responsive Bible Reading (L: Lay Reader, C: Congregation)**

**L:** But Christ has shown us that whatever we used to count as our greatest accomplishments, we've written them off as a worthless loss.

**C:** **We now realize that all that we gained, and thought was important, is counted as nothing but yesterday's garbage compared to knowing Christ Jesus our Lord.**

**L:** It is for him that we have given them all up and thrown everything aside [as] a pile of waste.

**C:** **For all we want is to gain Christ and to know we belong to him.**

**L:** We could not make ourselves acceptable to God by our own righteousness based on law, but we are made good by believing in Christ and actively relying on the faithfulness of Christ.

**C:** **God accepted us only by our faith in Christ.**

**L:** We want to know Christ [intimately] and the power that raised him to life.



**C: We want to be like him in his suffering and death that we may arrive -- safely raised to life.**

L: We have not yet reached our goal or become perfect.

**C: But Christ has taken a hold of us and won't let go.**

L: Therefore, we keep on running hard to gain what Jesus has in store for us.

**C: That is why Christ saved us.**

L: [If this is so, that it is not by our plans and accomplishments, but by faith in the God who displays through his Son his power over the affairs of this world and over death and life, then] --- you should know better than to make your plans and say, "In the next few days, we will go to this city. We will stay there for a year and buy and sell and make a lot of money."

**C: The reality is, we do not know what will happen to us tomorrow.**

L: How can we be so sure about our life? We are like a mist that appears for only a little while and then vanishes. Yet in our pride, we arrogantly brag about the big things we will do.

**C: We do not acknowledge the One who controls the Universe.**

L: This kind of big talking is the epitome of evil. [Instead], you should say,

**C: "If it is the Lord's will and we live long enough, we hope to do this project or pursue that dream."**

Philippians 3:4-12, See James 4:13-14,16,15

**Music** Paul and James make it clear that our time and our plans are in the hands of our timeless creating God. Let's recognize that truth by singing.

### **O God Our Help in Ages Past**

Words: Isaac Watts, 1719 Music: Attr. to William Croft., 1708  
harm. by WH Monk, 1861

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.

**[Prayers]**

**God Moments** (were not scripted)

**Music** Let's celebrate his loving leadership over our lives on this -- "Reign of Christ the King Sunday" -- as we prepare our hearts for prayer. Let's sing

### **We Will Glorify the King of Kings**

Words: Twila Paris Music: Twila Paris © 1982 Singspiration Music  
CCLI # 2561297

1. We will glorify the King of kings, we will glorify the Lamb;  
we will glorify the Lord of lords, who is the great I AM.
3. He is Lord of heaven, Lord of earth, he is Lord of all who live;  
he is Lord above the universe, all praise to Him we give

**Pastor's Prayer** Lord, You have been at work in our world since its conception. Your light shines brighter than the sun, and your power outlasts the strongest of nations. We see you in nature, we see you in children, we see you in people of all ages. And when we see you, we give thanks to you for the wonders that you have created. Shine in our hearts, in our worship, and in our dealings with others.

**Praises and Petitions** Today especially we pray for those who are hurting in any way and are in need of healing or continued healing. We are thankful for the praises that we have heard from our congregation, and the joy we have from just being together in this house, and watching from home. We pray for Jim Mallot who went to the hospital this week. We continue to pray for \* Mary Jo Bell's friend Denese for recovery from broken bones, \* for Brian and Judy Holmes, \* for Linda Gordonier's cousin Ray, \* and for Becky's cousin Julie and her husband Brian, and \* for Kathy Novak's friend Beverly Wilkinson and those who are surrounding her \* and there are others that are on our hearts and minds as well, so we pause a moment, to lift these up to you as well. [Pause]

Lord, teach us how to honor you in our lives, to forgive others and ourselves by your grace, to do your will, to rely on you for our daily bread, and follow you away from temptation and evil. In short, to let our lives get traction in living out the prayer you taught us to pray. **Lord's Prayer**

### **Intro to Bible Reading**

Lay Reader: So on this Thanksgiving and Reign of Christ the King Sunday, Paul gives thanks to God. He quotes a hymn that celebrates the reign of Jesus, first as the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, and also as the head of the church, as the one who restores our peace with God by what He accomplished on the cross. Paul reminds them



of their journey to God and that their true purpose as his people is to make known the secret of true faith. He writes:

### **Bible Reading**

At one time you were far away from God. You were at odds with God, wicked in your ways, and your evil thoughts made you his enemies. But his Son became a human and died on a cross and has brought you back to God. So God made peace with you... This message is about the mystery of the ages! It was kept secret from people who lived in all the past times of the world. But now it has been revealed to God's people. God decided to make known his wonderful and glorious blessing to the nations. The mysterious plan is that -- *Christ – lives - in - you*. He is your hope in sharing in all the wonderful things that are to come. [Therefore] we announce the message about Christ. We warn everyone to be careful to live the right way. We teach everyone so that all of Christ's followers will grow and become fully mature in Christ. This is why I work so hard with all of the strength of God's amazing power and energy that surges within me. (Colossians 1:21-22a,26-29)

**Music** As God's people, then the goal is to reveal to others that Christ lives victoriously in us and can be seen in us as by our words and actions, we reveal who we worship and what he can do in a person's life. Let's stand and sing.

### **Ye Servants of God**

Words: Charles Wesley, 1744 Music: Attr. to William Croft, 1708

1. Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim,  
and publish abroad his wonderful name;  
the name all-victorious of Jesus extol,  
his kingdom is glorious and rules over all.
2. God ruleth on high, almighty to save,  
and still he is nigh, his presence we have;  
the great congregation his triumph shall sing,  
ascribing salvation to Jesus, our King.
3. "Salvation to God, who sits on the throne!"  
Let all cry aloud and honor the Son;  
the praises of Jesus the angels proclaim,  
fall down on their faces and worship the Lamb.
4. Then let us adore and give him his right,  
all glory and power, all wisdom and might;  
all honor and blessing with angels above,  
and thanks never ceasing and infinite love.

## Sermon

It is fitting as we come to the end and pinnacle of the Christian year – Did you know that next week is the new year for Christians? The beginning of Advent is the beginning of the Christian year. And so the end of the year, today, culminates in Christ's ultimate victory over all, so it is fitting that we have one walk in Paradise today. By God's Spirit, we receive the gifts he gave us in the garden by once again following his loving limitations, finding the peace of relying on his provision, and today we receive again the final gift -- exchanging the difficult emptiness of toiling labor for the joy of purposeful work in his strength. But most of all, the restoration of all these gifts come by God's grace in Christ through whom we can receive a renewed and growing relationship with God, All of these things were said or implied in what we just heard Jerry read for us... Let's build a picture of that relationship between us and God's energy within us.

I have here a nail. Nails penetrate and become the “glue” that holds things together. The problem with nails is that, unless they are powered, they can't penetrate much of anything. They might join a box of nails. The nails in the box may inspire each other about what they can become, they can talk about what they ought to do, and they can dream about what their future may hold. But ultimately, none of that in and of itself fulfills the purpose of the nail. Until they are chosen by the builder, they cannot fulfill their purpose. (In John 15:16a – Jesus says you did not choose me, I chose you and appointed you that you might go and bear fruit that will last) , or in our imagery – “go and -- hold something together”, and we cannot fulfill that purpose until it is powered by some -- hammering force. But before that happens, the best they can do is huddle together (box up) and show off how shiny they all are -- and perhaps even get a little rusty while they lay around.

Even when the Creator picks one up for some purpose, nails still have a choice, don't they? They can disobediently duck away – you ever have that nail that you just can't seem to ever hit? That causes great pain to the empowering creator. Sometimes the nail is too forceful, pushing its way through the material and splinters it at great frustration to the Creator. Sometimes, the nail refuses to be used, bending to their own will (you've had those nails that flop over or bend sideways rather than going in and becoming an instrument of the Creator's reconstruction of his creation.



But all this laying around, boxing oneself up, ducking, forcing, and bending -- leaves nails empty and unfulfilled because they have not found the purpose of what they are truly created to be and do. True joy comes when the nail chooses to cooperate with the hammering force of God and is driven into some meaningful purpose in his constructive plan...

### Restoring our Purpose

- \* ~~Box up~~
- \* ~~Lay around~~
- \* ~~Duck away~~
- \* ~~Force through~~
- \* ~~Bend over~~
- \* **Cooperate**

We start moving back to Paradise when, as Ian Thomas describes it, we believe that Christ died to forgive us from our sins, not only to change our destination when we die, but we that he rose to life to change the way we live here and now. Jesus wants to re-inhabit us, giving us a lifetime of allowing him to live in us and do his work through us. That's why I chose this particular "box" of nails – they aren't ordinary nails – you can tell because they have an orange thing on the end of them. These are special nails that aren't normally used directly with a hammer. There is a power-nailer that goes in-between. Do you know how these things work? You put the nail in one end of the power nailer, you put – for lack of better word, I'll call it a bullet in the middle of the nailer, then you put the nail where you want it to go and you hit a button on the other end of the nailer, which triggers the "bullet" which drives the nail into – with that kind of force, pretty much anything. I used it to connect wood to concrete, and it holds really well. But my point is – there is a lot of power in the hammering force of God that makes the nail fulfill its purpose. (Not usually a negative nailing force.)

Jesus can powerfully restore us to our true humanity and purposeful function. So, the degree that his redemptive purpose is accomplished in us is the same degree that we are what he is. We are like him. We say is what he says, we do is what he does. The more we are like him the more we are redeemed.

**His life lives in us**

Christ came to earth to reveal what God is like and how humanity is supposed to be. He surrendered his will and work to the Father's wishes. This is what Jesus did: "Not my will but thine be done". And because Jesus desired to fulfill God's purposes most thoroughly through him, Jesus' life gives a true reflection of the nature of the heavenly Father. In the same way that Jesus did this with his heavenly Father within him; our lives become an expression of the life of Christ who is in us. So people look at our lives and they see our lives, they see Christ.

So as Jesus did, we do – we surrender our will and work to Christ’s wishes, and in so doing fulfill God’s purposes through us. Have you recently offered yourself to God’s transforming will? (Romans 12:1-2)

The Spirit equips us and empowers us (E.g. 1 Corinthians 12:4 ff) to fulfill our purpose just as the hammer and bullet equip and empower the nail. But the force of the heavenly hammer is rarely painful (I’ve never heard a nail yell back, have you?) even when in resistance, even when boxed up, even when we lay down, even when we duck away, even when we use splintering force, or bend away from God’s intended direction for our life. He is still gentle with us and still tries to bring us back to where we need to be so that we can be purposefully used again.

In the long run, God’s presence and power, while he is indeed a driving force, he is also a hopeful force and a healing force and gives a purpose which leads to true joy.

So now we come to the story of today: Numbers 13 and 14. We are nearing the edge of the promised land. Remember we started in Eden (here on the platform), we got kicked out of Eden and went down to the other Hall, where we were slaves in Egypt. Then the platform wasn’t Eden anymore, but it was as close as we could get to it – the promised land, and now we are getting close.

God wants to give the people a foretaste of what awaits them in that glorious, divine land. He instructs Moses to choose one leader from each of the 12 ancestral tribes of Israel. They were sent as scouts to explore and observe the land for 40

**PROVISION**

days. They returned and reported to the assembled people. Joshua and Caleb understood that God was providing this paradise for them. They showed the people a grape cluster that was so large that two men had to carry them on a pole straddled between their shoulders, (reminds me of Peter and the Wolf near the end of the story when the wolf is hanging upside down, tied to two poles that were on the shoulders of two of his captors – this big, big cluster of grapes that had to be carried on a pole between two men -- not to mention the pomegranates and figs that demonstrated the lushness of the crops of the land. (There is God’s provision).



