

Straight from the "Hart"

January 15, 2023



Sharing the journey
to know, love, and serve

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.

Affirmation - Apostle's Creed

Opening Prayer Lord, accept our worship as a profound gesture of

our desire to serve you today and always, for we have come to see you for who you are, and it is why we gather today in the name of your Son, the light of the world. You call us to be his servants -- a very worthwhile calling. Now inspire us by your Spirit, that we may continue to shine with your radiance, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen.



Call to Worship Christ has come to abide with us forever. He makes his home in trusting hearts. So come from the storms of life and experience him transforming weariness to rest, lonely wilderness to streams of abundant life, and sadness to the overflowing joy and assurance of his comforting presence.

Loosely adapted from phrases of "Blessed Quietness" by Manie P Ferguson.

Music That kind of assurance in the storms comes as we allow God to breathe his living presence in us as we give our lives to him in worship. Let's sing

Music Breathe on Me, Breath of God

Words: Edwin Hatch, 1878 Music: Robert Jackson, 1888

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

Theme Today, we are talking about calls and confessions, sometimes challenged with doubts -- but they can be met with assurances and encouragements to overcome them. The author of the hymn we just sang reminds us that God's call on us is complete, is sometimes difficult, demanding our all, but it is always worth it.

Sir Ernest Shackleton posted this ad in London newspapers in 1900.

"MEN WANTED FOR HAZARDOUS JOURNEY Small, wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success".

I don't know what was going on in London in 1900, but Shackleton later said it seemed as though all the men in Great Britain were determined to accompany him. The response was so overwhelming. The expedition to reach the south pole failed, but I hope that kind of courageous, resilient spirit for worthwhile causes still resides within people today.

Jesus spoke of the deathly challenge that lay ahead of him, and then said, "Anyone who wants to follow me must put aside his own desires and conveniences and carry his cross every day and keep close to me and has to let me lead. Don't run from suffering, embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-sacrifice is the way to finding your true self, but whoever insists on keeping his life will lose it. What profit is there in gaining everything you want in the world if it means losing the real you?" (From Luke 9:22-25 (MSG, TLB))

Kipling wrote similar thoughts to his son in hopes that he would grow up well. (I've modernized the language a bit for better understanding), but this is what he wrote in a poem.

IF ---

If you can keep your head
when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all people doubt you,
but make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
be lied about, but not stoop to dealing in lies,
being hated, but don't give in to hating...
If you can dream -- and not make dreams your master;
If you can meet with triumph and disaster
and treat the two the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,

or watch the things you gave your life to be broken,
and stoop to build them up again,

if you can [risk everything and lose it all,
and start again from scratch without complaining about your loss],
If you can will more energy from your heart and nerve and body
in order to hold on and keep on after they are worn out...

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
or walk with kings – and not lose touch with the common;

If all people [are important to] you,
but none so much that you can't remain you;

If you can fill the minute that marches relentlessly forward with purposeful living
then the earth is yours and everything that's in it,
and -- even more important -- you'll be a man, my son!
(of if it was to a daughter, it would have been "a woman, my daughter!")

Intro to and Bible Reading 1

Many people find their purpose and their energy to fulfill it under God's call to living fully. But as we just heard, while the call can be grand, it can also be difficult, and sometimes we need assurances to believe in God and in ourselves as we move forward.

Our first reading contains two of the most well-known confessions in the Bible – the first a bold assurance of who Jesus is, the second is a bold assurance by Jesus when their life's purpose in Christ got tough. The first confession is spoken by Peter



When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.

[The second confession is spoken by Thomas in response to the risen Jesus]

Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Matthew 16:13-17, John 20:26b-29 (NIV)

Music And as Thomas is blessed with that kind of assurance from the risen Christ, let us too be assured of our never ending relationship with Jesus by singing

Blessed Assurance

Words: Fanny Crosby, 1873 Music: Phoebe P Knapp, 1873

1. Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God, born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.

Refrain:

This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long;
this is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long.

2. Perfect submission, perfect delight, visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
angels descending bring from above echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

(Refrain)

3. Perfect submission, all is at rest; I in my Savior am happy and blest,
watching and waiting, looking above, filled with his goodness, lost in his love.

(Refrain)

[Prayers]

God Moments You sang the story, now you get to say it if you have one.
[Testimonies from congregation] (These were not scripted so are not quoted here)

Music God is good. He encourages us in every situation he watches over and helps us, prepares us, and keeps us ready for moments that come our way – and then those moments come and we have the opportunity to be his servants, and that is a great thing. Let's prepare our hearts for prayer now by singing

Spirit Song

Words and Music: John Wimber, 1979 © 1979 Mercy Publishing

O let the Son of God enfold you with his spirit and his love.

Let him fill your heart and satisfy your soul.

