

Straight from the "Hart"

January 1, 2023

New Year's Sunday



Welcome to Hartland UMC's "Straight from the "Hart"". We are glad you are participating in today's time of worship by reading this service script.

Opening Prayer

God of new years and fresh starts -- as we move deeper into the Christmas season, we realize you are flooding our world with Jesus Christ, the Light. We have gathered today to offer ourselves as a way of saying we seek to move ever closer to you -- so that the light we have received in our hearts may shine ever more brightly in every area of our lives. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Please join in a New Year's Affirmation that will also call us to worship.

Affirmation / Call to Worship

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

P: Come, let us worship God the Father.

C: We will worship the One who spoke in the beginning and created something out of nothing.

P: Come, let us worship Jesus the Christ.

C: We will worship the One who took on the clothing of humanity to set free those who were oppressed.

P: Come, let us worship the Holy Spirit.

C: We will worship the One whose Spirit rests continually upon us, calling us from sorrow-filled endings to bright new beginnings.

Music New beginnings can happen at the turn of events, the turn of a year, or the start of each day. Let's sing to the One who can make all things new.

This is the Day

Words: Psalm 118:24 ad by Les Garrett, 1967

Music: Les Garrett, 1967 © 1967,1980 Scripture in Song
(2 x - 1st time with echo, 2nd time unison)



This is the day, **this is the day**
That the Lord has made **that the Lord has made**
Let us rejoice, **let us rejoice**
and be glad in it **and be glad in it.**
This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day, **this is the day that the Lord hath made.**

This is the day, this is the day
That the Lord has made that the Lord has made
Let us rejoice, let us rejoice
and be glad in it and be glad in it.
This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day, this is the day that the Lord hath made.

Intro to Reading

Each day, each week, each month, each season, each year -- is a wonderful gift. As the year turns, we must wait for the Magi to arrive as it is only the 7th day of Christmas. We'll focus on that next week. This gives us an opportunity to contemplate the times and seasons of life. L.R. Knost wrote:

Life is amazing. And then it's awful. And then it's amazing again.

And in between the amazing and awful, it's ordinary and mundane and routine.

Breathe in the amazing, hold on through the awful,
and relax and exhale during the ordinary.

That's just the living heartbreaking, soul-healing,
amazing, awful, ordinary life.

And it's breathtakingly beautiful.

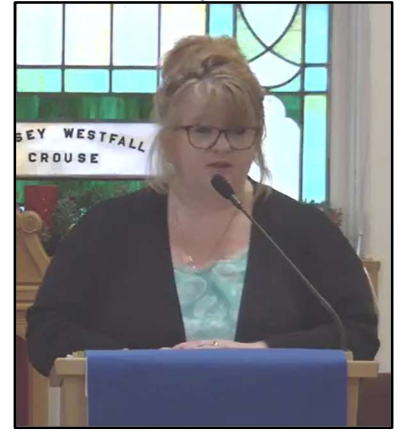
Hear snippets from the Bible's classic passage on this topic.

Reading

For everything that happens in life there is a season, a right time for every intention under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die... a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance... a time to embrace and a time to for keeping your distance ... a time to search and a time to give up as lost, a time to keep and a time to discard, a time to love and a time to hate... a time to go to war and a time for peace...

I have seen the tasks God has given humanity. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also placed in the hearts of humanity an awareness of eternity; yet no one can fully understand what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for people than to be joyful and to do good while they live. To eat and drink and see the good results in all our hard work is a gift from God.

From Ecclesiastes 3:1-13 (NIV, CJB, VOICE)



Theme

Ecclesiastes intends to go beyond a sampling meant to represent the whole of all human activity and interactions on earth. It is declaring that in the complete spectrum of all the possibilities of life from birth to peace, God is acting and will accomplish his purposes in his way and in his good time.

I think most of would agree that Jesus would say that there is never an appropriate season for hate or war – but that doesn't mean those seasons don't exist and may (especially with war) be necessary at times because we live in a broken world. That doesn't mean God can't or won't use those difficult seasons to accomplish his plans.