**PROHIBITION**

It was here where they could live out their covenant with God where he would protect them. (There is God's loving prohibitions meant so they could thrive).

**PURPOSE**

These two scouts boldly claimed that they should follow God's clear direction and enter the promised land and be his people for the sake of the world. (There is God's purpose).

**WITH GOD**

They could return to (a form of paradise) where they could live in loving relationship with their God. (There is God's relationship that is the essence of it all). So we have two promising reports.

Then there were 10 other scouts. They admitted it was a lush land flowing with milk and honey. But they saw heavily populated and massive fortified cities, filled with larger, stronger people – descendants of ~~WITH GOD~~ giants. A land that would devour them as a people. They said they felt like grasshoppers in the presence of these natives, and those natives probably looked at them like grasshoppers as well, just insignificant little insects. They did not see God's promise and presence. (Scratch the relationship with God)

They began to repeat to everyone who would listen this negative fear-building terror, and it spread throughout the people. The ~~PROVISION~~ people began to focus on circumstances rather than God and concluded that they would die by the sword, and their wives and children would be taken by the enemy, and become their enslaved property. (So much for God's provision)

And so, the chant of the people became, once again -- why did you lead us out of Egypt to here? Why couldn't we at least die in this ~~PURPOSE~~ wilderness? Why did we come all this way only to be slaughtered? (There goes purpose plummeting down the hillside)

Therefore, they decided they were not going to follow God's ~~PROHIBITION~~ direction and trust in his promises to enter paradise. Instead, they were going to elect a new leader to take them back to Egypt. (There goes the loving limitations – they disobeyed again, thinking they knew better than God). They were losing Paradise all over again.

Moses and Aaron fell face down in humble mourning. Joshua and Caleb also ripped their robes (that was a sign of mourning in their day) over this terrible decision and argued that it is in their best interest not to rebel against the Lord who was giving them this land, and to not be afraid of the circumstances but to rely on the Lord's presence with them. He has carried them all the way through the sea

and through this wilderness. The people responded to all of this message through Moses and Aaron and Joshua and Caleb -- by wanting to stone them -- to get them out of the way.

Then the Lord spoke to Moses. And God wondered how long he would put up with people who refuse to accept him and his paradise. Moses intercedes for the people, saying to God that his world-wide reputation for his miraculous working power that led them out of Egypt and all the wonders that he has done -- all of that reputation would fall flat and be destroyed if, in the end, he failed to bring his people into the promised land.

And then there is a declaration of God's eternal character -- slow to anger, abounding in love, forgiving sin and rebellion (but still suffering consequences for bad decisions). Moses asks God to forgive the people just as he has repeatedly done throughout the exodus journey. God does forgive, but he also leaves them to the consequences of their choices. They were not going to make it into the promised land. The children (that they claimed would become slaves) -- those were the ones who would inherit the promised land. The exception would be Caleb (and Joshua). They had a different spirit and had followed God wholeheartedly, and they would make it in.

Think about how hard that would be. Two out of twelve stood up to say, "Hey, this is a good thing!" While ten out of twelve said, "Be afraid! Be very afraid." We know even from modern politics that the message of fear is much more powerful than the promise of "let's work through this challenge and we might see a good thing at the other end." Right? That's why all we ever hear are negative things "Look out if they happen to get in -- or don't get in." Nevertheless, Caleb and Joshua did not give up.

Meanwhile, Moses came back and reported to the people about his intercession with God, how they would not reach the promised land, but their children would. When the people heard this, *then they* were the ones who began to mourn. Then they decided they would go capture paradise after all, once again ignoring the limitations God have given them, for God had already said this land was not for them anymore -- their children would inherit the land, but they were not to cross this boundary -- the line was drawn in the desert sand, and they were outside of it.

Moses tried to warn them against trying to force their purpose and gain provision by their own hands. This is the Garden of Eden story all over again. They were determined to do it their way without God's blessing or permission. They began to



go up into the hills where the enemies were without Moses, without the ark, which they understood represented God's presence and was to always lead the way. And those large powerful people living in the hill country came down and beat them back in a complete and horrific defeat. In essence, like Adam and Eve, they were evicted from Eden for thinking they could do it without God.

Oswald Chambers wrote in his book "My Utmost for His Highest", that the greatest thing, the most important thing for us to remember is that when we go forward into our future, we go to fulfill God's purpose, not our own. In the life of sin, our ambitions are our own, but in the Christian life, we have no goals of our own. Our goals are God's goals. We talk a lot about what *we* have decided for Christ, and about *our* determination to be his followers, *our* decisions for this and *our* decisions for that. But in the New Testament, the only aspect that is brought out is the compelling purpose of God. All our noble decisions and actions and what we think is right for us fades to nothing when compared to God's goals for us. (See James 4:13-16 Philippians 3:4-12) We heard that in the responsive bible reading earlier today.

Dr. David Aikman wrote, "Each of us has a purpose, a reason for being here, that no one else can tell you, but you can find out from God." In specific application, that is very true -- there may be individual roles and ministries according to specific gifts God has chosen to give each one of you for this time of your life. And you need to discover and rediscover what those things are.

But generally speaking, the purpose of every Christian is to enjoy God's presence and be so connected with him that we are eager to do his will, calmly rely on his provision to such a degree that when people look at us they see Christ. If we try to do it in our own strength, we will be as effective as the people who disobediently headed for paradise when the way was not yet prepared (or as the nail that just stayed in the box, or got out of the box and tried to force itself into something when it had no real power behind it). And they were splintered by trying to force themselves in when they were meant to stay out.

**Christ lives and works through us**

But when we are in tune with his timing and instruction, when we put forth every effort *by the strength of Christ working in our life*, then, when we are at our best, people whom God has chosen to open their spiritual eyes -- they will see this mysterious, yet rich and glorious truth -- that Christ lives in and through his people. Other people will see it, if the Spirit allows them to see it and they don't close their eyes

to it. We will experience a form of paradise in our life and maybe even a foretaste of paradise in our world, and a foretaste of what heaven might be like when all this takes place in our lives. So, the last question is, do we let Christ live and work through us? Can we grow with God even when it seems like everyone else seems to be against him? Can we still be bold enough to say, “this is a promised land?”

**Prayer** Let’s pray. Lord, it is so easy to hide behind what we like to think are important things ... but they are not important to you. When everything is removed but the core of who we are, what remains? Without your grace we are just another smile, another face, another fleeting breath, a grain of sand passing quickly through .... So, we give our lives, take it all, everything – take it as a living offering pleasing to you. Then when and who you choose, they will see you in each of us, they will hear you when we speak, they will feel you as we live out your purposes, and our lives will become music to those still seeking to find the rhythm of their life in you. And it is in the name of Jesus and for his sake we pray this. Amen.

**Music** So restored to our godly purpose, we bring Christ to his world by the (metaphorical) music of our life – I know some of us aren’t “music people”, but we all have a song to sing, so to speak (even if it is not “musical”)-- the melody that our lives proclaim by our actions and our words, inspiring others to see and receive the spiritual healing of Christ. Let’s stand and sing.

### **Christ for the World We Sing**

Words: Samuel Wolcott, 1869 Music: Felice de Giardini, 1769

1. Christ for the world we sing, the world to Christ we bring, with loving zeal;  
the poor, and them that mourn, the faint and overborne,  
sinsick and sorrow-worn, whom Christ doth heal.
2. Christ for the world we sing, the world to Christ we bring, with fervent prayer;  
the wayward and the lost, by restless passions tossed,  
redeemed at countless cost, from dark despair.
4. Christ for the world we sing, the world to Christ we bring, with joyful song;  
the newborn souls, whose days, reclaimed from error's ways,  
inspired with hope and praise, to Christ belong.

**Blessing** God has given us new eyes to see Jesus Christ in others. May we also, by our openness to him, reveal him to others. By the limitations we respect, the provision we receive, and the purpose in which we rejoice, but especially by his ever-present relationship with us. Amen.

# *Straight from the "Hart"*

November 20, 2022 – Thanksgiving

Reign of Christ the King Sunday



Welcome to the Hartland United Methodist Church Service Script.

**Opening Prayer** Lord, we know that your love will make more of a difference than our planning. May your love guide us to make good decisions to accomplish your purposes and spread your love. Now may our prayer and praise rise to you like the sun rises in the sky. As with each new dawn, in each new time of worship together, may you renew our trust in you, our delight to offer mercy, and our gladness to be in your presence, and an eagerness to fulfill you purpose. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Adapted from 2 prayers Herb Mather © 2002 GBOD  
and © 2006 Larry Peacock (ad.) Upper Room Books;  
both in UM Worship & Song, Leader's Ed. [W& S]

## **Call to Worship**

Lay Reader: We have gathered because God's mercy goes beyond our weaknesses and unearths the good; -- transforming us so that when all is said and done, our personal, temporary, treasures will mean nothing compared to what we have done in the name of God's eternal love. So come and worship, that we may do our best to live our lives for God. Let's begin with an affirmation of thanksgiving for God and his creation.

**Affirmation** (L - Lay Reader C - Congregation with Pastor)

L: Give thanks for the people gathered around us today. Give thanks for the things of the earth that give to us the provision of life.

**C: We give thanks for the plants, animals, and birds that we use as food and medicine.**

L: Give thanks for the natural world, in which we find the means to be clothed and housed.

**C: We give thanks for the ability to use these gifts of the natural world.**

L: May God guide us to see our place among these gifts, not to squander them or think of them as a means for selfish gain.

**C: We will respect the life of all God has made. Our spirits will be strengthened by using only what we need, and by using our strength to help those who need us.**

Ad. from Sue Ellen Herne, Mohawk, 20th cent., alt. in UM Book of Worship

**Music** A couple weeks ago we mentioned Saint Francis of Assisi. Among other things, he emphasized that it is our duty to protect and enjoy nature both as stewards of God's creation and as his creatures ourselves. His hymn rejoices in the environment in which God has placed us and encourages us to unite with nature and each other in worship of God's loving care. Let's sing...

### **All Creature of Our God and King**

Words: Francis of Assisi, ca. 1225 trans. by William H Draper 1925. Ad 1987  
 Music: Geistliche Kirchengesane, 1623; harm. by Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1906  
 ad. © 1989 The UM Publishing House

1. All creatures of our God and King, lift up your voice and with us sing,  
 O praise ye! Alleluia!

O brother sun with golden beam, O sister moon with silver gleam!  
 O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

4. Dear mother earth, who day by day unfoldest blessings on our way,  
 Alleluia! Alleluia!

The flowers and fruits that in thee grow, let them God's glory also show!  
 O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

5. All ye who are of tender heart, forgiving others, take your part,  
 O praise ye! Alleluia!

Ye who long pain and sorrow bear, praise God and on him cast your care!  
 O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

7. Let all things their Creator bless, and worship him in humbleness,  
 O praise ye! Alleluia!

Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son, and praise the Spirit, Three in One!  
 O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

**Theme** One of my favorite parts of nature is the night sky. One of the ones who had the privilege of venturing out into it just a very little bit, Astronaut James Irwin said -- The earth reminded us of a Christmas tree ornament, hanging in the blackness of space. As we got farther and farther away, it diminished in size. Finally, it shrank to the size of a marble, the most beautiful marble you can imagine. That beautiful, warm, living object looked so fragile, so delicate, that if you touched it with a finger, it would crumble and fall apart. Seeing this has to change a [person], has to make [them] appreciate the creation of God and the love of God.

