

Straight from the "Hart"

February 26, 2023

First Sunday of Lent

 **HARTLAND**

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.

Our Lenten Series is called "Journey of Stones" and is

loosely based on a book by the same title, written by Steven Molin. An optional way of participating at home is to set up a desktop cross. Each week, have a stone ready to place at the foot of the cross.



Hartland UMC Altar for Lent 2023 "Journey of Stones"

Introduction to the Season

The season of Lent was developed as a time of preparing new Christians for baptism and then became a time of repentance for all, and a time to reconcile and restore those who had wandered away from the faith. In other words, it is a time, often through exercising a chosen discipline of adding or subtracting something from our lives, to ensure that we are on the right track of spiritual growth with God, and in his accepting, encouraging arms, to make adjustments as needed under and his gracious, forgiving hands – that we may move forward with him on our journey together toward heaven. On this first Sunday of Lent, Sara is going to lead us in a Lenten confession and prayer. Join me on the yellow font.

A Confession and Prayer to begin Lent (L – Lay Reader, C -Congregation)

L: When we are hurt, we think it "only fair" and "what is right" when we retaliate with harsh words and withdraw from relationships.

C: We pray for payback and call it justice.

L: We are eager to do God's judging. We feel we are being faithful when we condemn others for what we perceive is wrong in their lives. We withhold forgiveness and carry grudges -- even over petty items.

C: We conspire to secure our own forgiveness while avoiding honest repentance. We withhold grace from others.

L: What if God paid us back in full for all the harm we cause and the good we fail to do?

C: Lord, we seek your mercy. Forgive our trespasses. Save us from our sins.

L: Lord, the forgiveness you offer on our account is larger than we can comprehend. You are full of compassion and mercy. You are slow to be angry and have chosen to sacrifice your own Son on our account.

C: It is because Jesus Christ pays the last full measure that our sins are forgiven.

L: Your gift of forgiveness makes us able, with the power of Holy Spirit, to choose to forgive, renew and live again in right relationships --

C: with each other, and with you, our God. Amen.

ad. from Bill Wessner, posted on [Confession RCL](#) blog.

Opening Prayer

O God, we bring to you our treasures – all that we have and all that we are, symbolized by these tangible resources to do your work in your world. We come seeking the treasure you have to offer – that does not fade, decay, or disappoint – the riches of Christ living in us, and it is in his name that we pray. Amen.

Call to Worship

Come, let's offer our ourselves to God who makes all things new. Allow him to take every hardened edge and measured beat and smooth out the rough parts, free what has become stuck, refresh what has become stagnate, and stir up our passion for holy love again.

ad. from Pamela C. Hawkins, in *The Awkward Season: Prayers for Lent*
Posted on **Prayer and Creeds**, <https://prayersandcreeds.wordpress.com>

Music

Last Wednesday we were asked to choose between the gold stones of our own making and choosing Christ -- the Keystone upon which everything is held up and together, and the Cornerstone which guides the shape and direction of our lives. It is only because of what Jesus did on the cross that he graciously offers to be that solid foundation upon which we can begin and continue to build our faith relationship with God. Let's sing...



Rock of Ages

Words: Augustus M. Toplady, 1776 Music: Thomas Hastings, 1830

1. Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee;
let the water and the blood, from thy wounded side which flowed,
be of sin the double cure; save from wrath and make me pure.
2. Not the labors of my hands can fulfill thy law's commands;
could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow,
all for sin could not atone; thou must save, and thou alone.
3. Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling;
naked, come to thee for dress; helpless, look to thee for grace;
foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me, Savior, or I die.

Theme

Dr. Mallard is studying to become a criminal profiler. Palmer is helping him prepare by going through a series of questions and he asks, "What is the difference between an ethical person and a moral person?"

Mallard answers: An ethical person knows the difference between right and wrong, while a moral person actually does what is right. An ethical person knows it is wrong to cheat on their spouse, while a moral person actually won't do it."

That got me curious as to how people look at words. I did a computer search on "What is the difference between ethics and morality" and found that quite a few of the authors as I pulled them into my living room for this discussion, had a wide range of nuances to how they understood those two words, sometimes their definitions were nearly opposites of each other. It was a fascinating discussion – these online authors on the same desktop. Sometimes the definitions were very nearly opposites. I'd love to go down that tangent with you today, but I don't have time for it so that is for another day. The point I'm trying to make today is that it is a challenge to use a living language. For while words remain the same, their connotations – how people understand them -- may change -- sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, sometimes *dramatically* differently. Sometimes the words get kidnapped and diluted or distorted to the point where no one knows what they mean. To be safe. I'll use historical, anecdotal examples.