For instance – In ancient history, God created circumstances that caused Egypt to love and embrace Joseph and his people, for his God-given wisdom saved them all from a severe and extended drought. Later, the Egyptians came to fear and hate those very same people. This created a timely opportunity for God to lead his people to form their own nation in the promised land. We can trust that even though there are seasons of struggle, God is working out his purposes and he will make everything refreshingly beautiful in its time. Knowing that it is God's rule and timing that is in charge of everything, there are several unhealthy ways that people may react.

One is that to try and discover his timing.

We may have a glimmer of eternity in our

We attempt to discover his timing

hearts, but in my experience, attempts to outguess God's plans and timing of things usually does more harm than help. I remember back in the 80s or 90s that people were saying that all the planets were going to line up, so Christ must be coming right then when that happens. Yet here we are. Doesn't help.

We attempt to force the seasons is another unhelpful reaction. We try to take what we

We attempt to force the seasons

think are God's plans into our hands and we force our own timing on them – rushing him or lagging behind him. In the Old Testament, some failed to trust God for promised heirs and so took it into their own hands, creating difficult family relations that eventually led to national conflicts. Ecclesiastes tells us that we are to recognize God's rule throughout the ages and to humble ourselves under his agenda.

The opposite extreme of that is also problematic, and that is to resign ourselves to

We resign ourselves to nothing

doing nothing. If God controls everything, then why bother doing anything? None of us are powerful enough (without him) to help or hinder his purposes. He will do it with us or without us. If a Bible hero had said no, he would have raised another to accomplish his purposes.

But even the author of Ecclesiastes, who seems to recognize a lot of the – apparent “meaningless futility of life”, says we should do all we can to do good and that the ability to enjoy ourselves in the work of life and its rewards is a gift from God, and while it is true that God can find others, he has graciously invited us to the great privilege of participating in his great cause, and it is best for us and for all, if we cooperate with his plan and call for our life.

Music

In order for us to unite with God's purposes, we need to give him permission to shape our hearts and minds and lives so that we can become like him in thought and purpose, that the only way we will be able to do his will. Let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing.

Change My Heart, O God

Words and Music: Eddie Espinosa

© 1982 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing

Change my heart, O God, make it ever true.

Change my heart, O God, may I be like you.

You are the Potter, I am the clay.

Mold me and make me, this is what I pray.

Change my heart, O God, make it ever true.

Change my heart, O God, may it be like you.

(Repeat)

Pastor's Prayer – Lord, all nature praises you for its creation simply by its beauty and functional design. We joined with all the angels singing praise over the birth of

Jesus, who came to deliver faithful people close to your heart. As we celebrated the Christmas story, let us continue to celebrate Christ's presence with us, lighting our dark world with beacons of hope, peace, love and joy -- creating room in a dark world for Christ who wants to empower your people, healing our pain, and guiding us in the way of peace. Reshape us, and make us true, that we may better fit in with the new creation that you are trying to bring to our world. **Praises and Petitions** We lift up * Pat Schleh who is hurting with a broken hip and heading toward rehab, * Cheri Hall requests prayer for her cousin's sister, Clare (and her family), as she has been diagnosed with metastasized cancer, * we pray for the family and friends Kim Blakely, * for the Campbells, * for those who are not feeling well for whatever reason, (for Jan's brother Reese Thornton, who yesterday went to the hospital with a possible stroke or TIA, * and those that we now name only in our hearts and minds in this moment of silence. [Pause]

Now wrap your arms around us that we may experience your blessing, peace, and fullness of life. Continue to bathe us in your love, that we may always be growing in your grace and in your favor, through Jesus Christ who shows us the way, and teaches us to pray **LORD'S PRAYER**

Intro to Bible Reading

In the days of Paul, children had a status barely above servants until they came of age. Paul describes people prior to accepting Christ as bound to the powers of elemental spirits. By this, he means the basic forms of religion, whether it was the Jews under the Law, or Gentiles under their former religious practices. These laws and rituals and rites operated much like guardians who watched over and regulated minors with obligations and restrictions until they came of age and were ready to take on the full privileges of an heir with a healthy adult responsibility. Jesus introduces this new age of faith, by which all genders and races and status are granted all the rights and privileges of full children. In today's reading, Paul writes to the Galatians describing the transition from an imprisoning law to a mature, gracious faith built on the work of Christ.