I think most of us have gathered today out of an appreciation for who God is, and how he has designed us to be with him, and for the general gifts that he has given us in loving limitations, ample provision and a meaningful purpose, for which he

has given each of us specific gifts and abilities. And it is by his grace in Christ that we find our purpose in seeking to reclaim, as close as we can get to it -- the paradise he wants to bring back to in our life and in our world.

So each week we gather to ask God's blessing, to remember him and he us, to be at our side to guide us and defend us and praise him as he makes us free. Listen to Donna and Kathy and they play for us the tune that contains those kinds of requests in the song, "We Gather Together"

### **Special Instrumental Music We Gather Together**

#### **Intro to Responsive Bible Reading**

Lay Reader: Paul was very thankful for his close friends in Philippi (Fah lip eye), and he encourages them to be thankful for the grace that they have received. Yet some began to teach them that if they were going to be God's people, they would have to follow Jewish laws. Paul saw this as a defiance of grace and faith and a futile attempt to earn God's salvation. He lists for them all the laws he had fulfilled, the lineage he had, and passionate pursuit of faith



that he had lived. If anyone could be saved by heart motivated accomplishments and a spotless record, he could. Yet this is what he concludes –

#### **Responsive Bible Reading (L: Lay Reader, C: Congregation)**

**L:** But Christ has shown us that whatever we used to count as our greatest accomplishments, we've written them off as a worthless loss.

**C: We now realize that all that we gained, and thought was important, is counted as nothing but yesterday's garbage compared to knowing Christ Jesus our Lord.**

**L:** It is for him that we have given them all up and thrown everything aside [as] a pile of waste.

**C: For all we want is to gain Christ and to know we belong to him.**

**L:** We could not make ourselves acceptable to God by our own righteousness based on law, but we are made good by believing in Christ and actively relying on the faithfulness of Christ.

**C: God accepted us only by our faith in Christ.**

**L:** We want to know Christ [intimately] and the power that raised him to life.

**C: We want to be like him in his suffering and death that we may arrive -- safely raised to life.**

L: We have not yet reached our goal or become perfect.

**C: But Christ has taken a hold of us and won't let go.**

L: Therefore, we keep on running hard to gain what Jesus has in store for us.

**C: That is why Christ saved us.**

L: [If this is so, that it is not by our plans and accomplishments, but by faith in the God who displays through his Son his power over the affairs of this world and over death and life, then] --- you should know better than to make your plans and say, "In the next few days, we will go to this city. We will stay there for a year and buy and sell and make a lot of money."

**C: The reality is, we do not know what will happen to us tomorrow.**

L: How can we be so sure about our life? We are like a mist that appears for only a little while and then vanishes. Yet in our pride, we arrogantly brag about the big things we will do.

**C: We do not acknowledge the One who controls the Universe.**

L: This kind of big talking is the epitome of evil. [Instead], you should say,

**C: "If it is the Lord's will and we live long enough, we hope to do this project or pursue that dream."**

Philippians 3:4-12, See James 4:13-14,16,15

**Music** Paul and James make it clear that our time and our plans are in the hands of our timeless creating God. Let's recognize that truth by singing.

### **O God Our Help in Ages Past**

Words: Isaac Watts, 1719 Music: Attr. to William Croft., 1708  
harm. by WH Monk, 1861

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.

**[Prayers]**

**God Moments** (were not scripted)

**Music** Let's celebrate his loving leadership over our lives on this -- "Reign of Christ the King Sunday" -- as we prepare our hearts for prayer. Let's sing

### **We Will Glorify the King of Kings**

Words: Twila Paris Music: Twila Paris © 1982 Singspiration Music  
CCLI # 2561297

1. We will glorify the King of kings, we will glorify the Lamb;  
we will glorify the Lord of lords, who is the great I AM.
3. He is Lord of heaven, Lord of earth, he is Lord of all who live;  
he is Lord above the universe, all praise to Him we give

**Pastor's Prayer** Lord, You have been at work in our world since its conception. Your light shines brighter than the sun, and your power outlasts the strongest of nations. We see you in nature, we see you in children, we see you in people of all ages. And when we see you, we give thanks to you for the wonders that you have created. Shine in our hearts, in our worship, and in our dealings with others.

**Praises and Petitions** Today especially we pray for those who are hurting in any way and are in need of healing or continued healing. We are thankful for the praises that we have heard from our congregation, and the joy we have from just being together in this house, and watching from home. We pray for Jim Mallot who went to the hospital this week. We continue to pray for \* Mary Jo Bell's friend Denese for recovery from broken bones, \* for Brian and Judy Holmes, \* for Linda Gordonier's cousin Ray, \* and for Becky's cousin Julie and her husband Brian, and \* for Kathy Novak's friend Beverly Wilkinson and those who are surrounding her \* and there are others that are on our hearts and minds as well, so we pause a moment, to lift these up to you as well. [Pause]

Lord, teach us how to honor you in our lives, to forgive others and ourselves by your grace, to do your will, to rely on you for our daily bread, and follow you away from temptation and evil. In short, to let our lives get traction in living out the prayer you taught us to pray. **Lord's Prayer**

### **Intro to Bible Reading**

Lay Reader: So on this Thanksgiving and Reign of Christ the King Sunday, Paul gives thanks to God. He quotes a hymn that celebrates the reign of Jesus, first as the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, and also as the head of the church, as the one who restores our peace with God by what He accomplished on the cross. Paul reminds them



of their journey to God and that their true purpose as his people is to make known the secret of true faith. He writes:

### **Bible Reading**

At one time you were far away from God. You were at odds with God, wicked in your ways, and your evil thoughts made you his enemies. But his Son became a human and died on a cross and has brought you back to God. So God made peace with you... This message is about the mystery of the ages! It was kept secret from people who lived in all the past times of the world. But now it has been revealed to God's people. God decided to make known his wonderful and glorious blessing to the nations. The mysterious plan is that -- *Christ – lives - in - you*. He is your hope in sharing in all the wonderful things that are to come. [Therefore] we announce the message about Christ. We warn everyone to be careful to live the right way. We teach everyone so that all of Christ's followers will grow and become fully mature in Christ. This is why I work so hard with all of the strength of God's amazing power and energy that surges within me. (Colossians 1:21-22a,26-29)

**Music** As God's people, then the goal is to reveal to others that Christ lives victoriously in us and can be seen in us as by our words and actions, we reveal who we worship and what he can do in a person's life. Let's stand and sing.

### **Ye Servants of God**

Words: Charles Wesley, 1744 Music: Attr. to William Croft, 1708

1. Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim,  
and publish abroad his wonderful name;  
the name all-victorious of Jesus extol,  
his kingdom is glorious and rules over all.
2. God ruleth on high, almighty to save,  
and still he is nigh, his presence we have;  
the great congregation his triumph shall sing,  
ascribing salvation to Jesus, our King.
3. "Salvation to God, who sits on the throne!"  
Let all cry aloud and honor the Son;  
the praises of Jesus the angels proclaim,  
fall down on their faces and worship the Lamb.
4. Then let us adore and give him his right,  
all glory and power, all wisdom and might;  
all honor and blessing with angels above,  
and thanks never ceasing and infinite love.



## Sermon

It is fitting as we come to the end and pinnacle of the Christian year – Did you know that next week is the new year for Christians? The beginning of Advent is the beginning of the Christian year. And so the end of the year, today, culminates in Christ's ultimate victory over all, so it is fitting that we have one walk in Paradise today. By God's Spirit, we receive the gifts he gave us in the garden by once again following his loving limitations, finding the peace of relying on his provision, and today we receive again the final gift -- exchanging the difficult emptiness of toiling labor for the joy of purposeful work in his strength. But most of all, the restoration of all these gifts come by God's grace in Christ through whom we can receive a renewed and growing relationship with God, All of these things were said or implied in what we just heard Jerry read for us... Let's build a picture of that relationship between us and God's energy within us.

I have here a nail. Nails penetrate and become the “glue” that holds things together. The problem with nails is that, unless they are powered, they can't penetrate much of anything. They might join a box of nails. The nails in the box may inspire each other about what they can become, they can talk about what they ought to do, and they can dream about what their future may hold. But ultimately, none of that in and of itself fulfills the purpose of the nail. Until they are chosen by the builder, they cannot fulfill their purpose. (In John 15:16a – Jesus says you did not choose me, I chose you and appointed you that you might go and bear fruit that will last) , or in our imagery – “go and -- hold something together”, and we cannot fulfill that purpose until it is powered by some -- hammering force. But before that happens, the best they can do is huddle together (box up) and show off how shiny they all are -- and perhaps even get a little rusty while they lay around.

Even when the Creator picks one up for some purpose, nails still have a choice, don't they? They can disobediently duck away – you ever have that nail that you just can't seem to ever hit? That causes great pain to the empowering creator. Sometimes the nail is too forceful, pushing its way through the material and splinters it at great frustration to the Creator. Sometimes, the nail refuses to be used, bending to their own will (you've had those nails that flop over or bend sideways rather than going in and becoming an instrument of the Creator's reconstruction of his creation.



But all this laying around, boxing oneself up, ducking, forcing, and bending -- leaves nails empty and unfulfilled because they have not found the purpose of what they are truly created to be and do. True joy comes when the nail chooses to cooperate with the hammering force of God and is driven into some meaningful purpose in his constructive plan...

### Restoring our Purpose

- \* ~~Box up~~
- \* ~~Lay around~~
- \* ~~Duck away~~
- \* ~~Force through~~
- \* ~~Bend over~~
- \* **Cooperate**

We start moving back to Paradise when, as Ian Thomas describes it, we believe that Christ died to forgive us from our sins, not only to change our destination when we die, but we that he rose to life to change the way we live here and now. Jesus wants to re-inhabit us, giving us a lifetime of allowing him to live in us and do his work through us. That's why I chose this particular "box" of nails – they aren't ordinary nails – you can tell because they have an orange thing on the end of them. These are special nails that aren't normally used directly with a hammer. There is a power-nailer that goes in-between. Do you know how these things work? You put the nail in one end of the power nailer, you put – for lack of better word, I'll call it a bullet in the middle of the nailer, then you put the nail where you want it to go and you hit a button on the other end of the nailer, which triggers the "bullet" which drives the nail into – with that kind of force, pretty much anything. I used it to connect wood to concrete, and it holds really well. But my point is – there is a lot of power in the hammering force of God that makes the nail fulfill its purpose. (Not usually a negative nailing force.)

Jesus can powerfully restore us to our true humanity and purposeful function. So, the degree that his redemptive purpose is accomplished in us is the same degree that we are what he is. We are like him. We say is what he says, we do is what he does. The more we are like him the more we are redeemed.

**His life lives in us**

Christ came to earth to reveal what God is like and how humanity is supposed to be. He surrendered his will and work to the Father's wishes. This is what Jesus did: "Not my will but thine be done". And because Jesus desired to fulfill God's purposes most thoroughly through him, Jesus' life gives a true reflection of the nature of the heavenly Father. In the same way that Jesus did this with his heavenly Father within him; our lives become an expression of the life of Christ who is in us. So people look at our lives and they see our lives, they see Christ.

So as Jesus did, we do – we surrender our will and work to Christ’s wishes, and in so doing fulfill God’s purposes through us. Have you recently offered yourself to God’s transforming will? (Romans 12:1-2)

The Spirit equips us and empowers us (E.g. 1 Corinthians 12:4 ff) to fulfill our purpose just as the hammer and bullet equip and empower the nail. But the force of the heavenly hammer is rarely painful (I’ve never heard a nail yell back, have you?) even when in resistance, even when boxed up, even when we lay down, even when we duck away, even when we use splintering force, or bend away from God’s intended direction for our life. He is still gentle with us and still tries to bring us back to where we need to be so that we can be purposefully used again.

