

Straight from the "Hart"

April 7, 2023 – Good Friday



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 very loosely based on a book by the same title, written by Steven Molin.



Welcome

Good evening We are glad you are here to with us whether you are tuning in at home or in the sanctuary... We are really glad you are here to participate in this evening's special worship.



worship

Opening Prayer Let's begin with prayer. Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ was lifted high upon the cross so that he might draw the whole world to himself. Grant that we, who see his death as our salvation, as bearing our sins in his body on the cross. may also see in it his call to take up our cross, dying to sin and living in righteousness by following him. We pray this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(ad. from UM Book of Worship)

Call to Worship Come tonight to worship, for this is not only a time of mourning, but of awe, not only for mourning but for wonder, for love and gratitude. Come to bow in reverence in praise of him. Come in awe to stand before him. Come in faith to glorify him. (ad from Bruce Prewer bruceprewer.com) For what he has done for us was seen long before it happened by the prophet Isaiah. Let's read what he wrote to us.

Responsive Lenten Confession (L – Pastor **P** – People)

L: He grew up in the Lord's presence like a tender shoot. There was nothing beautiful or majestic – nothing to attract us to him.

P: He was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows, and familiar with the deepest suffering. But we turned our backs and did not care.

L: We thought his troubles were a punishment by God, yet it was our weaknesses and sorrows that he carried.

P: He was pierced for *our* rebellion, crushed for our sins.

L: He was beaten so we could be whole. Whipped so we could be healed.

P: All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's path to follow our own.

L: Yet the Lord has laid on him the sins of us all. Even though he had done no wrong, he was oppressed and treated harshly. He remained silent as he was led like a lamb to the slaughter. No one cared that his life was cut short midstream – struck down for the rebellion of God's people.

P: It was the Lord's good plan to make him an offering for sin.

L: When he sees all that he has accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied. He will make it possible for many to be counted as righteous, for he will bear all their sins.

P: He exposed himself to death and was labeled a rebel. But he bore the sins of many and interceded for rebels. Therefore, he will enjoy a long life and have many descendants.

(adapted from Isaiah 53:2-12)

Theme We've gone through Thursday night this week, on our own, at home, privately, when Jesus gathered his disciples in a room, washed their feet to demonstrate the model of humble service of others, told them a new command is that we must love each other, hosted the last Passover supper, establishing a new covenant between God and people through the death he was about to experience. The meal ended and they went out to the Garden to have a prayer. It was here in the garden that Jesus wrestled with his destiny, so hard that his sweat was thick as blood, he fought off temptations and doubts and knowing there would be betrayals, and determined again that if he was going to be faithful to the Father and bring to the world the blessings of God's mercy and forgiveness and new life, he would have to face the trials and storm of crucifixion. Put yourself in his sandals in the garden as Jesus prays as Mary Jo Bell sings for us...

Special Music

Blessings

Laura Mixon Story, © 2011 Laura Stories, New Spring Publishing

We pray for blessings, we pray for peace,
comfort for family, protection while we sleep.

We pray for healing, for prosperity.

We pray for your mighty hand to ease our suffering.
And all the while you hear each spoken need,
yet love is way too much to give us lesser things.

Chorus

So what if Your blessings come through raindrops?
What if your healing comes through tears?
What if a thousand sleepless nights
are all it takes to know You're near?
And what if trials of this life
are Your mercies in disguise?



We pray for wisdom, your voice to hear.
We cry in anger when we cannot feel you near.
We doubt your goodness, we doubt your love,
as if every promise from your Word is not enough.
And all the while you hear each desperate plea
and long that we'd have faith to believe.

Chorus

When friends betray us, when darkness seems to win.
We know that pain reminds this heart --
that this is not -- this is not our home. It's not our home.

Chorus

And what if trials of this life, the rain, the storms,
the hardest nights are your mercies in disguise?