Bible Reading

There was a time when we were underage juveniles, enslaved by the elemental spirits of the universe But when the right time of fulfillment had arrived, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born into a culture in which legalistic perversion of the Torah was the norm, so that he might redeem and set free those held hostage to this legalism and thus enable us to be adopted as God's children. Now because

you are part of God's true family, he sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who intimately calls out "Abba! (that is, "Dear Father"). Now we're no longer living like slaves under law, but we enjoy being God's very own sons and daughters! And since we're his, we can access everything our Father has – for we are heirs because of what God has done! Before we knew God as our Father, we were unwitting servants to the powers which in reality are not gods. But now that we truly know him, and more than that, are known by him, why would for a moment consider turning back to those weak and worthless principles of religion as though we were still enslaved by them all over again? Haven't you endured enough bondage to these breathless idols and those weak and miserable principles and rituals?

Galatians 4:3b-9 (VOICE, CJB, NIV, TPT)

Music – If we are going to succeed in maintaining Christ's fulfilled "new day" in our lives -- then we need God to not only change and mold our hearts to become like our heavenly Father. We already prayed in song. This next song teaches us to keep placing our hearts, --- our lives, --- in God's strengthening hands, lest we resort to falling back into the captivity of old patterns, as Paul warned us about in the reading. Let's sing before the sermon

Make Me a Captive, Lord

Words: George Matheson, 1890 Music: George J Elvey, 1868

2. My heart is weak and poor until it master find; it has no spring of action sure,
it varies with the wind. It cannot freely move till thou hast wrought its chain;
enslave it with thy matchless love, and deathless it shall reign.
3. My power is faint and low till I have learned to serve;
it lacks the needed fire to glow, it lacks the breeze to nerve.
It cannot drive the world until itself be driven;
its flag can only be unfurled when thou shalt breathe from heaven.
4. My will is not my own till thou hast made it thine;
if it would reach a monarch's throne, it must its crown resign.
It only stands unbent amid the clashing strife,
when on thy bosom it has leant, and found in thee its life.

Sermon Do you Have the Time?

Those in the room see on the front bulletin the words from the Roman poet Virgil, a contemporary of Christ, who wrote that "Time flies never more to be recalled".

And we just thought the speeding of time was only a modern problem. The imagery expresses our futile desire to try to hold on to time – and though it may seem like we have a handle on it, it just keeps ticking away and flying out of our grasp -- leading the Bible writers to compare the time of our life as a brief wisp of fog that disappears in the morning sun, with no control over where it may take us tomorrow...therefore we must make the most of every passing moment now.



The letter to the Galatians tells us that the time became fully ripe -- prepared and ready -- for God to gift us with his Son and a new era, a new way of working with humanity – God adopting them as his children, and freeing us from things that imprison us. We live in a time when God has granted us everything we need to freely and joyfully run a good race of spiritual progress and growth. But some wanted to take the church back to a pre-Christ way of living out their lives and faith.

When I was a youth, probably somewhere near heading toward being a freshman in high school, the school held an intramural all-school track and field event. All the students came. We signed up for all kinds of things. I ran a 60-yard dash. When the time came, I lined up with some of my best friends. The rules were that you were supposed to stay in your own lane from the start line to the finish line. My brother advised me to not look at the other runners, just look straight ahead to the finish line – go for that and nothing else. The problem was, however, that as I started running, there was someone to my left, a lane or two over, who was running so hard that he just kind of drifted over and started crossing lanes. If I hadn't caught him in my eyesight, we would have tangled up and tumbled. I did a short step and a hold up pause to let him get through, and I remember seeing the top of this shorter runner's head as he passed in front of me – and then I continued on. When the race was over, I discovered I had lost to my best friend at the time by 2/10ths of a second, and I didn't say anything, but I knew that forced encounter slowed me down a lot longer than that. On the other hand, if I had not seen him and kept on plowing ahead, we would have been rolling around on the ground and it would have been a lot more than 2/10ths of a second. I knew this law breaker, but I don't remember his name now. It is not important.