In the long run, God’s presence and power, while he is indeed a driving force, he is also a hopeful force and a healing force and gives a purpose which leads to true joy.

So now we come to the story of today: Numbers 13 and 14. We are nearing the edge of the promised land. Remember we started in Eden (here on the platform), we got kicked out of Eden and went down to the other Hall, where we were slaves in Egypt. Then the platform wasn’t Eden anymore, but it was as close as we could get to it – the promised land, and now we are getting close.

God wants to give the people a foretaste of what awaits them in that glorious, divine land. He instructs Moses to choose one leader from each of the 12 ancestral tribes of Israel. They were sent as scouts to explore and observe the land for 40

**PROVISION**

days. They returned and reported to the assembled people. Joshua and Caleb understood that God was providing this paradise for them. They showed the people a grape cluster that was so large that two men had to carry them on a pole straddled between their shoulders, (reminds me of Peter and the Wolf near the end of the story when the wolf is hanging upside down, tied to two poles that were on the shoulders of two of his captors – this big, big cluster of grapes that had to be carried on a pole between two men -- not to mention the pomegranates and figs that demonstrated the lushness of the crops of the land. (There is God’s provision).



**PROHIBITION**

It was here where they could live out their covenant with God where he would protect them. (There is God's loving prohibitions meant so they could thrive).

**PURPOSE**

These two scouts boldly claimed that they should follow God's clear direction and enter the promised land and be his people for the sake of the world. (There is God's purpose).

**WITH GOD**

They could return to (a form of paradise) where they could live in loving relationship with their God. (There is God's relationship that is the essence of it all). So we have two promising reports.

Then there were 10 other scouts. They admitted it was a lush land flowing with milk and honey. But they saw heavily populated and massive fortified cities, filled with larger, stronger people – descendants of ~~WITH GOD~~ giants. A land that would devour them as a people. They said they felt like grasshoppers in the presence of these natives, and those natives probably looked at them like grasshoppers as well, just insignificant little insects. They did not see God's promise and presence. (Scratch the relationship with God)

They began to repeat to everyone who would listen this negative fear-building terror, and it spread throughout the people. The ~~PROVISION~~ people began to focus on circumstances rather than God and concluded that they would die by the sword, and their wives and children would be taken by the enemy, and become their enslaved property. (So much for God's provision)

And so, the chant of the people became, once again -- why did you lead us out of Egypt to here? Why couldn't we at least die in this ~~PURPOSE~~ wilderness? Why did we come all this way only to be slaughtered? (There goes purpose plummeting down the hillside)

Therefore, they decided they were not going to follow God's ~~PROHIBITION~~ direction and trust in his promises to enter paradise. Instead, they were going to elect a new leader to take them back to Egypt. (There goes the loving limitations – they disobeyed again, thinking they knew better than God). They were losing Paradise all over again.

Moses and Aaron fell face down in humble mourning. Joshua and Caleb also ripped their robes (that was a sign of mourning in their day) over this terrible decision and argued that it is in their best interest not to rebel against the Lord who was giving them this land, and to not be afraid of the circumstances but to rely on the Lord's presence with them. He has carried them all the way through the sea

and through this wilderness. The people responded to all of this message through Moses and Aaron and Joshua and Caleb -- by wanting to stone them -- to get them out of the way.

Then the Lord spoke to Moses. And God wondered how long he would put up with people who refuse to accept him and his paradise. Moses intercedes for the people, saying to God that his world-wide reputation for his miraculous working power that led them out of Egypt and all the wonders that he has done -- all of that reputation would fall flat and be destroyed if, in the end, he failed to bring his people into the promised land.

And then there is a declaration of God's eternal character -- slow to anger, abounding in love, forgiving sin and rebellion (but still suffering consequences for bad decisions). Moses asks God to forgive the people just as he has repeatedly done throughout the exodus journey. God does forgive, but he also leaves them to the consequences of their choices. They were not going to make it into the promised land. The children (that they claimed would become slaves) -- those were the ones who would inherit the promised land. The exception would be Caleb (and Joshua). They had a different spirit and had followed God wholeheartedly, and they would make it in.

Think about how hard that would be. Two out of twelve stood up to say, "Hey, this is a good thing!" While ten out of twelve said, "Be afraid! Be very afraid." We know even from modern politics that the message of fear is much more powerful than the promise of "let's work through this challenge and we might see a good thing at the other end." Right? That's why all we ever hear are negative things "Look out if they happen to get in -- or don't get in." Nevertheless, Caleb and Joshua did not give up.

Meanwhile, Moses came back and reported to the people about his intercession with God, how they would not reach the promised land, but their children would. When the people heard this, *then they* were the ones who began to mourn. Then they decided they would go capture paradise after all, once again ignoring the limitations God have given them, for God had already said this land was not for them anymore -- their children would inherit the land, but they were not to cross this boundary -- the line was drawn in the desert sand, and they were outside of it.

Moses tried to warn them against trying to force their purpose and gain provision by their own hands. This is the Garden of Eden story all over again. They were determined to do it their way without God's blessing or permission. They began to

go up into the hills where the enemies were without Moses, without the ark, which they understood represented God's presence and was to always lead the way. And those large powerful people living in the hill country came down and beat them back in a complete and horrific defeat. In essence, like Adam and Eve, they were evicted from Eden for thinking they could do it without God.

Oswald Chambers wrote in his book "My Utmost for His Highest", that the greatest thing, the most important thing for us to remember is that when we go forward into our future, we go to fulfill God's purpose, not our own. In the life of sin, our ambitions are our own, but in the Christian life, we have no goals of our own. Our goals are God's goals. We talk a lot about what *we* have decided for Christ, and about *our* determination to be his followers, *our* decisions for this and *our* decisions for that. But in the New Testament, the only aspect that is brought out is the compelling purpose of God. All our noble decisions and actions and what we think is right for us fades to nothing when compared to God's goals for us. (See James 4:13-16 Philippians 3:4-12) We heard that in the responsive bible reading earlier today.

Dr. David Aikman wrote, "Each of us has a purpose, a reason for being here, that no one else can tell you, but you can find out from God." In specific application, that is very true -- there may be individual roles and ministries according to specific gifts God has chosen to give each one of you for this time of your life. And you need to discover and rediscover what those things are.

But generally speaking, the purpose of every Christian is to enjoy God's presence and be so connected with him that we are eager to do his will, calmly rely on his provision to such a degree that when people look at us they see Christ. If we try to do it in our own strength, we will be as effective as the people who disobediently headed for paradise when the way was not yet prepared (or as the nail that just stayed in the box, or got out of the box and tried to force itself into something when it had no real power behind it). And they were splintered by trying to force themselves in when they were meant to stay out.

**Christ lives and works through us**

But when we are in tune with his timing and instruction, when we put forth every effort *by the strength of Christ working in our life*, then, when we are at our best, people whom God has chosen to open their spiritual eyes -- they will see this mysterious, yet rich and glorious truth -- that Christ lives in and through his people. Other people will see it, if the Spirit allows them to see it and they don't close their eyes

to it. We will experience a form of paradise in our life and maybe even a foretaste of paradise in our world, and a foretaste of what heaven might be like when all this takes place in our lives. So, the last question is, do we let Christ live and work through us? Can we grow with God even when it seems like everyone else seems to be against him? Can we still be bold enough to say, “this is a promised land?”

**Prayer** Let’s pray. Lord, it is so easy to hide behind what we like to think are important things ... but they are not important to you. When everything is removed but the core of who we are, what remains? Without your grace we are just another smile, another face, another fleeting breath, a grain of sand passing quickly through .... So, we give our lives, take it all, everything – take it as a living offering pleasing to you. Then when and who you choose, they will see you in each of us, they will hear you when we speak, they will feel you as we live out your purposes, and our lives will become music to those still seeking to find the rhythm of their life in you. And it is in the name of Jesus and for his sake we pray this. Amen.

**Music** So restored to our godly purpose, we bring Christ to his world by the (metaphorical) music of our life – I know some of us aren’t “music people”, but we all have a song to sing, so to speak (even if it is not “musical”)-- the melody that our lives proclaim by our actions and our words, inspiring others to see and receive the spiritual healing of Christ. Let’s stand and sing.

### **Christ for the World We Sing**

Words: Samuel Wolcott, 1869 Music: Felice de Giardini, 1769

1. Christ for the world we sing, the world to Christ we bring, with loving zeal;  
the poor, and them that mourn, the faint and overborne,  
sinsick and sorrow-worn, whom Christ doth heal.
2. Christ for the world we sing, the world to Christ we bring, with fervent prayer;  
the wayward and the lost, by restless passions tossed,  
redeemed at countless cost, from dark despair.
4. Christ for the world we sing, the world to Christ we bring, with joyful song;  
the newborn souls, whose days, reclaimed from error's ways,  
inspired with hope and praise, to Christ belong.

**Blessing** God has given us new eyes to see Jesus Christ in others. May we also, by our openness to him, reveal him to others. By the limitations we respect, the provision we receive, and the purpose in which we rejoice, but especially by his ever-present relationship with us. Amen.

# *Straight from the "Hart"*

November 20, 2022 – Thanksgiving

Reign of Christ the King Sunday



Welcome to the Hartland United Methodist Church Service Script.

**Opening Prayer** Lord, we know that your love will make more of a difference than our planning. May your love guide us to make good decisions to accomplish your purposes and spread your love. Now may our prayer and praise rise to you like the sun rises in the sky. As with each new dawn, in each new time of worship together, may you renew our trust in you, our delight to offer mercy, and our gladness to be in your presence, and an eagerness to fulfill you purpose. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Adapted from 2 prayers Herb Mather © 2002 GBOD  
and © 2006 Larry Peacock (ad.) Upper Room Books;  
both in UM Worship & Song, Leader's Ed. [W& S]

## **Call to Worship**

Lay Reader: We have gathered because God's mercy goes beyond our weaknesses and unearths the good; -- transforming us so that when all is said and done, our personal, temporary, treasures will mean nothing compared to what we have done in the name of God's eternal love. So come and worship, that we may do our best to live our lives for God. Let's begin with an affirmation of thanksgiving for God and his creation.

**Affirmation** (L - Lay Reader C - Congregation with Pastor)

L: Give thanks for the people gathered around us today. Give thanks for the things of the earth that give to us the provision of life.

**C: We give thanks for the plants, animals, and birds that we use as food and medicine.**

L: Give thanks for the natural world, in which we find the means to be clothed and housed.

**C: We give thanks for the ability to use these gifts of the natural world.**

L: May God guide us to see our place among these gifts, not to squander them or think of them as a means for selfish gain.

**C: We will respect the life of all God has made. Our spirits will be strengthened by using only what we need, and by using our strength to help those who need us.**

Ad. from Sue Ellen Herne, Mohawk, 20th cent., alt. in UM Book of Worship



**Music** A couple weeks ago we mentioned Saint Francis of Assisi. Among other things, he emphasized that it is our duty to protect and enjoy nature both as stewards of God's creation and as his creatures ourselves. His hymn rejoices in the environment in which God has placed us and encourages us to unite with nature and each other in worship of God's loving care. Let's sing...