Intro to and Bible Reading 1

Jesus finishes praying, rejoins his closest friends and wakes them up, and then the others, and the Judas arrives with Roman soldiers and Temple guards, and points him out to them by greeting Jesus with a kiss. Jesus quells a near battle that Peter tries to start, and Jesus is arrested, taken to the high priest's courtyard where outside, Peter denies knowing Jesus; and inside Jesus is interrogated by the high priest, and then brought to Pilate to execute him. Pilate interviewed Jesus, couldn't find anything he was guilty of...(as far as Rome was concerned), but through a Passover custom, he gave them a choice for him to release back to the public Jesus or a revolutionary named Barabbas. (Which I am sure in his mind was a no-brainer – surely they would want Jesus released to freedom and the violent Barabbas held, but that is not what happened. Now we pick up the story.

(Summary of primarily John 18)

Then Pilate had Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip. The soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they put a purple robe on him. “Hail! King of the Jews!” they mocked, as they slapped him across the face. Pilate went outside again and said to the people, “I am going to bring him out to you now, but understand clearly that I find him not guilty.” Then Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said, “Look, here is the man!”

When they saw him, the leading priests and Temple guards began shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

“Take him yourselves and crucify him,” Pilate said. “I find him not guilty.”

The Jewish leaders replied, “By our law he ought to die because he called himself the Son of God.”

Then Pilate tried to release him, but the Jewish leaders shouted, “If you release this man, you are no ‘friend of Caesar.’ [That scared him]. Anyone who declares himself a king is a rebel against Caesar.” When they said this, Pilate brought Jesus out to [the crowd] again. Then Pilate sat down on the judgment seat on the platform that is called the Stone Pavement (in Hebrew, *Gabbatha*). It was now about noon on the day of preparation for the Passover. And Pilate said to the people, “Look, here is your king!”

“Away with him,” they yelled. “Away with him! Crucify him!”

“What? Crucify your king?” Pilate asked.

“We have no king but Caesar,” the leading priests shouted back. [That’s “good” for religious leaders to say that, isn’t it? (sarcasm)]

Then Pilate turned Jesus over to them to be crucified.

John 19:1-7, 12-16a (NLT)

Music And so Jesus, whipped nearly to death, the thorned crown digging into his head, the soldier’s blows still stinging on his face, *his* storm leading to *our* blessing has begun flooding over Jesus. Let’s sing together

O Sacred Head, Now Wounded

Words: Anonymous; trans. by Paul Gerhardt and James W. Alexander

Music: Hans L. Hassler, 1564-1612; harm. by J.S. Bach, 1685-1750

1. O sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down,
now scornfully surrounded with thorns, thine only crown:
how pale thou art with anguish, with sore abuse and scorn!
How does that visage languish which once was bright as morn!

2. What thou, my Lord, has suffered was all for sinners' gain;
mine, mine was the transgression, but thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Savior! 'Tis I deserve thy place;
look on me with thy favor, vouchsafe to me thy grace.
3. What language shall I borrow to thank thee, dearest friend,
for this thy dying sorrow, thy pity without end?
O make me thine forever; and should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never outlive my love for thee.

Intro to and Bible Reading 2

And now Jesus has to carry his own crossbeam (they weighed about 40 pounds) which doesn't sound like a lot for a strapping young man, but when you've been beaten and whipped to the point you can barely stand and live, much less walk, 40 pounds is a lot to carry. He started out, but he couldn't finish. We pick up the story at that point.

Along the way, they came across a man named Simon, who was from Cyrene, and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross. And they went out to a place called Golgotha (which means "Place of the Skull"). The soldiers gave Jesus wine mixed with bitter gall, but when he had tasted it, he refused to drink it.

After they had nailed him to the cross, the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice. Then they sat around and kept guard as he hung there. A sign was fastened above Jesus' head, announcing the charge against him. It read: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.

The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. "Look at you now!" they yelled at him. "You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Well then, if you are the Son of God, save yourself and come down from the cross!"

The leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders also mocked Jesus. "He saved others," they scoffed, "but he can't save himself! So he is the King of Israel, is he? Let him come down from the cross right now, and we will believe in him! He trusted God, so let God rescue him now if he wants him! For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" Even the revolutionaries who were crucified with him ridiculed him in the same way.

Matthew 27:32-44 (NLT)

Music And so the battle for our soul continues, let's not walk away – but realize the watery storm he is going through will become the fountain of life that brings healing to us if we will only continue believing, hoping and trusting in him. Let's sing...

Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross

Words: Fanny J. Crosby, 1869 Music: William H. Doane, 1869

1. Jesus, keep me near the cross; there a precious fountain,
free to all, a healing stream, flows from Calvary's mountain.

Refrain

In the cross, in the cross, be my glory ever,
till my raptured soul shall find rest beyond the river.

3. Near the cross! O Lamb of God, bring its scenes before me;
help me walk from day to day with its shadow o'er me.

Refrain

4. Near the cross I'll watch and wait, hoping, trusting ever,
till I reach the golden strand just beyond the river.

Refrain

Intro to and Bible Reading 3

And from the cross, let's pause to think of what was in Jesus mind at the time... You may have heard that when someone quotes the first line of a Psalm, it often indicates the whole of the Psalm is in that person's mind. So if I say, "The Lord is my Shepherd? [congregation replied: "I shall not want"] – Sure, it brings the whole Psalm to mind. From the cross, Jesus quoted the first line of Psalm 22, which probably meant all of that Psalm was in his mind. Hear just a few bits of it...

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far away when I groan for help? Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer. Every night I lift my voice, but I find no relief...

My life is poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax, melting within me. My strength has dried up like sunbaked clay. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. You have laid me in the dust and left me for dead. My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs; an evil gang closes in on me. They have pierced my hands and feet. I can count all my bones. My enemies stare at me and gloat. They divide my garments among themselves and throw dice for my clothing...

[and then jumping down to the end of the Psalm] The whole earth will acknowledge the LORD and return to him. All the families of the nations will bow down before him. For royal power belongs to the LORD. He rules all the nations. Let the rich of the earth feast and worship. Bow before him, all who are mortal, all whose lives will end as dust. Our children will also serve him. Future generations will hear about the wonders of the Lord. His righteous acts will be told to those not yet born. They will hear about everything he has done.

Psalm 22:1-2, 14-18, 27-31 (NLT)

Music The hymnwriter invites us to put ourselves in the story and relive the scene. If you are comfortable to stand, do so and let's sing...

Were You There

Words: Afro-American spiritual

Music: Afro-American spiritual; (ad. and arr. by William Farley Smith, 1986)

1. Were you there when they crucified my Lord? (were you there)
Were you there when they crucified my Lord? (were you there)
Oh! ---- sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they crucified my Lord? (were you there)
2. Were you there when they nailed him to the tree? (were you there)
Were you there when they nailed him to the tree? (were you there)
Oh!---- sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they nailed him to the tree? (were you there)
3. Were you there when the sun refused to shine? (were you there)
Were you there when the sun refused to shine? (were you there)
Oh!---- sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when the sun refused to shine? (were you there)

Sermon Finishing Stone: Complete the Noble Fight

At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (EL - OH - EE, EL - OH - EE, LAH-MAH SAH-BACH-THA-NEE) which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

Matthew 27:45-46 (NLT)

Just hold on to those words for a bit.

For all Facebook is and isn't, a few years ago it connected me to someone I had not seen nor heard from since I left seminary... One of the first posts I read from Greg was this:

On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. was shot and killed on the balcony of a Memphis hotel. I was only 9 years old, but I remember my mother talking about that event and teaching me that all people were created equal regardless of race, gender, and income.

It was my mother's influence that motivated me to live in an inner-city neighborhood in Kansas City.

[She] inspired me to work in inner-city Los Angeles feeding homeless families. The message of Dr. King still inspires me to work for justice for [the] oppressed ... In Memphis that day he was advocating for the rights of sanitation workers. I don't know any better way of dying than in the pursuit of justice for the marginal ones in our society. I hope I will die that way.