But when it comes to our spiritual progress, Paul makes it clear that we need to recognize and name what it is – within or without – those things that cut us off, that slow us down, that steal our steps toward joy, turns us away from the truth of grace and pushes us back to the old pre-Christ patterns. On this first day of the year when some of us pause to reflect and resolve again to do something new, it might be good to ask: What kinds of things hinder our resolve?

Past patterns, for one. They do not easily let go. We are creatures of habit, how we exercise – or don't. How we eat and drink or practice other comforts, escape, or other activities. They easily become patterns and may even become addictive. Many of us also have mental tape recorders that echo memories of words and attitudes of parents or other significant others or even our own self-perceptions. Something triggers it and it is like hitting a play button, and you hear it again and again and again, and we can't seem to turn it off.

Past patterns

There is a story about a child who is always trying to win the approval of a parent who saw a cloud in every silver lining. Imagine the tapes her attitudes and words put in his head. One day they were walking by the edge of the sea and a large wave caught them off guard and yanked the boy out to sea. The mother screamed, dropped to her knees and prayed. Another wave washed the boy back -- practically into her arms. She looked him, and then at the sky and said – “Hey, he had a hat!”

All these tapes and habits may be true or false, good or bad. But if they are negative, they can entangle us in negative self-images and create a lack of confidence that keep us from moving forward to full maturity. Past patterns.

Then there are people patterns. People also pressure us to remain as we are. I left my home church to go to college. I changed, grew, and developed in many ways, as do most of us when we go away from home for the first time, whether it is college or somewhere else. I grew, changed and developed in many ways, and when I returned to that church 5 years later, most still saw me as the youth I was rather than I person I had become. I don't fault them. From the other side of it – I still find it hard to believe that I have to look up to look into my oldest boy's eyes. We tend to freeze people into where we last saw them often and knew them well – and we can inadvertently (or purposefully) attempt to drag them back to those less mature years and habits.

People patterns

Or even worse, we freeze them with their worst event and never let them escape it. A now very safe driver may never live down an accident – even if was 30 years

prior – and an accident! I’ve heard it put into the mouths of characters on several TV shows. When a person’s past is thrown in their face – they protest, “I am more than my worst moment.”

And if we manage to overcome their expectations and form a new, better life, they often don’t recognize it because they have us locked into the way we were -- in that one moment even, instead of what we are becoming. Even Jesus could do little good in his hometown because they remembered him as a boy, son of a carpenter. I don’t know what he was like as a boy, but he wasn’t the Messiah then – in their eyes – and locked him into that childhood – into a time before he was recognized even as a rabbi, much less the Messiah. Past Patterns, People Patterns, and the Encouragement of Expectations.

Often, thoughts and words from ourselves or others may sound like an encouragement to **Expectations Encouraged** overcome our negative past and people patterns – but what is really *expected* is more of the same old established behaviors. You ever commented on your observations of a person, and somebody responds by saying, “Well that’s just (whatever their name is) That is just the way they are”. We don’t expect them to change. That’s just who they are. The comment is gracious, and hopefully that is what the intent is, but it also admits that there is an expectation that that person will never become better in that area than was observed, whether it is about someone else or about ourselves. Our goal should be not to simply to say encouraging words of progress while expecting none, because people live up to perceived expectations more than spoken words. With gracious acceptance, we need to help each other move forward and put their past behind them.