### **All Creature of Our God and King**

Words: Francis of Assisi, ca. 1225 trans. by William H Draper 1925. Ad 1987  
 Music: Geistliche Kirchengesane, 1623; harm. by Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1906  
 ad. © 1989 The UM Publishing House

1. All creatures of our God and King, lift up your voice and with us sing,  
 O praise ye! Alleluia!

O brother sun with golden beam, O sister moon with silver gleam!  
 O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

4. Dear mother earth, who day by day unfoldest blessings on our way,  
 Alleluia! Alleluia!

The flowers and fruits that in thee grow, let them God's glory also show!  
 O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

5. All ye who are of tender heart, forgiving others, take your part,  
 O praise ye! Alleluia!

Ye who long pain and sorrow bear, praise God and on him cast your care!  
 O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

7. Let all things their Creator bless, and worship him in humbleness,  
 O praise ye! Alleluia!

Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son, and praise the Spirit, Three in One!  
 O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

**Theme** One of my favorite parts of nature is the night sky. One of the ones who had the privilege of venturing out into it just a very little bit, Astronaut James Irwin said -- The earth reminded us of a Christmas tree ornament, hanging in the blackness of space. As we got farther and farther away, it diminished in size. Finally, it shrank to the size of a marble, the most beautiful marble you can imagine. That beautiful, warm, living object looked so fragile, so delicate, that if you touched it with a finger, it would crumble and fall apart. Seeing this has to change a [person], has to make [them] appreciate the creation of God and the love of God.

I think most of us have gathered today out of an appreciation for who God is, and how he has designed us to be with him, and for the general gifts that he has given us in loving limitations, ample provision and a meaningful purpose, for which he

has given each of us specific gifts and abilities. And it is by his grace in Christ that we find our purpose in seeking to reclaim, as close as we can get to it -- the paradise he wants to bring back to in our life and in our world.

So each week we gather to ask God's blessing, to remember him and he us, to be at our side to guide us and defend us and praise him as he makes us free. Listen to Donna and Kathy and they play for us the tune that contains those kinds of requests in the song, "We Gather Together"

### **Special Instrumental Music We Gather Together**

#### **Intro to Responsive Bible Reading**

Lay Reader: Paul was very thankful for his close friends in Philippi (Fah lip eye), and he encourages them to be thankful for the grace that they have received. Yet some began to teach them that if they were going to be God's people, they would have to follow Jewish laws. Paul saw this as a defiance of grace and faith and a futile attempt to earn God's salvation. He lists for them all the laws he had fulfilled, the lineage he had, and passionate pursuit of faith



that he had lived. If anyone could be saved by heart motivated accomplishments and a spotless record, he could. Yet this is what he concludes –

#### **Responsive Bible Reading (L: Lay Reader, C: Congregation)**

**L:** But Christ has shown us that whatever we used to count as our greatest accomplishments, we've written them off as a worthless loss.

**C: We now realize that all that we gained, and thought was important, is counted as nothing but yesterday's garbage compared to knowing Christ Jesus our Lord.**

**L:** It is for him that we have given them all up and thrown everything aside [as] a pile of waste.

**C: For all we want is to gain Christ and to know we belong to him.**

**L:** We could not make ourselves acceptable to God by our own righteousness based on law, but we are made good by believing in Christ and actively relying on the faithfulness of Christ.

**C: God accepted us only by our faith in Christ.**

**L:** We want to know Christ [intimately] and the power that raised him to life.

**C: We want to be like him in his suffering and death that we may arrive -- safely raised to life.**

L: We have not yet reached our goal or become perfect.

**C: But Christ has taken a hold of us and won't let go.**

L: Therefore, we keep on running hard to gain what Jesus has in store for us.

**C: That is why Christ saved us.**

L: [If this is so, that it is not by our plans and accomplishments, but by faith in the God who displays through his Son his power over the affairs of this world and over death and life, then] --- you should know better than to make your plans and say, "In the next few days, we will go to this city. We will stay there for a year and buy and sell and make a lot of money."

**C: The reality is, we do not know what will happen to us tomorrow.**

L: How can we be so sure about our life? We are like a mist that appears for only a little while and then vanishes. Yet in our pride, we arrogantly brag about the big things we will do.

**C: We do not acknowledge the One who controls the Universe.**

L: This kind of big talking is the epitome of evil. [Instead], you should say,

**C: "If it is the Lord's will and we live long enough, we hope to do this project or pursue that dream."**

Philippians 3:4-12, See James 4:13-14,16,15

**Music** Paul and James make it clear that our time and our plans are in the hands of our timeless creating God. Let's recognize that truth by singing.

### **O God Our Help in Ages Past**

Words: Isaac Watts, 1719 Music: Attr. to William Croft., 1708  
harm. by WH Monk, 1861

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.

**[Prayers]**

**God Moments** (were not scripted)

**Music** Let's celebrate his loving leadership over our lives on this -- "Reign of Christ the King Sunday" -- as we prepare our hearts for prayer. Let's sing

### **We Will Glorify the King of Kings**

Words: Twila Paris Music: Twila Paris © 1982 Singspiration Music  
CCLI # 2561297

1. We will glorify the King of kings, we will glorify the Lamb;  
we will glorify the Lord of lords, who is the great I AM.
3. He is Lord of heaven, Lord of earth, he is Lord of all who live;  
he is Lord above the universe, all praise to Him we give

**Pastor's Prayer** Lord, You have been at work in our world since its conception. Your light shines brighter than the sun, and your power outlasts the strongest of nations. We see you in nature, we see you in children, we see you in people of all ages. And when we see you, we give thanks to you for the wonders that you have created. Shine in our hearts, in our worship, and in our dealings with others.

**Praises and Petitions** Today especially we pray for those who are hurting in any way and are in need of healing or continued healing. We are thankful for the praises that we have heard from our congregation, and the joy we have from just being together in this house, and watching from home. We pray for Jim Mallot who went to the hospital this week. We continue to pray for \* Mary Jo Bell's friend Denese for recovery from broken bones, \* for Brian and Judy Holmes, \* for Linda Gordonier's cousin Ray, \* and for Becky's cousin Julie and her husband Brian, and \* for Kathy Novak's friend Beverly Wilkinson and those who are surrounding her \* and there are others that are on our hearts and minds as well, so we pause a moment, to lift these up to you as well. [Pause]

Lord, teach us how to honor you in our lives, to forgive others and ourselves by your grace, to do your will, to rely on you for our daily bread, and follow you away from temptation and evil. In short, to let our lives get traction in living out the prayer you taught us to pray. **Lord's Prayer**

### **Intro to Bible Reading**

Lay Reader: So on this Thanksgiving and Reign of Christ the King Sunday, Paul gives thanks to God. He quotes a hymn that celebrates the reign of Jesus, first as the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, and also as the head of the church, as the one who restores our peace with God by what He accomplished on the cross. Paul reminds them



of their journey to God and that their true purpose as his people is to make known the secret of true faith. He writes:

### **Bible Reading**

At one time you were far away from God. You were at odds with God, wicked in your ways, and your evil thoughts made you his enemies. But his Son became a human and died on a cross and has brought you back to God. So God made peace with you... This message is about the mystery of the ages! It was kept secret from people who lived in all the past times of the world. But now it has been revealed to God's people. God decided to make known his wonderful and glorious blessing to the nations. The mysterious plan is that -- *Christ – lives - in - you*. He is your hope in sharing in all the wonderful things that are to come. [Therefore] we announce the message about Christ. We warn everyone to be careful to live the right way. We teach everyone so that all of Christ's followers will grow and become fully mature in Christ. This is why I work so hard with all of the strength of God's amazing power and energy that surges within me. (Colossians 1:21-22a,26-29)

**Music** As God's people, then the goal is to reveal to others that Christ lives victoriously in us and can be seen in us as by our words and actions, we reveal who we worship and what he can do in a person's life. Let's stand and sing.

### **Ye Servants of God**

Words: Charles Wesley, 1744 Music: Attr. to William Croft, 1708

1. Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim,  
and publish abroad his wonderful name;  
the name all-victorious of Jesus extol,  
his kingdom is glorious and rules over all.
2. God ruleth on high, almighty to save,  
and still he is nigh, his presence we have;  
the great congregation his triumph shall sing,  
ascribing salvation to Jesus, our King.
3. "Salvation to God, who sits on the throne!"  
Let all cry aloud and honor the Son;  
the praises of Jesus the angels proclaim,  
fall down on their faces and worship the Lamb.
4. Then let us adore and give him his right,  
all glory and power, all wisdom and might;  
all honor and blessing with angels above,  
and thanks never ceasing and infinite love.

## Sermon

It is fitting as we come to the end and pinnacle of the Christian year – Did you know that next week is the new year for Christians? The beginning of Advent is the beginning of the Christian year. And so the end of the year, today, culminates in Christ's ultimate victory over all, so it is fitting that we have one walk in Paradise today. By God's Spirit, we receive the gifts he gave us in the garden by once again following his loving limitations, finding the peace of relying on his provision, and today we receive again the final gift -- exchanging the difficult emptiness of toiling labor for the joy of purposeful work in his strength. But most of all, the restoration of all these gifts come by God's grace in Christ through whom we can receive a renewed and growing relationship with God, All of these things were said or implied in what we just heard Jerry read for us... Let's build a picture of that relationship between us and God's energy within us.

I have here a nail. Nails penetrate and become the “glue” that holds things together. The problem with nails is that, unless they are powered, they can't penetrate much of anything. They might join a box of nails. The nails in the box may inspire each other about what they can become, they can talk about what they ought to do, and they can dream about what their future may hold. But ultimately, none of that in and of itself fulfills the purpose of the nail. Until they are chosen by the builder, they cannot fulfill their purpose. (In John 15:16a – Jesus says you did not choose me, I chose you and appointed you that you might go and bear fruit that will last) , or in our imagery – “go and -- hold something together”, and we cannot fulfill that purpose until it is powered by some -- hammering force. But before that happens, the best they can do is huddle together (box up) and show off how shiny they all are -- and perhaps even get a little rusty while they lay around.

Even when the Creator picks one up for some purpose, nails still have a choice, don't they? They can disobediently duck away – you ever have that nail that you just can't seem to ever hit? That causes great pain to the empowering creator. Sometimes the nail is too forceful, pushing its way through the material and splinters it at great frustration to the Creator. Sometimes, the nail refuses to be used, bending to their own will (you've had those nails that flop over or bend sideways rather than going in and becoming an instrument of the Creator's reconstruction of his creation.



But all this laying around, boxing oneself up, ducking, forcing, and bending -- leaves nails empty and unfulfilled because they have not found the purpose of what they are truly created to be and do. True joy comes when the nail chooses to cooperate with the hammering force of God and is driven into some meaningful purpose in his constructive plan...

### Restoring our Purpose

- \* ~~Box up~~
- \* ~~Lay around~~
- \* ~~Duck away~~
- \* ~~Force through~~
- \* ~~Bend over~~
- \* **Cooperate**

We start moving back to Paradise when, as Ian Thomas describes it, we believe that Christ died to forgive us from our sins, not only to change our destination when we die, but we that he rose to life to change the way we live here and now. Jesus wants to re-inhabit us, giving us a lifetime of allowing him to live in us and do his work through us. That's why I chose this particular "box" of nails – they aren't ordinary nails – you can tell because they have an orange thing on the end of them. These are special nails that aren't normally used directly with a hammer. There is a power-nailer that goes in-between. Do you know how these things work? You put the nail in one end of the power nailer, you put – for lack of better word, I'll call it a bullet in the middle of the nailer, then you put the nail where you want it to go and you hit a button on the other end of the nailer, which triggers the "bullet" which drives the nail into – with that kind of force, pretty much anything. I used it to connect wood to concrete, and it holds really well. But my point is – there is a lot of power in the hammering force of God that makes the nail fulfill its purpose. (Not usually a negative nailing force.)

Jesus can powerfully restore us to our true humanity and purposeful function. So, the degree that his redemptive purpose is accomplished in us is the same degree that we are what he is. We are like him. We say is what he says, we do is what he does. The more we are like him the more we are redeemed.