O let him have the things that hold you, and his Spirit like a dove
will descend upon your life and make you whole.

Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill your lambs.

Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill your lambs.

O come and sing this song with gladness as your hearts are filled with joy.

Lift your hands and sweet surrender to his name.

O give him all your tears and sadness; Give him all your years of pain,
and you'll enter into life in Jesus' name.

Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill your lambs.

Jesus, O Jesus, come and fill your lambs.

Pastor's Prayer Lord, we are grateful for every praise that we have heard. The way you work among us, the way you work in your world, it gives us confidence as we move into each day. And we are in the season that we emphasizes your light shining through the life of your Son, Jesus, the beacon of truth and compassion in the world. You revealed yourself through his life and words. Fill creation with your Word again, that your hope is proclaimed that all may be welcomed in love, and more and more will enter your presence and you will dwell among us with the Holy Spirit and Christ and we may be united in your name. We pray for the good of those that are in need. **Praises and Petitions** Specifically, * Earl Campbell requests prayers for 9-year-old niece Lila who had a seizure yesterday, so as they try to figure out what is going on in her life, we ask that you would guide them to the right decisions so that she may be treated properly and get passed this situation. * Gary expressed his thanks for the prayers and is doing much better, but we continue to pray for his healing, * we continue to pray for Pat Schleh, * for Clare, * for Reese, * and for those who are not feeling well for whatever reason, * and for those people and events we have not named out loud, but are on our hearts and minds; that they, as well as all of us, may be touched by your grace, your guidance, your comfort, your moral strength, your healing, according to your will and timing. [Pause]

Now Lord, continue to bring healing to all wounds, make whole those who feel broken; guide those who feel confused, that we may we sense the greatness of your name and the power of your love. Transform our hearts, that we may delight in your grace and share our varied gifts and graces of love -- in the name of the one who taught us to pray **LORD's PRAYER**

Intro to Bible Reading 2

Lay Reader: Andrew and probably John, that author of this Gospel, were disciples of John the Baptist. The Baptist sees Jesus and points him out as the Lamb of God. They start following

Jesus, who notices and turns to ask what they want. They ask where he is staying. Jesus replies, “Come and you will see.” They did and stayed with him that day.

Andrew then went to his brother Simon, saying, “We have found the Messiah”. He brought Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon, son of John, but you will be called Peter”.

The next day, we hear two more calls and confessions, which is told in almost the same way. They often fade into the shadows of history because they are not told as dramatically as other confessions and calls that we read, where people left their nets, the tax booth, or other professions and activities of their life, often overcoming strong internal doubts about themselves -- to lead people, to speak as prophets, or to follow Jesus.

And yet, while we don't hear the details of what they left behind, or a lot of what they individually said and did moving forward, it must have been just as radically life-changing for them as it was for the others for whom we know all those details. From the beginning of Jesus' ministry, their new lives began. And this is how John describes that transformation.

Bible Reading

... Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.” Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked. “Come and see,” said Philip.

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”

“How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.”



Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." John 1:43b-50 (NIV)

Music Let's sing before the sermon and like Nathanael did under the tree, let's find a place and time in the busy-ness of our lives to seek God -- and to be found and called by Jesus.

Come and Find the Quiet Center

Words: Shirley Erena Murray © 1992 Hope Publishing Co. Music: attr. to BF White

Come and find the quiet center in the crowded life we lead,
find the room for hope to enter, find the frame where we are freed:
Clear the chaos and the clutter, clear our eyes that we can see
all the things that really matter, be at peace, and simply be.

Silence is a friend who claims us, cools the heat and slows the pace,
God it is who speaks and names us, knows our being, touches base,
making space within our thinking, lifting shades to show the sun,
raising courage when we're shrinking, finding scope for faith begun.

In the Spirit let us travel, open to each other's pain,
let our loves and fears unravel, celebrate the space we gain:
there's a place for deepest dreaming, there's a time for heart to care,
in the spirits lively scheming there is always room to spare.

Sermon Seeing Christ Through Love: Call and Confess

We see it on crime shows all the time. They bring the suspect in -- they make them wait uncomfortably long, then come in and sit across from them -- throw in front of them some gory pictures, talk about some of the evidence that they've accumulated (or pretend that they've accumulated), and start talking about what they think is the suspect's motive. And when they think the suspect is primed, they finally belt it out: "It is obvious to us. We have more than enough evidence. We know you did it! Confess!" And since it is a scripted show, the suspect in exasperation finally blurts out a response, "All right! all right. This is the truth of what happened." And they spill everything they know about that event -- and if they are guilty of the accusation, sometimes they even confess that as well."

Therefore, we usually think of confession as an admission of something we've done wrong. Even in the church, confession is most often connected with

confessing our sins, what we've done wrong. So, if someone walked up to you and shouted, "Confess!" Your gut reaction might be, "What did I do wrong?" or "What do they think I did wrong?" or "Which of the wrong things that I have done do they know about?" or, "How did they know?"