Methodism was initially meant as a ridicule for the methodical approach that we have to our faith. We embraced that word. The Nazarenes deliberately chose their name to connect themselves with the disenfranchised. (Remember "nothing good

comes out of Nazareth”), and so they deliberately chose that label to proclaim that they were going to be in ministry to the disenfranchised, and that is what they did as they embarked on their denomination.

Someone tries to come up with a catchy logo, a phrase or word or name, to help inspire a movement. Opponents may use a very similar slogan to dilute and relinquish the first one -- or they will redefine the word to make it a slur, put everyone associated with into a box, slap that negative label on it and dismiss the whole group or movement as irrelevant or even evil. And if it works, then all you need to do is say the name, the label with a little disgust in your tone – and everybody believes the negative without any need for additional discussion. And so for example -- I wasn't around when Methodism was born to if this really happened or not, but if the people then were like many people today, this is what would have happened: A reporter might go and ask someone on the street what they thought about Methodism and they might reply “Oh they are evil troublemakers, we need to get rid of them.” And if the reporter would ask a follow up question such as “why, what do they teach. what do they believe and do that makes them troublemakers?” The average interviewee would have no idea – know nothing about Methodism at all -- because they only heard headline, heard the sound blip talking point, and the spit and people spit out the label. [Say with disgust]: “Methodism”. And then that ends all of the discussion, and no one even knows what they mean.

One that words that kind of bugs me. At least in my world, it didn't happen all that long ago, and that is the word religious. When young and growing up, in my circles, at least; it was a positive word used to describe some of the best of us. And now it seems it is used to describe the worst of us – or who aren't even us, but use out name Christian. So much so that, for good or for ill, I haven't decided yet -- many Christian leaders adopted the cultural connotation of that word and then began to make a distinction – we aren't religious, we are in a relationship... One person put it this way: faith is about committing ourselves to what is above and beyond the trappings of religion, and we strive for the essence of faith. (which in my mind, means being religious! because I still have the positive connotation). So I mourn the loss of a good word. Ironically, it is still wonderful if we pay our bills religiously, walk our dog religiously, attend our kids' events religiously, and one of these days, I may even religiously go back on my diet and exercise. And most everyone thinks those are good things because we have placed those things in our life as important

enough to do them with care and consistency and to do them well. The only thing we can't say we do religiously is religion.

I bring all this up because this is what we are examining in today's Bible stories encourage us to stop putting people in boxes and labels and stereotypes with words and actually live out things like the golden rule and reaping what you sow, so sow good – live out the principles of our morality – or ethics – or both. I'm not so worried about getting hung up on “what is morality versus what is ethics” as whether we are living that out that makes the difference. Encyclopedia Britannica says that most people today use those two words (morality and ethics) interchangeably and it is up to the person using the words to define what they mean when they use them, [In our context, what that means is mean that we don't settle for labels and headlines and sound bites and the tone of the label to form our opinions. We have to get beyond that in speaking and listening so that we can understand each other.] I love the way they concluded their discussion by saying “Ultimately, the distinction between the two is as substantial as a line drawn in the sand”. (britannica.com)

Intro to and Reading

Lay Reader: Jesus helps us get a hold of what it means to move beyond, or at least in spite of, the stereo-typical labels that are put upon us and to actually live moral, ethical, lives. Hear the first story.

Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, but early the next morning he was back again at the house of God. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. As he was speaking, the teachers of the Law and the proud religious law-keepers came to him. They brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.

“Teacher,” they said to Jesus, “this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses says to throw stones and kill a woman like this. What do you say?” They were trying to bait him into a trap to have something they could accuse him of and use against him. Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. They kept demanding an answer. Then he stood up and said, “All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!” Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the older ones until they were all gone. Jesus was left in the middle of

the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, “Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?”

“No one, Lord,” she said.

And Jesus said, “Neither do I. Go on your way and do not sin again.”

John 8:1-11 (NLT, NLV, NMB)

Intro to and Special Music

This first song asks questions that are all over this story. Questions the woman may wonder as she is about to be condemned, and then isn’t -- that the stoners should be asking themselves as they walk away, but probably didn’t – but most importantly, what we ourselves must as we seek to navigate the disappointments and complexities of our lives.