**His life lives in us**

Christ came to earth to reveal what God is like and how humanity is supposed to be. He surrendered his will and work to the Father's wishes. This is what Jesus did: "Not my will but thine be done". And because Jesus desired to fulfill God's purposes most thoroughly through him, Jesus' life gives a true reflection of the nature of the heavenly Father. In the same way that Jesus did this with his heavenly Father within him; our lives become an expression of the life of Christ who is in us. So people look at our lives and they see our lives, they see Christ.

So as Jesus did, we do – we surrender our will and work to Christ’s wishes, and in so doing fulfill God’s purposes through us. Have you recently offered yourself to God’s transforming will? (Romans 12:1-2)

The Spirit equips us and empowers us (E.g. 1 Corinthians 12:4 ff) to fulfill our purpose just as the hammer and bullet equip and empower the nail. But the force of the heavenly hammer is rarely painful (I’ve never heard a nail yell back, have you?) even when in resistance, even when boxed up, even when we lay down, even when we duck away, even when we use splintering force, or bend away from God’s intended direction for our life. He is still gentle with us and still tries to bring us back to where we need to be so that we can be purposefully used again.

In the long run, God’s presence and power, while he is indeed a driving force, he is also a hopeful force and a healing force and gives a purpose which leads to true joy.

So now we come to the story of today: Numbers 13 and 14. We are nearing the edge of the promised land. Remember we started in Eden (here on the platform), we got kicked out of Eden and went down to the other Hall, where we were slaves in Egypt. Then the platform wasn’t Eden anymore, but it was as close as we could get to it – the promised land, and now we are getting close.

God wants to give the people a foretaste of what awaits them in that glorious, divine land. He instructs Moses to choose one leader from each of the 12 ancestral tribes of Israel. They were sent as scouts to explore and observe the land for 40

**PROVISION**

days. They returned and reported to the assembled people. Joshua and Caleb understood that God was providing this paradise for them. They showed the people a grape cluster that was so large that two men had to carry them on a pole straddled between their shoulders, (reminds me of Peter and the Wolf near the end of the story when the wolf is hanging upside down, tied to two poles that were on the shoulders of two of his captors – this big, big cluster of grapes that had to be carried on a pole between two men -- not to mention the pomegranates and figs that demonstrated the lushness of the crops of the land. (There is God’s provision).





**PROHIBITION**

It was here where they could live out their covenant with God where he would protect them. (There is God's loving prohibitions meant so they could thrive).

**PURPOSE**

These two scouts boldly claimed that they should follow God's clear direction and enter the promised land and be his people for the sake of the world. (There is God's purpose).

**WITH GOD**

They could return to (a form of paradise) where they could live in loving relationship with their God. (There is God's relationship that is the essence of it all). So we have two promising reports.

Then there were 10 other scouts. They admitted it was a lush land flowing with milk and honey. But they saw heavily populated and massive fortified cities, filled with larger, stronger people – descendants of ~~WITH GOD~~ giants. A land that would devour them as a people. They said they felt like grasshoppers in the presence of these natives, and those natives probably looked at them like grasshoppers as well, just insignificant little insects. They did not see God's promise and presence. (Scratch the relationship with God)

They began to repeat to everyone who would listen this negative fear-building terror, and it spread throughout the people. The ~~PROVISION~~ people began to focus on circumstances rather than God and concluded that they would die by the sword, and their wives and children would be taken by the enemy, and become their enslaved property. (So much for God's provision)

And so, the chant of the people became, once again -- why did you lead us out of Egypt to here? Why couldn't we at least die in this ~~PURPOSE~~ wilderness? Why did we come all this way only to be slaughtered? (There goes purpose plummeting down the hillside)

Therefore, they decided they were not going to follow God's ~~PROHIBITION~~ direction and trust in his promises to enter paradise. Instead, they were going to elect a new leader to take them back to Egypt. (There goes the loving limitations – they disobeyed again, thinking they knew better than God). They were losing Paradise all over again.

Moses and Aaron fell face down in humble mourning. Joshua and Caleb also ripped their robes (that was a sign of mourning in their day) over this terrible decision and argued that it is in their best interest not to rebel against the Lord who was giving them this land, and to not be afraid of the circumstances but to rely on the Lord's presence with them. He has carried them all the way through the sea

and through this wilderness. The people responded to all of this message through Moses and Aaron and Joshua and Caleb -- by wanting to stone them -- to get them out of the way.

Then the Lord spoke to Moses. And God wondered how long he would put up with people who refuse to accept him and his paradise. Moses intercedes for the people, saying to God that his world-wide reputation for his miraculous working power that led them out of Egypt and all the wonders that he has done -- all of that reputation would fall flat and be destroyed if, in the end, he failed to bring his people into the promised land.

And then there is a declaration of God's eternal character -- slow to anger, abounding in love, forgiving sin and rebellion (but still suffering consequences for bad decisions). Moses asks God to forgive the people just as he has repeatedly done throughout the exodus journey. God does forgive, but he also leaves them to the consequences of their choices. They were not going to make it into the promised land. The children (that they claimed would become slaves) -- those were the ones who would inherit the promised land. The exception would be Caleb (and Joshua). They had a different spirit and had followed God wholeheartedly, and they would make it in.

Think about how hard that would be. Two out of twelve stood up to say, "Hey, this is a good thing!" While ten out of twelve said, "Be afraid! Be very afraid." We know even from modern politics that the message of fear is much more powerful than the promise of "let's work through this challenge and we might see a good thing at the other end." Right? That's why all we ever hear are negative things "Look out if they happen to get in -- or don't get in." Nevertheless, Caleb and Joshua did not give up.

Meanwhile, Moses came back and reported to the people about his intercession with God, how they would not reach the promised land, but their children would. When the people heard this, *then they* were the ones who began to mourn. Then they decided they would go capture paradise after all, once again ignoring the limitations God have given them, for God had already said this land was not for them anymore -- their children would inherit the land, but they were not to cross this boundary -- the line was drawn in the desert sand, and they were outside of it.

Moses tried to warn them against trying to force their purpose and gain provision by their own hands. This is the Garden of Eden story all over again. They were determined to do it their way without God's blessing or permission. They began to

go up into the hills where the enemies were without Moses, without the ark, which they understood represented God's presence and was to always lead the way. And those large powerful people living in the hill country came down and beat them back in a complete and horrific defeat. In essence, like Adam and Eve, they were evicted from Eden for thinking they could do it without God.

Oswald Chambers wrote in his book "My Utmost for His Highest", that the greatest thing, the most important thing for us to remember is that when we go forward into our future, we go to fulfill God's purpose, not our own. In the life of sin, our ambitions are our own, but in the Christian life, we have no goals of our own. Our goals are God's goals. We talk a lot about what *we* have decided for Christ, and about *our* determination to be his followers, *our* decisions for this and *our* decisions for that. But in the New Testament, the only aspect that is brought out is the compelling purpose of God. All our noble decisions and actions and what we think is right for us fades to nothing when compared to God's goals for us. (See James 4:13-16 Philippians 3:4-12) We heard that in the responsive bible reading earlier today.

Dr. David Aikman wrote, "Each of us has a purpose, a reason for being here, that no one else can tell you, but you can find out from God." In specific application, that is very true -- there may be individual roles and ministries according to specific gifts God has chosen to give each one of you for this time of your life. And you need to discover and rediscover what those things are.

But generally speaking, the purpose of every Christian is to enjoy God's presence and be so connected with him that we are eager to do his will, calmly rely on his provision to such a degree that when people look at us they see Christ. If we try to do it in our own strength, we will be as effective as the people who disobediently headed for paradise when the way was not yet prepared (or as the nail that just stayed in the box, or got out of the box and tried to force itself into something when it had no real power behind it). And they were splintered by trying to force themselves in when they were meant to stay out.

**Christ lives and works through us**

But when we are in tune with his timing and instruction, when we put forth every effort *by the strength of Christ working in our life*, then, when we are at our best, people whom God has chosen to open their spiritual eyes -- they will see this mysterious, yet rich and glorious truth -- that Christ lives in and through his people. Other people will see it, if the Spirit allows them to see it and they don't close their eyes

to it. We will experience a form of paradise in our life and maybe even a foretaste of paradise in our world, and a foretaste of what heaven might be like when all this takes place in our lives. So, the last question is, do we let Christ live and work through us? Can we grow with God even when it seems like everyone else seems to be against him? Can we still be bold enough to say, “this is a promised land?”

**Prayer** Let’s pray. Lord, it is so easy to hide behind what we like to think are important things ... but they are not important to you. When everything is removed but the core of who we are, what remains? Without your grace we are just another smile, another face, another fleeting breath, a grain of sand passing quickly through .... So, we give our lives, take it all, everything – take it as a living offering pleasing to you. Then when and who you choose, they will see you in each of us, they will hear you when we speak, they will feel you as we live out your purposes, and our lives will become music to those still seeking to find the rhythm of their life in you. And it is in the name of Jesus and for his sake we pray this. Amen.

**Music** So restored to our godly purpose, we bring Christ to his world by the (metaphorical) music of our life – I know some of us aren’t “music people”, but we all have a song to sing, so to speak (even if it is not “musical”)-- the melody that our lives proclaim by our actions and our words, inspiring others to see and receive the spiritual healing of Christ. Let’s stand and sing.

### **Christ for the World We Sing**

Words: Samuel Wolcott, 1869 Music: Felice de Giardini, 1769

1. Christ for the world we sing, the world to Christ we bring, with loving zeal;  
the poor, and them that mourn, the faint and overborne,  
sinsick and sorrow-worn, whom Christ doth heal.
2. Christ for the world we sing, the world to Christ we bring, with fervent prayer;  
the wayward and the lost, by restless passions tossed,  
redeemed at countless cost, from dark despair.
4. Christ for the world we sing, the world to Christ we bring, with joyful song;  
the newborn souls, whose days, reclaimed from error's ways,  
inspired with hope and praise, to Christ belong.

**Blessing** God has given us new eyes to see Jesus Christ in others. May we also, by our openness to him, reveal him to others. By the limitations we respect, the provision we receive, and the purpose in which we rejoice, but especially by his ever-present relationship with us. Amen.

# *Straight from the "Hart"*

November 20, 2022 – Thanksgiving

Reign of Christ the King Sunday



Welcome to the Hartland United Methodist Church Service Script.

**Opening Prayer** Lord, we know that your love will make more of a difference than our planning. May your love guide us to make good decisions to accomplish your purposes and spread your love. Now may our prayer and praise rise to you like the sun rises in the sky. As with each new dawn, in each new time of worship together, may you renew our trust in you, our delight to offer mercy, and our gladness to be in your presence, and an eagerness to fulfill your purpose. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Adapted from 2 prayers Herb Mather © 2002 GBOD  
and © 2006 Larry Peacock (ad.) Upper Room Books;  
both in UM Worship & Song, Leader's Ed. [W& S]

## **Call to Worship**

Lay Reader: We have gathered because God's mercy goes beyond our weaknesses and unearths the good; -- transforming us so that when all is said and done, our personal, temporary, treasures will mean nothing compared to what we have done in the name of God's eternal love. So come and worship, that we may do our best to live our lives for God. Let's begin with an affirmation of thanksgiving for God and his creation.

**Affirmation** (L - Lay Reader C - Congregation with Pastor)

L: Give thanks for the people gathered around us today. Give thanks for the things of the earth that give to us the provision of life.

**C: We give thanks for the plants, animals, and birds that we use as food and medicine.**

L: Give thanks for the natural world, in which we find the means to be clothed and housed.

**C: We give thanks for the ability to use these gifts of the natural world.**

L: May God guide us to see our place among these gifts, not to squander them or think of them as a means for selfish gain.