A simplistic example: When my children were young, each Vacation Bible School and even camp beyond high school days, it was a big challenge for one of them in particular. The music was always strange and too loud for his sensitive ears and so during the music time he would sit behind all the others and cover his ears trying to filter out the noise. By mid-week he was starting to get used to it and by the end of the week he was on the platform singing loudly as everybody else. But the expectation had to be there. Otherwise, he would have stayed in the back row and never participated. And as we enter a new year, this is often a season of looking back over the year and looking ahead to the new one, and some of us make resolutions to help us be intentional about our growth to becoming a better person. Often, we think it is about stopping or giving up something, but resolutions could

just as easily be adding something into your life's pattern that might make it better than it is currently. Statistically, I have heard that resolutions don't last very long with a vast majority of people – I am included in that majority. Here are some tips to help me and may help all of us do a bit better.

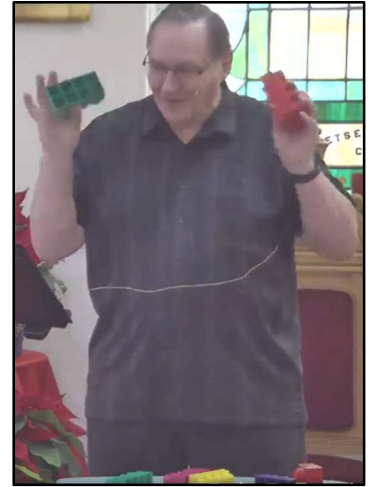
[*Move over to table with pail of Legos*]

1) First. Don't set too many or unrealistic resolutions. [*Pour out many large Legos from the pail*] If every one of these is a goal, we won't be able to get any of them done well. Get rid of some of them. [*Push many of Legos aside and even off the table*] Just pick one or two good goals to work on -- one to stop and one to start, perhaps, or whatever it is. but just prayerfully pick one or two. [*Pick up a couple of Legos*]

2) Second. Don't settle for boring, unmotivated goals. (That's why I'm giving you some props 😊) Sometimes we choose goals based on past pressures or people pressures and we think "I have to choose "this goal" because this is what everyone thinks I ought to be, so this is what I think I ought to be." But truthfully, I don't really care about this. And that means it is not going to last, because it has got to come from within. You need to pick a goal [*Hold up one Lego*] that really motivates you and that you want to live with a passion, and that is important to you, not something that someone else thinks is important for you.

3) Be creative to try to make your resolution fun and interesting and important to you. If your goal is cleaning the house more often – and you can't figure out a creative way of making it fun or interesting – then add something fun to the project (listen to some fun music while you are doing the task). So this one is fun, and you add it to [*Click one Lego onto another*] the thing that is not so fun so you make it a fun way of enjoying this new goal that you are working at.

3) Another thing to be aware of is what masters you – know that (1) you are craving it (2) and that it is bad for you (3) and that you really want to give them up. And be aware that sometimes there is a trigger that tempts you. Let me use a simple illustration. [*Hold up a Lego*] Bowling. Good thing. Good exercise. Good social experience. Go Bowling – Eat Pizza [*Click one Lego onto the "bowling Lego*] One thing triggers the other. If there is a way you can keep doing the good thing but it triggers something bad, figure out a way to either eliminate the bad, or put on something that is a little more healthy [*exchange the "bad lego" with another one*] so



that the damaging thing will no longer go along with the good thing. Replace the bad part with something that is good.

4) The fourth idea is: Practice progress, not perfection. Some resolutions fail because we lose our resolve after one setback. We not only chastise ourselves for our failure, we give up trying altogether, and we allow that bad activity or lack of activity to master us all over again. Don't quit. Keep progressing. If and when we happen to fail, pick it back up where we left off and start right over again.

5) If possible, give an external structure to your goal. That could mean a friend or joining a group who will help keep you accountable. Our family is a bowling family. There have been several times in our life when we have said, we don't want to be a part of a league, it costs a lot of money, we'll just commit to going open bowling once a week. We get about 2 or 3 weeks in and then schedules take over. But when we commit ourselves to a league, it is effortless for us to be there every single week -- and the league cancels on us more than we do on the league. The commitment to the organized structure makes it a whole different thing. When there is an external force that helps reinforce your goal, it can be a really helpful thing.