God, How Can We Forgive

Words: Ruth Duck, © 1996 The Pilgrim Press

Music: Hebrew Melody, Sacred harmony, harm. from Hymns Ancient and Modern alt.

God, how can we forgive when bonds of love are torn?
How can we rise and start anew, our trust reborn?
When human loving fails and every hope is gone,
your love gives strength beyond our own to face the dawn.
When we have missed the mark, and tears of anguish flow,
how can you still release our guilt, the debt we owe?
The ocean depth of grace surpasses all our needs.
A priest who shares our human pain, Christ intercedes.
Who dares to throw the stone to damn another’s sin,
when you, while knowing all our past, forgive again?
No more we play the judge, for by your grace we live.
As you, O God forgive our sin, may we forgive.



Special Music Hopefully we all realize that we are in need – not to judge or be judged, but of God’s forgiving grace, and our willingness to receive it... Join us the second time through as we prepare our hearts for prayer.

O Lord, Your Tenderness

Words: Graham Kendrick Music: Graham Kendrick

© 1986 Kingsway’s Thank You Music, adm. by EMI Christian Music Group

O Lord, your tenderness, melting all my bitterness; O Lord, I receive your love---.
 O Lord, your loveliness, changing my unworthiness; O Lord, I receive your love---
 O Lord, I receive your love---; O Lord, I receive your love---

[Repeat -- second time with congregation]

Pastor’s Prayer

Almighty God, we pause slowly and deeply breathing in your love. We remind ourselves to rest in the warming light of your presence. You are our cornerstone, the foundation upon whom we can securely trust. You are the God of the wilderness and of the water. This is the season your Son prepared for ministry by denying himself, intentionally moving alone into the wilderness to face and defeat temptation. We too, face many temptations, betrayals and hurts. Guide us through this season, that we may not avoid the struggle, but open ourselves to your blessing through the cleansing depths of repentance, restoration and renewal. Deepen our faith that we may resist temptation and in the midst of trial, proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord while we wait for you to deliver us to freedom, teaching us to be grateful for all the bountiful blessings that come from your hand.

It can be in the midst of joys and prospering moments that we are tempted to forget and neglect (to take for granted) your giftedness. It can be in the midst of sorrows that tempt us to doubt and even deny your support and power. Therefore, we pause to lift gratitude for everyone’s joys and to lift intercessions for the hurts and pains of others as well as of ourselves.

Praises and Petitions We continue to pray for * Dick and Sandy Sandula, * for all those impacted by the shooting at MSU, * We pray for Pat Schleh’s sister-in-law Marianne, * for Gar Lemon, * for those impacted by the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, and all those places in the world troubled by natural disasters or human conflict and violence; and for the UM Committee on Relief as they carry out their work in those unpleasant and even dangerous circumstances, * and for all those unnamed among us-- and beyond us -- who are recovering from illness or injury or facing other types of challenges or setbacks in their lives, for these and others

on our hearts and minds, we pause to silently lift our prayers in this next moment of silence. [Pause]

Lord, Lent reminds us that Christ looked forward to the glory of the cross, wrestled with the power of death and broke its hold over your people. Through it he drew all people to you, that we who confess Jesus as Lord may find eternal life and learn to live abundantly, and to live as you taught us to pray **LORD's PRAYER**

Intro to and Bible Reading

Jesus is talking about how to handle people who have wronged you and how you should make every effort to work for reconciliation and peace. This prompts a question by Peter about how many times we are supposed to forgive someone who wrongs us. He suggests 7, which is more than double the standard of the faith he grew up in. But Jesus answers not 7 times, but 70 times 7, (and he didn't mean 490). Then Jesus gives a fuller answer with a story drawn from their everyday life...



“Therefore, the holy nation of heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date and find out how much money his servants had borrowed from him. In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. He had nothing to pay with, so his master ordered that he be sold — along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned — to pay the debt.

“But the man fell down before his master and begged him, ‘Please, be patient with me, give me time, and I will pay you all the money.’

Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt.

“But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him very little money. He grabbed him by the throat and said, ‘Pay me the money you owe me [now]!’”

“His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. ‘Be patient with me, give me time and I will pay all the money,’” he pleaded. But he would not wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full.

“When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you. I said that you would not have to pay back that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’

The king was very angry. He delivered him to the jailers until he had paid his entire debt. [Then Jesus drove home the point of his parable] “That’s what my Father in heaven will do with you unless you forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.”