**C: We will respect the life of all God has made. Our spirits will be strengthened by using only what we need, and by using our strength to help those who need us.**

Ad. from Sue Ellen Herne, Mohawk, 20th cent., alt. in UM Book of Worship

**Music** A couple weeks ago we mentioned Saint Francis of Assisi. Among other things, he emphasized that it is our duty to protect and enjoy nature both as stewards of God's creation and as his creatures ourselves. His hymn rejoices in the environment in which God has placed us and encourages us to unite with nature and each other in worship of God's loving care. Let's sing...

### **All Creature of Our God and King**

Words: Francis of Assisi, ca. 1225 trans. by William H Draper 1925. Ad 1987  
 Music: Geistliche Kirchengesane, 1623; harm. by Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1906  
 ad. © 1989 The UM Publishing House

1. All creatures of our God and King, lift up your voice and with us sing,  
 O praise ye! Alleluia!

O brother sun with golden beam, O sister moon with silver gleam!  
 O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

4. Dear mother earth, who day by day unfoldest blessings on our way,  
 Alleluia! Alleluia!

The flowers and fruits that in thee grow, let them God's glory also show!  
 O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

5. All ye who are of tender heart, forgiving others, take your part,  
 O praise ye! Alleluia!

Ye who long pain and sorrow bear, praise God and on him cast your care!  
 O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

7. Let all things their Creator bless, and worship him in humbleness,  
 O praise ye! Alleluia!

Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son, and praise the Spirit, Three in One!  
 O praise ye! O praise ye! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

**Theme** One of my favorite parts of nature is the night sky. One of the ones who had the privilege of venturing out into it just a very little bit, Astronaut James Irwin said -- The earth reminded us of a Christmas tree ornament, hanging in the blackness of space. As we got farther and farther away, it diminished in size. Finally, it shrank to the size of a marble, the most beautiful marble you can imagine. That beautiful, warm, living object looked so fragile, so delicate, that if you touched it with a finger, it would crumble and fall apart. Seeing this has to change a [person], has to make [them] appreciate the creation of God and the love of God.

I think most of us have gathered today out of an appreciation for who God is, and how he has designed us to be with him, and for the general gifts that he has given us in loving limitations, ample provision and a meaningful purpose, for which he

has given each of us specific gifts and abilities. And it is by his grace in Christ that we find our purpose in seeking to reclaim, as close as we can get to it -- the paradise he wants to bring back to in our life and in our world.

So each week we gather to ask God's blessing, to remember him and he us, to be at our side to guide us and defend us and praise him as he makes us free. Listen to Donna and Kathy and they play for us the tune that contains those kinds of requests in the song, "We Gather Together"

### **Special Instrumental Music We Gather Together**

#### **Intro to Responsive Bible Reading**

Lay Reader: Paul was very thankful for his close friends in Philippi (Fah lip eye), and he encourages them to be thankful for the grace that they have received. Yet some began to teach them that if they were going to be God's people, they would have to follow Jewish laws. Paul saw this as a defiance of grace and faith and a futile attempt to earn God's salvation. He lists for them all the laws he had fulfilled, the lineage he had, and passionate pursuit of faith



that he had lived. If anyone could be saved by heart motivated accomplishments and a spotless record, he could. Yet this is what he concludes –

#### **Responsive Bible Reading (L: Lay Reader, C: Congregation)**

**L:** But Christ has shown us that whatever we used to count as our greatest accomplishments, we've written them off as a worthless loss.

**C: We now realize that all that we gained, and thought was important, is counted as nothing but yesterday's garbage compared to knowing Christ Jesus our Lord.**

**L:** It is for him that we have given them all up and thrown everything aside [as] a pile of waste.

**C: For all we want is to gain Christ and to know we belong to him.**

**L:** We could not make ourselves acceptable to God by our own righteousness based on law, but we are made good by believing in Christ and actively relying on the faithfulness of Christ.

**C: God accepted us only by our faith in Christ.**

**L:** We want to know Christ [intimately] and the power that raised him to life.

**C: We want to be like him in his suffering and death that we may arrive -- safely raised to life.**

L: We have not yet reached our goal or become perfect.

**C: But Christ has taken a hold of us and won't let go.**

L: Therefore, we keep on running hard to gain what Jesus has in store for us.

**C: That is why Christ saved us.**

L: [If this is so, that it is not by our plans and accomplishments, but by faith in the God who displays through his Son his power over the affairs of this world and over death and life, then] --- you should know better than to make your plans and say, "In the next few days, we will go to this city. We will stay there for a year and buy and sell and make a lot of money."

**C: The reality is, we do not know what will happen to us tomorrow.**

L: How can we be so sure about our life? We are like a mist that appears for only a little while and then vanishes. Yet in our pride, we arrogantly brag about the big things we will do.

**C: We do not acknowledge the One who controls the Universe.**

L: This kind of big talking is the epitome of evil. [Instead], you should say,

**C: "If it is the Lord's will and we live long enough, we hope to do this project or pursue that dream."**

Philippians 3:4-12, See James 4:13-14,16,15

**Music** Paul and James make it clear that our time and our plans are in the hands of our timeless creating God. Let's recognize that truth by singing.

### **O God Our Help in Ages Past**

Words: Isaac Watts, 1719 Music: Attr. to William Croft., 1708  
harm. by WH Monk, 1861

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.

**[Prayers]**

**God Moments** (were not scripted)



**Music** Let's celebrate his loving leadership over our lives on this -- "Reign of Christ the King Sunday" -- as we prepare our hearts for prayer. Let's sing

### **We Will Glorify the King of Kings**

Words: Twila Paris Music: Twila Paris © 1982 Singspiration Music  
CCLI # 2561297

1. We will glorify the King of kings, we will glorify the Lamb;  
we will glorify the Lord of lords, who is the great I AM.
3. He is Lord of heaven, Lord of earth, he is Lord of all who live;  
he is Lord above the universe, all praise to Him we give

**Pastor's Prayer** Lord, You have been at work in our world since its conception. Your light shines brighter than the sun, and your power outlasts the strongest of nations. We see you in nature, we see you in children, we see you in people of all ages. And when we see you, we give thanks to you for the wonders that you have created. Shine in our hearts, in our worship, and in our dealings with others.

**Praises and Petitions** Today especially we pray for those who are hurting in any way and are in need of healing or continued healing. We are thankful for the praises that we have heard from our congregation, and the joy we have from just being together in this house, and watching from home. We pray for Jim Mallot who went to the hospital this week. We continue to pray for \* Mary Jo Bell's friend Denese for recovery from broken bones, \* for Brian and Judy Holmes, \* for Linda Gordonier's cousin Ray, \* and for Becky's cousin Julie and her husband Brian, and \* for Kathy Novak's friend Beverly Wilkinson and those who are surrounding her \* and there are others that are on our hearts and minds as well, so we pause a moment, to lift these up to you as well. [Pause]

Lord, teach us how to honor you in our lives, to forgive others and ourselves by your grace, to do your will, to rely on you for our daily bread, and follow you away from temptation and evil. In short, to let our lives get traction in living out the prayer you taught us to pray. **Lord's Prayer**

### **Intro to Bible Reading**

Lay Reader: So on this Thanksgiving and Reign of Christ the King Sunday, Paul gives thanks to God. He quotes a hymn that celebrates the reign of Jesus, first as the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, and also as the head of the church, as the one who restores our peace with God by what He accomplished on the cross. Paul reminds them



of their journey to God and that their true purpose as his people is to make known the secret of true faith. He writes:

### **Bible Reading**

At one time you were far away from God. You were at odds with God, wicked in your ways, and your evil thoughts made you his enemies. But his Son became a human and died on a cross and has brought you back to God. So God made peace with you... This message is about the mystery of the ages! It was kept secret from people who lived in all the past times of the world. But now it has been revealed to God's people. God decided to make known his wonderful and glorious blessing to the nations. The mysterious plan is that -- *Christ – lives - in - you*. He is your hope in sharing in all the wonderful things that are to come. [Therefore] we announce the message about Christ. We warn everyone to be careful to live the right way. We teach everyone so that all of Christ's followers will grow and become fully mature in Christ. This is why I work so hard with all of the strength of God's amazing power and energy that surges within me. (Colossians 1:21-22a,26-29)

**Music** As God's people, then the goal is to reveal to others that Christ lives victoriously in us and can be seen in us as by our words and actions, we reveal who we worship and what he can do in a person's life. Let's stand and sing.

### **Ye Servants of God**

Words: Charles Wesley, 1744 Music: Attr. to William Croft, 1708

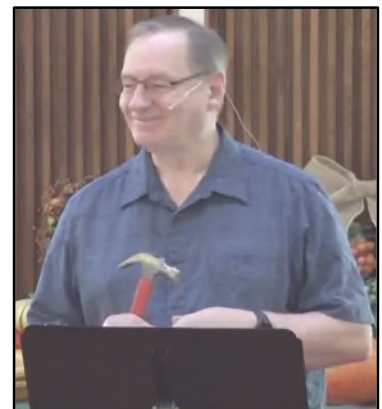
1. Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim,  
and publish abroad his wonderful name;  
the name all-victorious of Jesus extol,  
his kingdom is glorious and rules over all.
2. God ruleth on high, almighty to save,  
and still he is nigh, his presence we have;  
the great congregation his triumph shall sing,  
ascribing salvation to Jesus, our King.
3. "Salvation to God, who sits on the throne!"  
Let all cry aloud and honor the Son;  
the praises of Jesus the angels proclaim,  
fall down on their faces and worship the Lamb.
4. Then let us adore and give him his right,  
all glory and power, all wisdom and might;  
all honor and blessing with angels above,  
and thanks never ceasing and infinite love.

## Sermon

It is fitting as we come to the end and pinnacle of the Christian year – Did you know that next week is the new year for Christians? The beginning of Advent is the beginning of the Christian year. And so the end of the year, today, culminates in Christ's ultimate victory over all, so it is fitting that we have one walk in Paradise today. By God's Spirit, we receive the gifts he gave us in the garden by once again following his loving limitations, finding the peace of relying on his provision, and today we receive again the final gift -- exchanging the difficult emptiness of toiling labor for the joy of purposeful work in his strength. But most of all, the restoration of all these gifts come by God's grace in Christ through whom we can receive a renewed and growing relationship with God, All of these things were said or implied in what we just heard Jerry read for us... Let's build a picture of that relationship between us and God's energy within us.

I have here a nail. Nails penetrate and become the “glue” that holds things together. The problem with nails is that, unless they are powered, they can't penetrate much of anything. They might join a box of nails. The nails in the box may inspire each other about what they can become, they can talk about what they ought to do, and they can dream about what their future may hold. But ultimately, none of that in and of itself fulfills the purpose of the nail. Until they are chosen by the builder, they cannot fulfill their purpose. (In John 15:16a – Jesus says you did not choose me, I chose you and appointed you that you might go and bear fruit that will last) , or in our imagery – “go and -- hold something together”, and we cannot fulfill that purpose until it is powered by some -- hammering force. But before that happens, the best they can do is huddle together (box up) and show off how shiny they all are -- and perhaps even get a little rusty while they lay around.

Even when the Creator picks one up for some purpose, nails still have a choice, don't they? They can disobediently duck away – you ever have that nail that you just can't seem to ever hit? That causes great pain to the empowering creator. Sometimes the nail is too forceful, pushing its way through the material and splinters it at great frustration to the Creator. Sometimes, the nail refuses to be used, bending to their own will (you've had those nails that flop over or bend sideways rather than going in and becoming an instrument of the Creator's reconstruction of his creation.