Last I heard, Greg is in Arizona now and continuing to work with and advocate for the disadvantaged. It takes a special kind of person to devote their life full time to this type of work and I wish him well in his endeavors. We admire people like Dr. King, Mother Theresa, John Wesley, and Billy Graham, and many other role models -- past or present, public or personal. We admire them for their willingness to personally sacrifice so deeply to make our world a better place. Many of us seek to emulate them, to do something noble to impact our world for the better.

Many people begin as idealist dreamers -- (like all of us in seminary long ago) and I mean that in the best sense of the phrase -- and some do indeed accomplish much. Others fall short -- discovering that the romantic notion of self-sacrifice is not all so romantic and feel so admirable when you yourself are actually forced to live that sacrifice in real time. Unlike TV and movies, or books, even the Bible, we cannot skip forward through life from one exciting event and victory to the next, we must live out the routine, the drudgery, the unrelenting opposition, the failures in-between the advances and victories, but also all that other stuff that comes in-between them. [Pause]

This trio was in it together from the beginning. They launched the perfect plan. They were going to attempt to accomplish the impossible. They knew it wouldn't be easy. There would be rough spots, resistance, pain. But they knew they could do it because they had each other, they had love, and love conquers all (in the end). They would carry their plan through to the end -- they had the resolve and the discipline to overcome. The trio of Father, Son and Spirit --- created the world, and now they put into effect their plan save the world they created. The writer to the Hebrews summed up the attitude:

fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame... Consider him who endured such opposition from [the] sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Hebrews 12:2-3 (NIV)

But as the day of resistance grew ever nearer and the romance of the plan faded, and as the reality of it took to the forefront; we heard that Jesus was overwhelmed and in the garden praying... Is it possible that there can be another plan?

Yet, if it is the only way -- then he is still willing... and Luke tells us that (since his human friends were unable to comfort him), he was strengthened by the presence of an angel... Maureen Pratt wrote:

Oh Lord, help me to feel your calming hand
upon me when I am in pain.
Let your ever-loving comfort enfold me,
And give me the heart to see
that in my suffering, I am becoming
closer to you... and more divine.

When we can feel and sense the Presence of the Father and His people in the dark times, it is usually still a bearable thing. So when the sky grew dark as Jesus hung on the cross, perhaps he still had a sense of his saving mission being accomplished. An old BC comic had this dialog:

Was ultimate victory in mind?

Thor: I hate the term 'Good Friday.'

Curls: Why?

Thor: My Lord was hanged on a tree that day.

Curls: If you were going to be hanged on a tree on that day, and he volunteered to take your place, how would you feel?

Thor: Good.

Curls: ~~Have a nice day.~~ [There you go... He took our place.]

Jesus may have had this good in mind even as he uttered Psalm 22. The Psalm works its way from a sense of delay and distance and desertion on to intense suffering, but eventually concludes with a trust of ultimate vindication and victory.

We kind of like to emphasize the ultimate victory, don't we -- because in minimizing the suffering, in an odd way, it lessens the impact of my sin that put him there. And if I can minimize his pain, I minimize my guilt.... The Sidewalks prophets had a different view, a more accurate view when they sang:

My heart is so frail, I'd rather stay inside, It took more than my strength to seek but never find, reasons we change, reasons I doubt – [then at the heart of it]: I am the thorn in your crown, I am the sweat from your brow, I am the nail in your wrist, I am Judas's kiss, I am the man who yelled from the crowd for you blood to be spilled on this earth shaking ground and I turned away with a smile on my face with this sin in my -- heart tried to bury your grace - And as Jesus took on all that sin, the sin of the world, you can't get around the immediate context – you can't just jump to the victorious end:

"EL - OH - EE, EL - OH - EE, LAH MAH SAH BACH THA NEE" ... "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

This is not romantic poeticism. This is not dispassionate theological treatise about how sin separates us from God, and Jesus is now made sin, and therefore is separated from God, and that can't feel good – [said happily] *“but it's all OK because it will be all right in the end”*?