Matthew 18:23-35 (NLT, NLV, NMB)

Music

The lesson is clear. We reap what we sow, and we give what we’ve been given because we believe in Jesus and what he has given us, and we will reap the rewards of what he has given us . Let’s stand if comfortable and sing ...

Freely, Freely

Words and Music: Carol Owens, © 1972 Communiqué Music, Inc.

God forgave my sin in Jesus' name, I've been born again in Jesus' name,
and in Jesus' name I come to you, to share his love as he told me to.

He said, "Freely, freely you have received, freely, freely give.

Go in my name, and because you believe, others will know that I live."

All power is given in Jesus' name, in earth and heaven in Jesus' name,
and in Jesus' name I come to you, to share his power as he told me to.

He said, "Freely, freely you have received, freely, freely give.

Go in my name, and because you believe, others will know that I live."

Sermon

Journey of Stones – Judgment Stone: Looking Sin Square in the Heart

If you set down your stone, please pick it up and hold it through the sermon. Use it as a touch point as we talk today. This Sunday, the stone we hold is to help us look sin square in the heart, and especially how we are **not** going to be looking at everyone else’s. In the first reading, Jesus tells us the one who has no sin can throw the first stone. So in our effort to follow his words, we avoid stones at all costs. There is a Reverendfun.com comic



which shows a man handing a stone to Jesus and saying, “We were going to skip some rocks on the pond, but it seems you are the only one who can cast the first stone.” We take the words so literally that we set up safeguards so diligently, that we would never touch a stone in any way shape or form – lest we accidentally bump someone with it -- and we point out anyone who gets anywhere near a stone for any purpose because we don’t want them to bump anyone either. It can get very constrictive, suffocating, legalistic... “Don’t touch your stone!”

Or there is another tendency. We look at the instruction and we start looking for loopholes so we don’t have to deal with those restrictions so that we can do what we really want to do without technically violating the rule. So in another comic strip from the same source, a man lays flat on his back, clearly knocked out by a stone, or worse. And in the background a man holding a stone and is explaining to Jesus, “You said he who is without sin casts the first stone, right? Well, I still have the first stone, I threw the second stone at him.”

The point Jesus is trying to make is to point about how differently God thinks from overly zealous buffers of protection that robs our life, and from finding the loopholes that are not loopholes at all. Instead, Jesus demonstrates God's compassionate presence to all sorts of people and in all kinds of situations. The religious leaders pulled a woman allegedly caught in the act of adultery into the center of the Bible study trying to show everyone "exhibit A" of why you cannot go around forgiving everyone. “What are we supposed to do with her?” The religious leaders were setting a trap. If we don't read carefully, we may think the trap was for the woman. But, at best, that was a secondary concern. In fact, the whole thing may have been a set up -- after all the law of Moses does say that both adulterers and adulteresses should be punished, but the man is nowhere to be found in this story -- Does that mean the man was a part of a planned plot -- a sting – a plant by the religious leaders -- an "undercover" Pharisee, no pun – well it was intended -- pun intended, or is it just that a double standard had developed – enforcing the rules on one gender but not the other? I’m not sure.



But the text is clear, we can be sure of this -- that at best, this woman was being used as a pawn to trap Jesus. At worst, she was, to them, clearly an unclean sinner who deserved no grace. "A woman such as this!" (Do you hear that label slapped on her?) You can almost feel the spit as they say the words: “such a woman!”

But they are just words, and we know the old saying: "Sticks and Stones may break my bones, but [let them finish it] words can never hurt me." I suspect we developed the saying to help our children be brave and dismiss cruel mocking when they face school bullies, or community bullies, or wherever we come across them. But we also know that in truth, words can cut even more deeply than sticks and stones. This woman was used as a pawn, and hears these public, condemning words that label her "a woman such as this", and the label put on the box (the category) of the kind of person she was, and the label was probably much more graphic than "a woman like this."

There is more than one way to stone someone. She was already dying a death of humiliation. She not only got the cruel words, but she was also going to get the "sticks and stones" too. It was not going to be a good day. She was trapped but good, for all to see.

Let's leave her in her distress for the moment, for as I said, this trap was not so much about her as it was about Jesus. "Moses says stone her, now what do you say, Jesus?"