But all this laying around, boxing oneself up, ducking, forcing, and bending -- leaves nails empty and unfulfilled because they have not found the purpose of what they are truly created to be and do. True joy comes when the nail chooses to cooperate with the hammering force of God and is driven into some meaningful purpose in his constructive plan...

### Restoring our Purpose

- \* ~~Box up~~
- \* ~~Lay around~~
- \* ~~Duck away~~
- \* ~~Force through~~
- \* ~~Bend over~~
- \* **Cooperate**

We start moving back to Paradise when, as Ian Thomas describes it, we believe that Christ died to forgive us from our sins, not only to change our destination when we die, but we that he rose to life to change the way we live here and now. Jesus wants to re-inhabit us, giving us a lifetime of allowing him to live in us and do his work through us. That's why I chose this particular "box" of nails – they aren't ordinary nails – you can tell because they have an orange thing on the end of them. These are special nails that aren't normally used directly with a hammer. There is a power-nailer that goes in-between. Do you know how these things work? You put the nail in one end of the power nailer, you put – for lack of better word, I'll call it a bullet in the middle of the nailer, then you put the nail where you want it to go and you hit a button on the other end of the nailer, which triggers the "bullet" which drives the nail into – with that kind of force, pretty much anything. I used it to connect wood to concrete, and it holds really well. But my point is – there is a lot of power in the hammering force of God that makes the nail fulfill its purpose. (Not usually a negative nailing force.)

Jesus can powerfully restore us to our true humanity and purposeful function. So, the degree that his redemptive purpose is accomplished in us is the same degree that we are what he is. We are like him. We say is what he says, we do is what he does. The more we are like him the more we are redeemed.

**His life lives in us**

Christ came to earth to reveal what God is like and how humanity is supposed to be. He surrendered his will and work to the Father's wishes. This is what Jesus did: "Not my will but thine be done". And because Jesus desired to fulfill God's purposes most thoroughly through him, Jesus' life gives a true reflection of the nature of the heavenly Father. In the same way that Jesus did this with his heavenly Father within him; our lives become an expression of the life of Christ who is in us. So people look at our lives and they see our lives, they see Christ.

So as Jesus did, we do – we surrender our will and work to Christ’s wishes, and in so doing fulfill God’s purposes through us. Have you recently offered yourself to God’s transforming will? (Romans 12:1-2)

The Spirit equips us and empowers us (E.g. 1 Corinthians 12:4 ff) to fulfill our purpose just as the hammer and bullet equip and empower the nail. But the force of the heavenly hammer is rarely painful (I’ve never heard a nail yell back, have you?) even when in resistance, even when boxed up, even when we lay down, even when we duck away, even when we use splintering force, or bend away from God’s intended direction for our life. He is still gentle with us and still tries to bring us back to where we need to be so that we can be purposefully used again.

In the long run, God’s presence and power, while he is indeed a driving force, he is also a hopeful force and a healing force and gives a purpose which leads to true joy.

So now we come to the story of today: Numbers 13 and 14. We are nearing the edge of the promised land. Remember we started in Eden (here on the platform), we got kicked out of Eden and went down to the other Hall, where we were slaves in Egypt. Then the platform wasn’t Eden anymore, but it was as close as we could get to it – the promised land, and now we are getting close.

God wants to give the people a foretaste of what awaits them in that glorious, divine land. He instructs Moses to choose one leader from each of the 12 ancestral tribes of Israel. They were sent as scouts to explore and observe the land for 40

**PROVISION**

days. They returned and reported to the assembled people. Joshua and Caleb understood that God was providing this paradise for them. They showed the people a grape cluster that was so large that two men had to carry them on a pole straddled between their shoulders, (reminds me of Peter and the Wolf near the end of the story when the wolf is hanging upside down, tied to two poles that were on the shoulders of two of his captors – this big, big cluster of grapes that had to be carried on a pole between two men -- not to mention the pomegranates and figs that demonstrated the lushness of the crops of the land. (There is God’s provision).



**PROHIBITION**

It was here where they could live out their covenant with God where he would protect them. (There is God's loving prohibitions meant so they could thrive).

**PURPOSE**

These two scouts boldly claimed that they should follow God's clear direction and enter the promised land and be his people for the sake of the world. (There is God's purpose).

**WITH GOD**

They could return to (a form of paradise) where they could live in loving relationship with their God. (There is God's relationship that is the essence of it all). So we have two promising reports.

Then there were 10 other scouts. They admitted it was a lush land flowing with milk and honey. But they saw heavily populated and massive fortified cities, filled with larger, stronger people – descendants of ~~WITH GOD~~ giants. A land that would devour them as a people. They said they felt like grasshoppers in the presence of these natives, and those natives probably looked at them like grasshoppers as well, just insignificant little insects. They did not see God's promise and presence. (Scratch the relationship with God)

They began to repeat to everyone who would listen this negative fear-building terror, and it spread throughout the people. The ~~PROVISION~~ people began to focus on circumstances rather than God and concluded that they would die by the sword, and their wives and children would be taken by the enemy, and become their enslaved property. (So much for God's provision)

And so, the chant of the people became, once again -- why did you lead us out of Egypt to here? Why couldn't we at least die in this ~~PURPOSE~~ wilderness? Why did we come all this way only to be slaughtered? (There goes purpose plummeting down the hillside)

Therefore, they decided they were not going to follow God's ~~PROHIBITION~~ direction and trust in his promises to enter paradise. Instead, they were going to elect a new leader to take them back to Egypt. (There goes the loving limitations – they disobeyed again, thinking they knew better than God). They were losing Paradise all over again.

Moses and Aaron fell face down in humble mourning. Joshua and Caleb also ripped their robes (that was a sign of mourning in their day) over this terrible decision and argued that it is in their best interest not to rebel against the Lord who was giving them this land, and to not be afraid of the circumstances but to rely on the Lord's presence with them. He has carried them all the way through the sea

and through this wilderness. The people responded to all of this message through Moses and Aaron and Joshua and Caleb -- by wanting to stone them -- to get them out of the way.

Then the Lord spoke to Moses. And God wondered how long he would put up with people who refuse to accept him and his paradise. Moses intercedes for the people, saying to God that his world-wide reputation for his miraculous working power that led them out of Egypt and all the wonders that he has done -- all of that reputation would fall flat and be destroyed if, in the end, he failed to bring his people into the promised land.

And then there is a declaration of God's eternal character -- slow to anger, abounding in love, forgiving sin and rebellion (but still suffering consequences for bad decisions). Moses asks God to forgive the people just as he has repeatedly done throughout the exodus journey. God does forgive, but he also leaves them to the consequences of their choices. They were not going to make it into the promised land. The children (that they claimed would become slaves) -- those were the ones who would inherit the promised land. The exception would be Caleb (and Joshua). They had a different spirit and had followed God wholeheartedly, and they would make it in.

Think about how hard that would be. Two out of twelve stood up to say, "Hey, this is a good thing!" While ten out of twelve said, "Be afraid! Be very afraid." We know even from modern politics that the message of fear is much more powerful than the promise of "let's work through this challenge and we might see a good thing at the other end." Right? That's why all we ever hear are negative things "Look out if they happen to get in -- or don't get in." Nevertheless, Caleb and Joshua did not give up.

Meanwhile, Moses came back and reported to the people about his intercession with God, how they would not reach the promised land, but their children would. When the people heard this, *then they* were the ones who began to mourn. Then they decided they would go capture paradise after all, once again ignoring the limitations God have given them, for God had already said this land was not for them anymore -- their children would inherit the land, but they were not to cross this boundary -- the line was drawn in the desert sand, and they were outside of it.

Moses tried to warn them against trying to force their purpose and gain provision by their own hands. This is the Garden of Eden story all over again. They were determined to do it their way without God's blessing or permission. They began to

go up into the hills where the enemies were without Moses, without the ark, which they understood represented God's presence and was to always lead the way. And those large powerful people living in the hill country came down and beat them back in a complete and horrific defeat. In essence, like Adam and Eve, they were evicted from Eden for thinking they could do it without God.

Oswald Chambers wrote in his book "My Utmost for His Highest", that the greatest thing, the most important thing for us to remember is that when we go forward into our future, we go to fulfill God's purpose, not our own. In the life of sin, our ambitions are our own, but in the Christian life, we have no goals of our own. Our goals are God's goals. We talk a lot about what *we* have decided for Christ, and about *our* determination to be his followers, *our* decisions for this and *our* decisions for that. But in the New Testament, the only aspect that is brought out is the compelling purpose of God. All our noble decisions and actions and what we think is right for us fades to nothing when compared to God's goals for us. (See James 4:13-16 Philippians 3:4-12) We heard that in the responsive bible reading earlier today.

Dr. David Aikman wrote, "Each of us has a purpose, a reason for being here, that no one else can tell you, but you can find out from God." In specific application, that is very true -- there may be individual roles and ministries according to specific gifts God has chosen to give each one of you for this time of your life. And you need to discover and rediscover what those things are.

But generally speaking, the purpose of every Christian is to enjoy God's presence and be so connected with him that we are eager to do his will, calmly rely on his provision to such a degree that when people look at us they see Christ. If we try to do it in our own strength, we will be as effective as the people who disobediently headed for paradise when the way was not yet prepared (or as the nail that just stayed in the box, or got out of the box and tried to force itself into something when it had no real power behind it). And they were splintered by trying to force themselves in when they were meant to stay out.

**Christ lives and works through us**

But when we are in tune with his timing and instruction, when we put forth every effort *by the strength of Christ working in our life*, then, when we are at our best, people whom God has chosen to open their spiritual eyes -- they will see this mysterious, yet rich and glorious truth -- that Christ lives in and through his people. Other people will see it, if the Spirit allows them to see it and they don't close their eyes



to it. We will experience a form of paradise in our life and maybe even a foretaste of paradise in our world, and a foretaste of what heaven might be like when all this takes place in our lives. So, the last question is, do we let Christ live and work through us? Can we grow with God even when it seems like everyone else seems to be against him? Can we still be bold enough to say, “this is a promised land?”

**Prayer** Let’s pray. Lord, it is so easy to hide behind what we like to think are important things ... but they are not important to you. When everything is removed but the core of who we are, what remains? Without your grace we are just another smile, another face, another fleeting breath, a grain of sand passing quickly through .... So, we give our lives, take it all, everything – take it as a living offering pleasing to you. Then when and who you choose, they will see you in each of us, they will hear you when we speak, they will feel you as we live out your purposes, and our lives will become music to those still seeking to find the rhythm of their life in you. And it is in the name of Jesus and for his sake we pray this. Amen.

**Music** So restored to our godly purpose, we bring Christ to his world by the (metaphorical) music of our life – I know some of us aren’t “music people”, but we all have a song to sing, so to speak (even if it is not “musical”)-- the melody that our lives proclaim by our actions and our words, inspiring others to see and receive the spiritual healing of Christ. Let’s stand and sing.

### **Christ for the World We Sing**

Words: Samuel Wolcott, 1869 Music: Felice de Giardini, 1769

1. Christ for the world we sing, the world to Christ we bring, with loving zeal;  
the poor, and them that mourn, the faint and overborne,  
sinsick and sorrow-worn, whom Christ doth heal.
2. Christ for the world we sing, the world to Christ we bring, with fervent prayer;  
the wayward and the lost, by restless passions tossed,  
redeemed at countless cost, from dark despair.
4. Christ for the world we sing, the world to Christ we bring, with joyful song;  
the newborn souls, whose days, reclaimed from error's ways,  
inspired with hope and praise, to Christ belong.

**Blessing** God has given us new eyes to see Jesus Christ in others. May we also, by our openness to him, reveal him to others. By the limitations we respect, the provision we receive, and the purpose in which we rejoice, but especially by his ever-present relationship with us. Amen.