Generally speaking, we now label negative admissions as confessions and positive beliefs as affirmations. But the word confession could be defined as "a truth based on first-hand experience on a given event, experience or topic." (It doesn't have to be negative.)

John the Baptist's, "Behold the Lamb of God", Andrew and Philip's "We have found the Messiah" are all positive confessions that inspired the people to follow Jesus. Peter's "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" is a positive confession that comes near the end of Jesus' ministry and in that context it assures Jesus that he was getting through to them, that they are beginning to understand the scope of who he really was, and it gives Jesus an opportune time to take them to the next step of the plan which was to tell them what was going to happen to him in Jerusalem (See Matthew 16:21ff). A plan they didn't really accept, but it moved them forward together.

Thomas and Nathanael's confessions. Jesus told Thomas to feel his side and hands and to stop doubting and believe, and he responded with, "My Lord and My God" and Nathanael, when he heard Jesus tell him that he saw him under the fig tree, said: "You are the Son of God". These two confessions demonstrate the victory of belief over doubt and skepticism. (See John 20:30-31).

There is a handful of confessions back then. Let's break them down and see how they can be helpful for us today by the definition of the word.

Frist, a confession is first-hand. We've all seen the bumper sticker: "Let me tell you about my grand-children." People who are so proud, so excited, they announce it on their car that if you've got the guts to listen, they've got the desire, time and effort to tell you. They talk, they write, they show, they post, they send photos. Despite digital cameras and social media to communicate it; at some point we realize that no camera can ever capture it, no description can make it come completely alive for another, no analysis can do it justice. We realize that the only way for another person to experience what we are experiencing is for them to experience it for themselves. (And so, Philip said, "Come and see." He could not explain it anymore than what he had already said in his confession).

A confession is first-hand

And that is why, when all is said and done, when your child or dear friend calls and says, "It's a boy" or "It's a girl" and they describe weight and height and hair (or lack of it) and send all kinds of great pictures, it doesn't matter. If it is at all possible (I know it isn't always, but if it is at all possible), you drop everything, and go to see for yourself this new one that has captured their heart and life, and now yours too, right?

Peter had been living with Jesus 24-7 for over two years before his confession. Thomas confessed the overcoming of his doubts when the resurrected Christ appeared and had him touch his hands and side. We don't know how much Philip had heard or known of Jesus before Jesus found him and said follow. Our text mentions that Andrew and Peter were brothers and Philip came from the same town, which *may* imply that they knew and perhaps talked to each other. Perhaps they had already had conversations about Jesus, and may have even crossed paths and talked with Jesus, we don't know that for sure. It is clear that Jesus knew of Philip for he had at least heard of Philip, for the text makes it sound like Jesus decided to go to Galilee with the purpose of finding and recruiting him.

However long or short was Philip's experience with Jesus, his heart was captured by Christ's life, love, kindness, knowledge, and power. He couldn't contain it; he couldn't explain it. He confessed to Nathanael, "You've got to see this -- You've got to meet this Person for yourself."

And John, who penned the story for us, is encouraging us to experience what he, Philip and Nathaniel experienced. We sang it earlier. "This is MY story, this is MY song, praising my Savior all the day long". (emphasis added) A confession is a first-hand experience.

Secondly, confessions are meant to capture our hearts to the point we can't keep quiet about it. You feel everyone needs to experience for themselves his powerful love and the difference he makes in our lives and the world. So when God provides a proper opportunity, are you excited to share?

Has Christ captured your heart?

We need others to know because it is not just "my" experience and "my" relationship that is important. There is a "we" thing to it as well. Philip tells his brother, "WE'VE found the Messiah – not sure who all else was in that we, but it was a "WE found him." Even though Nathaniel hadn't yet seen him, Philip has included Nathaniel in the discovery, and actually included all of Israel, for they have

been looking and waiting for him for generations... the promised Messiah who would restore Israel, forgive sins, and would reign over the world in peace.

This story is calling us to come and see for ourselves -- to find God's presence among us and in our lives. The original language implies surprise or unexpected discovery. Ever have a young toddler come up to you jumping up and down full of excitement and joy eager to show you -- "Look what I found!!"? Ever seen that? [Yes] Good. Finding the Messiah would be like looking for a needle in a haystack's worth of needles. We could search all our lives and never find that one needle. We know because they'd been doing it for generations; for centuries now, they've been waiting for this Messiah to come and restore them.