6) Finally, connect to the *why* of your resolution. Want to be more consistent with your devotional life? Don't just set up a task and prayer calendar that you can check off as you go (unless that works for you as a powerful motivational tool – that's fine) – but don't just think, "oh, I've got that done for the day," and check it off – rather, envision the deeper meaning of the goal, in the case of a devotional life -- the closer relationship with God that it can nourish, the wisdom to practical living it can bring. etc... Keep those higher "why am I doing this" purposes of your resolution in front of you rather than merely checking the resolution off as an accomplished task for the day...

If you have trouble thinking of a resolution that might improve your life, I stumbled across this quite by accident. It may or may not help, but I thought it was interesting enough that I want to share it with you anyway. It comes from a comedian, and because I had to "sanitize" what he said, the humor isn't necessarily there, but the core ideas behind it were pretty good. I've adapted, edited and expanded on these 9 Life Lessons – There is a fill-in-the-letter puzzle insert, if you are interested in doing that. As the source is secular, I added Bible references as well off the top of my head. You may find better references on your own... This might give you some fodder to think about what you may want to pursue in 2023.

1) Passionate Pursuit of Short-Term Goals. Many people tell us to find the one big goal in your life and shoot for it your whole life. Steven Covey warns us that climbing this ladder of what we think is success and be a challenge because as life nears end and we get near the top of that ladder it may dawn on us too late that we leaned out ladder against the wrong building. We've spent our whole life chasing after something that – if we get there – we discover wasn't as meaningful as we thought it might be. It is like the earlier track illustration, if I had only looked at the finish line and not seen something important on the periphery, I would have been a tumbled mess. The original speaker put it this way: If you are only focusing on what is too far ahead – you may not see the shiny thing out of the corner of your eye. Work hard at what is in front of you, and be aware that the next worthy pursuit that God is wanting for you will probably appear in your periphery.

2) Happiness is NOT a Goal. Like the poem we heard early in the service the life has ups and downs, and that is normal. We aren't designed to be constantly content. If you overly focus on being happy, it goes away. I like the imagery of the dog chasing its tail and happiness is in the tail – you just go around in circles and get nowhere. But if you go do something, then happiness trails along. Or as the speaker put it: Rather than seeking happiness, instead seek to make others happy and then, perhaps as a side effect, you might get some too.

3) Don't pretend you are self-made. There is an old joke about the someone looking at landscape of a beautiful farm and admiring God's handiwork. The farmer replied, "you should have seen it before I got here." Yes, there is a lot of human endeavor and work involved, but who gave him the body and breath do it. You are lucky to be here, lucky to be born. Nothing can be done on our own. As Ecclesiastes put it – even enjoying the work of your hands is a gift of God. The fact you can't truly take credit for your successes nor truly blame others for their failures will humble you and make you more compassionate. Empathy is intuitive but is also something you can work on intellectually. So don't pretend you can do it ALL by yourself, because nobody can. We all rely on somebody. Businesses require staff, or at least customers, if they are going to succeed. They can't do it by themselves.

4) Exercise. You only have one body. You've got to take care of it. He told that group of graduating people that even the poorest among them will be living long and comfortable lives. And it will depress you and stress you out. So don't get overwhelmed, take care of your body, and you will sleep.

5) Be hard on your own opinions. Society fails to recognize nuance and keeps most arguments alive by generating false dichotomies. It is like two tennis players trying to win a match by hitting beautifully executed shots from either end of *separate* tennis courts. They just aren't connecting with each other, they are in different ball parks. I like the imagery my Church History professor used. We create a strawmen by saying, "This is what *they* believe", and then we burn up and destroy the straw man, destroyed their arguments, and think we have accomplished something when in truth -- it isn't what they believe at all. We feel good, even superior, because we think we've beat them, but what we've defeated has nothing to do with it because we didn't honestly look at what they truly believe. We should be less concerned about everyone else's opinions and more concerned about our own beliefs. They should be consistently and thoroughly examined.

6) Be a teacher. Even if you are not a teacher, be a teacher. Share your ideas, don't take what you learn for granted. Rejoice in what you learn and -- spray it.