If Jesus advocates letting her go, then he offends the ethical and moral sensibilities of the crowd and would give the religious leaders ammunition to oppose him. If he allows her to be stoned -- then he was aligning himself with their authority and hypocrisy -- and he would have to stop preaching and teaching about God's kingdom of grace and love. They thought they had Jesus over a barrel -- in was a helpless, hopeless, no-win situation.

But Jesus is smarter than that. He refuses to be caught in a trap. Like the rodent in Mouse Hunt, he knows just how to set off the traps to catch the ones who were trying to catch him. And we celebrate because we agree with Jesus.

Two thousand years after the fact, we readily admit that Jesus was right, that the woman deserved a second chance. We can absolve her of her now centuries-old, alleged indiscretion that happened half way across the world. Yet today there are still many who take pride that they are not like those others -- who steal, who are addicted, who can't make a relationship work, and the list goes on and on and on -- we have labels for just about everyone and everything. Sometimes it is through the buffer of social technology, or behind their backs, and some to their face -- but we are harshly critical of whatever mistakes they break whatever rules violate our modern personal pet peeves and hang ups, and special interests. Like the one I have today about -- being made a people who put labels on people, redefining

words, and listening to soundbites, and not delving beyond the sensationalistic headlines. These people use metaphorical stones and aim them at anyone who does not think, act, speak, or believe the way we do, or perform as successfully as we think they should.

So to all of us, yet today, Jesus kneels down and begins writing in the dirt. And then, "Here is my judgment," he says. Whoever has never sinned, you may cast the first stone." If you're perfect, let 'em fly! If your life is without sin, you can start the stoning. A sinner is in no position to judge another sinner. It is incongruous for one criminal to sit in judgment of another. An embezzler, even an ex-embezzler, has no right to judge a thief.

This woman is bracing herself to bear the pain of the stones. Instead, she hears the plops and clinking of stones as they hit the pavement and dirt. They drop their stones at Jesus' feet and leave the temple. The woman looks up and finds herself alone with Jesus but not alone in the classification of sinner. In their walking away, ironically, each of the men joined her. They all were forced to admit that they were just as bad as she was, that they, and we, have *all* fallen short of God's glory.

The good news was that this time, compassion won. This time, love was more powerful than "justice". "Is there no one left to condemn you?" Jesus asked. "No, sir." "Then neither do I." Grace wins. To steal some lines from Matthew West – There are those whispers in my ear saying who do you think you are?.... grace could never reach that far... but in the shadow of that shame, beat down by all the blame – I hear *you* call my name...there's a war between guilt and grace and they're fighting for sacred space – and [she's] living proof grace wins every time. ... For the Prodigal Son, grace wins -- For the woman at the well, grace wins -- For the blind men and the beggar, grace wins -- For always and forever, grace wins -- For the lost out on the street, grace wins -- For the worst part of you and me, grace wins -- For the thief on the cross, grace wins -- For a world that is lost (and for this woman today) grace wins every time....

And we respond in faith to his relief and rescue -- not with license to go on sinning -- but to a renewed desire to be and do better. What do we do when we feel better, when we realize we are not alone, that we all are in need of grace? It is only when the woman feels better (when she feels no longer condemned) when she is able to receive and feel the grace, that Jesus now says she has a chance to be better.

A converted convict spoke to us at seminary years ago about jail ministry, and he said, "people in jail don't need to hear the bad news of sin – they're living it

[already]. What they need to hear is the good news of hope that there can be something better; that there exists an option out of their current situation, that life – and they -- can become better.”

A child feels bad when he or she presents a poor report card. Each child and parent interact differently, but I'll say that generally, if *overly* criticized with condemnation and labels; the child's energies will go into self-defense, into making excuses and blaming others for the failure – or just giving up in defeat and hopelessness because that is what is being reinforced, and learning and growth becomes even more difficult.”

We know this in the physical realm for each of us. When we are tired, sick, worn out, it is much harder to recall what we know, and what we are about because we are not at our best, and the defeat of the bad results can cycle us deeper into a scrambling, more defeated mode.

But the child who is held accountable, yet experiences grace and encouragement and tutors and hope about the class they are failing – they will better be able to sit down with a new determination to do better, to study harder to make the grade the next time.

“Now go and do better.” It was addressed to the woman, but it might as well have been addressed to the crowd that was listening to Jesus' teaching, and to those who dropped the stones and walked away, and to each of us.

Hear in Jesus' words an invitation: Come // everyone who is fallen and fractured under the stones. Come // everyone who is wandering and wondering. Come // everyone who is lost and lonely. Receive God's grace and passionate love with a new determination to be and do better than before.