Imagine an assignment in which you are to find a specific big-time manager who has or will arrive at the Mall of America, which has about 40 million annual visitors. You know his title, you have a general description of what he would be like, but all good people strive to be like that, so that isn't really helpful. He isn't wearing a name tag or uniform, and probably has no uniform. He blends right in with every customer and employee in the whole mall. No clue what he looks like, you don't know his name, you don't even know *when* he is going to show up. You only know a few things about his *future* career -- but even that takes deep study. How absolutely shocked you would be if you ever discovered this person in that packed out mall. Yet you search day after day after day after day.

The manager arrives. And much to your astonishment, he knows exactly *who you* are, what *you* look like, what *you* live like, what *you* talk like, and when and where you are. And he is standing right in front of you. The manager has found you! And in your amazement, you go and tell your friends, family, and loved ones that you found the one you were looking for.

People in every generation and in every culture, though some may not be aware of what they are looking for -- are looking for the presence of God in their lives. Many give up, become cynical, don't really expect to find him, begin to believe the person is only an urban legend and not even a real person. But the manager has "flown in from another world" and is at the mall of this crowded life of ours, and he finds us. And suddenly, there he is! Right in front of us! Found! But do we notice? Or are we looking beyond and around him, still looking for him?

Philip, after this shocking personal encounter, runs to Nathaniel: “We found the Messiah that we were looking for.” There is some liberality in the language here about who found who. So let's be clear about it – Jesus went to Philip to find and recruit him. God isn't waiting for us to find him. He comes to us, he seeks us out, he looks for opportunities to express his love and grace to us and through us. The question is, so we notice that he is right in front of us, and all around us?

Philip's confession mentioned the Nazareth roots in Jesus' life. Nathanael hadn't met him first-hand yet. He was skeptical. It should be a warning to all of us about the danger of stereotypical, generalizations about groups and locations and all the rest. Nazareth wasn't considered a place that would produce big achievers much less the Messiah, and Nathaniel says so. What is that story I think I told you not too long ago – about the tourist who was kind of uppity, came to a small town and asked, “Any heroes born here?” and local person said, “Nope, just babies.”

Philip doesn't debate, he doesn't get defensive, he doesn't get all judge-y. He simply says, “Come and see for yourself”. Philip knew that all Nathanael would need was his own personal encounter with Jesus to realize what he was and who he was.

They began to move toward Jesus. Jesus sees them coming, and says, “Here is an honest person.” How do you know? “I saw you under the fig tree” -- (trees were a typical place of meditation and study and prayer). Jesus recognized in Nathaniel that he was a sincere seeker – **Are we sincere, true seekers?** And if Jesus saw him there, now Nathaniel knew that Jesus knew, not only his practices --- but also of his heart. **What does God see in our heart? What descriptive phrase(s) would He use of us?** And now, having himself been found, Nathaniel's doubt instantly changes to faith and he makes his own confession: Jesus is God's Son and the King of Israel, and from here on, Jesus would lead him in his ways, in his directions, and his ethics, and his Spirit. **Do we allow him to lead us?**

And on the heels of this conversation, Jesus concludes with the promise that if we follow him, he will lead us to greater things than we can even imagine because Jesus is the bridge between heaven and earth, between divine and human, between temporal and eternal. It is in him that we will see the presence of God, it is he whom we have been seeking as the answer to completing our life. To Nathaniel, that meant leaving behind the contemplation and devotion and study *about* the Messiah and beginning to *actively follow* the Messiah and seeing the

miracles, the teachings, and in time, the bridge Jesus made to God because of His work on the cross.

Jesus found Philip. Philip confessed. Philip brought Nathaniel to come and see Jesus, and

What is our call/confession?

Nathaniel confessed. When Jesus finds and calls to us today and says: [say loudly] “Confess!” What truth are we going to say back from our first-hand encounter with him? Or to put it back into the context of the beginning of the sermon. When someone puts us in the interrogation room, walks in and places gory photos of the crucifixion in front us, and they ask accusingly, “What do you know about this? What role did you play in this?” What will we be able to say? What will we confess? about Jesus?

Prayer Let’s pray. Now Lord warm our hearts and focus our thoughts, that we may worship and live with renewed energy and commitment to you, as you pour out your Spirit of grace and love upon us. You said through Paul that whoever believes with their heart and confesses with their mouth that Jesus is Lord will be saved. We understand that a confession of your Lordship is not only words, but a recognition there is a new life to live. Empower us to hear you call and respond by doing your will. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

Music Let’s sing about our desire to follow Jesus and continue his mission through our lives, through this church, in this community and beyond.

Here I Am, Lord

Words & Music: Dan Schutte, 1981 ad by Carlton R Young, 1988
© 1989 Daniel L Schutte

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

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

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

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

(Refrain)

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Refrain)

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

Blessing So now as you prepare to leave this place and go into your week, find and create those spaces and those times so that you can be strengthened and comforted and inspired to live lives worthy of God, whether it is “under a tree” or in a “mall”, and holding his people in your heart because you are being called into his kingdom and into his glory. Amen

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