7) Define yourself by what you love. We see it all the time in our culture, especially online, people join together in their mutual hatred of – something. whatever it may be. We tend to define ourselves by what we are in opposition to and by what we don't like. I've even heard it said, "the only way people will ever unite is if there is an enemy to defeat", or "we have to take a stand against *something*" so pick something randomly, maybe not so randomly, but they pick something and then they start to attack it. But life would be better if we defined ourselves by what we love, by what we have a passion for. And to be generous and demonstrative in praise of those things and people that you admire. Send thank you cards and give ovations – so be pro-stuff, not just anti-stuff.

8) Respect those with less "power". The speaker said that in the past he has made important decisions about who he works with on the basis of how they treat the wait staff in the restaurants in which they met. Sometimes some people think they are highlighting their importance when they treat others terribly. But that is not really what they are doing. And this speaker said he will judge you on how you treat the least powerful. So there. (And by the way, so does Jesus).

9) Fill Your Life. You don't need to already know what you are going to do. You don't need to rush, you don't need to panic. Ecclesiastes says life may seem empty and meaningless as we travel through its seasons. There is only one thing to do with this empty existence, and that is – to fill it. Our speaker suggests that it is best

filled by learning as much as you can, taking pride in whatever you are doing, having compassion, sharing ideas, running, being enthusiastic, and participate in activities that appeal to you... (that might be different for all of us – he named a bunch of them, but we all have our own special things that we like to do). Take time to enjoy all the various joys of life... it is an incredibly exciting thing, this one meaningless life of yours, so fill it to the full.

We resolve to be better people - free from what masters us - because Christ came when we did not know God, and were slaves to what by nature are not gods. He gifted us out of that darkness and into his light of goodness, righteousness and truth -- enabling us to know the Lord's will and to please him -- living carefully – wisely, making the most of every moment, of every opportunity. (See Ephesians 5:8-10,15-17) The question is, then: do we have the time? The time to make the most of life in 2023? John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, wrote a watch night service in which we renew our covenant as Christians to make the most of our time, of our lives. Portions of what follows from that service will be included in our Communion Covenant today. There will be bold responses we will say together as we continue to reflect on what we must resolve to serve Christ better.

Communion

Invitation Through the communion table we invite you to once again commit yourselves to Christ as his servants. Give yourself to him, that you may belong to him, and serve him, whether the task be easy and honorable or difficult and disgraceful, whether they suit our inclinations and interests or they are not. Whether we can please Christ and ourselves, or where we must deny ourselves to please him. God promises to give us new life in Christ, the Source and Perfecter of our faith, while we pledge to live not for ourselves, but for Jesus Christ who loved us and gave himself for us. We gather (symbolically in this context) at the Lord's table where we meet, as the generations before us have met; to renew the covenant that binds us to God. Let's prepare to make this covenant our own by singing a song Charles Wesley wrote specifically for this purpose.

Come Let Us Use the Grace Divine

Words: Charles Wesley, 1762 Music: Richard Storrs Willis, 1850

Sung to tune of It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

1. Come, let us use the grace divine, and all with one accord,
in a perpetual covenant join ourselves to Christ the Lord;

Give up ourselves, thru Jesus' power, his name to glorify;
and promise, in this sacred hour, for God to live and die.

2. The covenant we this moment make be ever kept in mind;
we will no more our God forsake, or cast these words behind.

We never will throw off the fear of God who hears our vow;
and if thou art well pleased to hear, come down and meet us now.

Confession Let continue to prepare our hearts by a time of confession. O God, Searcher of all our hearts, you have formed us and claimed us for your own. We enter anew into covenant with you. Reveal any reluctance of falsehood within and receive us in your mercy for the sake of Jesus Christ. For you have been our light in darkness, our rock of strength in adversity and temptation. When we forget, you remember; when we flee, you follow after us with overflowing grace, patiently waiting for us to return to you.

We come to you in a new year with new desires and old fears, new decisions and old controversies, new dreams and old weaknesses.... and so, Lord, as the hymn says, we in silence ponder the blessing of Christ coming to earth to command our kingship – a king who gives himself for our spiritual food... so as we hear the music play, guide our meditation to what we need to leave behind us in 2022 and what we need to make new in our lives in 2023...