Stone Meditation and Silent Reflection

Bow your heads, feel the stone in your hand. Bow your heads. We know it is easier to put ourselves in the story as the woman – oh not the specific accusation, probably, but to feel like – innocent or not – we are the victims, judged, even condemned by others, hurting, broken. Maybe that is where some of us are today. And we know as the result of the interaction with Jesus that the religious leaders were not the good guys in this story, so we don't want to connect with them -- even though they were the ones at least pretending, perhaps even sincerely believing that they were protecting the faith – from sinners, from false Messiahs, as they surely believed Jesus to be that. Maybe we need to think if we fit into that role of a stone tosser sometimes. And there is even a third option where we hold the

stone, but want to throw it at ourselves for things in our life that are weighing us down. Wherever we find ourselves in the story – and maybe it is everywhere, just remember --- grace wins. I'm going to read some questions that help us to meditate a bit. They are in the bulletin for later use, don't look at them now, just keep your eyes closed and meditating. just listen as I read the highlights of the questions that are printed in the bulletin. We don't have enough time to digest and deal with them in this moment, that is why they are printed – so you can take them home and work with them later in the week.

Think prayerfully on these things: *(Italics were the portions of the questions read out loud)*

Q1) How would I rate my ethics/morals? Do I know it, live it, in love? *Am I on a quest for a deeper understanding of right and wrong in my life? Especially in the context of how I relate to and love God and others?*

Q2) *How do I use my understanding of good and evil? (For examples that come from the Bible story, Do I use my knowledge to lay burdens on others? to find loopholes? to entrap others? to feel better about myself by thinking less of others? Or do I use my understanding to compassionately encourage myself and others to more meaningful, more joyous, more grace-filled living? The question implies an obvious intended answer – but what am I really living?*

Q3) *In the context of where I spend my time (school work, family, circle of friends, organizations, or even the community/nation/world in general how do I see people “throwing stones” at one another? What stones have I thrown at who lately?*

Q4) *Is there a person and / or situation in which I need to strengthen my forgiving spirit?*

[Pause]

One sign that we have truly received and are being filled with God's grace is that it comes to us in a way that inspires us to want to be and do even more – or in some cases, perhaps step back and do less – but it will move us to do what Jesus wants us to do. Consider the stone in your hand - real, but also symbolic of what is in your spirit -- What will you do with your judgment stone? And maybe you haven't yet figured out how this applies to you – then make the stone be anything you need it to be for you today – any issue you are facing, or concern about another, whatever is weighing you down, or another down, and let the stone be that thing for you today...

Music The music is going to start playing our final song shortly. Meditate while it is played through -- if you want to look at the questions while it is being played you may. When the song begins the second time, I invite you to stand as quietly as possible, and begin singing the first verse, and as we do, I invite you to come forward and set your stone at the foot of this cross that is in front of me, and then return to your seat and remain standing for the rest of the song. If walking is difficult for you, feel free to hand your stone to another who can bring it up for you – we are called to carry each other’s burdens, so that is fitting.... The song we are going to sing is to the tune of Amazing Grace, and it speaks to the other story we read today – about our need to drop our stones and forgive as we have been forgiven. Again, the instruments are going to play, the second time through we will stand quietly and begin singing as we bring our stones forward to the cross and then return and remain standing as we sing the remainder of the song. Meditate as it is played through once to the tune of Amazing Grace..

**Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive
(to tune of Amazing Grace)**

Words: Rosamond Herklots, 1966 © 1969,1983 Rosamond Herklots,
by permission of Oxford University Press, London
Music: 19th Cent. USA melody; harm. by Edwin O Excell, 1900



"Forgive our sins as we forgive," you taught us, Lord, to pray;
but you alone can grant us grace to live the words we say.

How can your pardon reach and bless the unforgiving heart
that broods on wrongs and will not let old bitterness depart?

In blazing light your cross reveals the truth we dimly knew:
what trivial debts are owed to us, how great our debt to you!

Lord, cleanse the depths within our souls, and bid resentment cease;
then, bound to all in bonds of love, our lives will spread your peace.

Blessing Go forth with the hope of new beginnings. Go forth with the trust of God's redeeming love. Go forth with courage and live in the promise of eternal life. Go forth to blossom and flourish in the Good News of Jesus Christ. Amen. You may be seated while we have a brief instrumental and then we'll begin the meeting....

CCLI # 2561297