Special Instrumental Music Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

Words: Liturgy of St James, 4th c. tr. by Gerard Moultrie, 1864

Words: French Carol Melody, harm from The English Hymnal, 1906

1. Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and with fear and trembling stand;
ponder nothing earthly-minded, for with blessing in his hand,
Christ our God to earth descendeth, our full homage to demand.

2. King of kings, yet born of Mary, as of old on earth he stood,
Lord of lords, in human vesture, in the body and the blood;
he will give to all the faithful his own self for heavenly food.

Now Lord, we put away all that would compete with you.

I here from the bottom of my heart renounce them all, covenanting with you that no known sin shall be allowed in my life. Against your will, I have turned my love toward the world. In your power I will watch all temptations that will lead me away from you. For my own righteousness is riddled with sin, unable to stand before you

For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,

Forgive my unfaithfulness in not having done your will, for you have promised mercy to me if I turn to you with my whole heart.

Assurance Now Lord, because you are a God of hope, we know that you create all the possibilities of the future. Because you are a God of love, we know that you accept all the mistakes of the past. Because you are the God of faith, we come into your presence with gladness, we serve and bless you.

Thanksgiving

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

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

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. From everlasting to everlasting, you alone are God. You created light out of darkness and brought forth life on the earth. You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life. When we turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast. You delivered us from captivity, made covenant to be our sovereign God, and spoke to us through your prophets. And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

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

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ, in whom you have revealed yourself, our light and our salvation.

Jesus, I do humbly accept you as the only new and living Way, and sincerely join myself in a covenant with you. O blessed Jesus, I come to you and with all my power accept you as my Lord, and that my destiny with you as it may fall... through your grace, I promise that neither death nor life shall part me from you.

By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection, Father, you gave birth to your Church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit. And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice,

Before all heaven and earth, I here acknowledge you as my Lord and God. I take you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for my portion, and vow to give up myself, body and soul, as your servant, to serve you in holiness and righteousness all the days of my life.

We do this in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

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

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and cup. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood. By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world,

Lord, make me what you will. I put myself fully into your hands: put me to doing, put me to suffering, let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you, let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and with a willing heart give it all to your pleasure and disposal

until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet. Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church, all honor and glory is yours, almighty Father, now and forever. **Amen.**

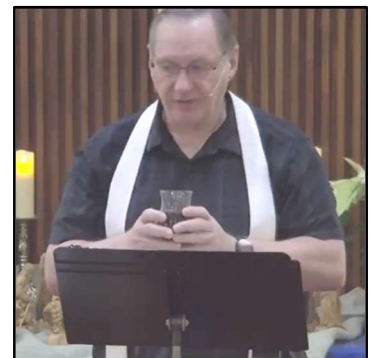
Bread and Cup



On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

[Take and Eat]

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



You have given to the Lord your hearts, you have opened your mouths to the Lord, and you have dedicated yourself to God. With God's power, never go back.

Music Let's sing and resolve to enter the new year focusing on the important things -- May the Light of his Word comfort, convince, and change us to continue making the most of every opportunity to experience the joy of doing his good will.

I Am Resolved

Words: Palmer Hartsough 1896 Music: James H Fillmore 1896

1 I am resolved no longer to linger, charmed by the world's delight;
things that are higher, things that are nobler, these have allured my sight.

Refrain:

I will hasten to Him, hasten so glad and free;
Jesus, greatest, highest, I will come to Thee.

2 I am resolved to go to the Savior, leaving my sin and strife;
He is the true one, He is the just one, He has the words of life.

[Refrain]

3 I am resolved to follow the Savior, Faithful and true each day,
Heed what he sayeth, do what he willeth; he is the living Way.

[Refrain]

Blessing

Now as you go, resolve to stand firm in the faith. Continue to listen for God's direction and give yourself fully to the worthwhile work of the Lord this year. In Jesus name, we go. Amen.