No. That is too easy to say, to turn the page and get past it. That is not where he was in that moment. As true as all that may be, this loud cry is filled with powerful emotion -- an agonized expression of a real sense of alienation... the only place in Matthew Mark or Luke where Jesus addresses God without calling Him "Father".

Human experience tells us that for people of faith, in hard times we turn to Scripture and prayer. So yes, I am going to agree with those Forsaken who argue the whole Psalm was in his head at the time. But what we know in our heads is often little comfort to the agony of our hearts' intense experience of the moment. Right?

When strong temptation comes to us, we **know** the verse says we can bear it, but it sure doesn't **feel** that way... When Paul says we can learn to be content in every circumstance because we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us in every situation -- and we **know** that to be true, but when your unemployment runs out, and it seems no one will hire you, it sure doesn't **feel** that way.

Any struggle or failure or sin -- we KNOW that God cares and forgives -- but it doesn't always **FEEL** that way.

When Peter nobly dared venture out into the sea for Jesus, and as much as he wanted to focus on him, it took almost no time at all before all he could see are the waves. We **know** that all we need to do is focus on him, but all our human senses are drawn to **feel** only the deep dark drenching of the waves of our circumstances.

* where there seems no end to pain

- * no relief from the darkness of depression,
- * or the agony of conflict,
- * the torment of tensions...
- * when we are isolated and alone, we know that God is with us always, but it does not feel that way.

Darkness fell on the land. We KNOW -- the answer -- is God, but in the moment of crisis, it may not FEEL that way.

In the same way, Jesus KNEW vindication was coming around the corner. But in that moment, what he FELT was *our* sin laid on him and he FELT that separation that sin causes for the first time in all of eternity-- and "Father" could not make it to his lips... all he could only say was what we say: "Why?" [Pause]

Well. that is a negative way to start something isn't it? What can we learn, then, from this text?

With you in the hard times

First) When we feel abandoned in life, in our church, in our spiritual journey, -- you may not feel it, but at least KNOW it -- that Jesus has felt what we feel in the crisis of dark circumstances. Jesus plumbed the deepest depths of human experience, so that there might be no situation that we might live that he has not experienced before us". He understands. He's been there -- fully. He had a connection and bond with his Father of which we can only dream... and he felt the total absence of that power and comfort too. That's not failure -- that's humanity in crisis.

Second) We can learn that even in the abandonment, when he felt nothing but pain of His circumstances, nothing but lonely isolation, he still trusted and remained obedient. For while He did not call out Father, he did call out -- expecting to be heard, and he cried "MY God, MY God".

Even in the midst of doubts, when we can see nothing but the abyss that seems to separate us from the Creator, Jesus still strives desperately for the assurance from HIS God, for communion with him. He still seeks, He still trusts, He asks "Why?" as a frantic search to find the bridge which will lead him back -- to feeling his presence again...

And may we too, in our noble dreams for making a difference in our world, continue the work -- whether we sense God's Fatherly protective presence or we feel abandoned in our circumstances -- even then, may we continue to seek our God, and ask and trust that he would simply hold on to us even in our overwhelming experiences.

Stone Meditation

And so we hold in our hand again -- our finishing stone. This stone represents everything we have journeyed through this Lent, from choosing what our cornerstone of life was going to be built on, to the judgment stone that needs to be dropped in favor of acceptance and forgiveness, the hypocrisy stone that becomes a stumbling block to others, the substitute stone that replaces our priority in God with anything or anyone else, the labeling stone that dismisses people by a word that is often undefined, the sealing stone that gives us a choice to seal sin or Jesus away, or to be sealed into God's family, and the crying stone, crying for Jesus, or for him to be quiet and out of our way – all these things we have gone through this lent and perhaps some things we have personally faced that were not discussed in this season, laid at this cross as a desire to be better as Jesus directs each of us.

And Jesus finally said, it is finished – the work of salvation has been completed, he went through what he had to do so that we even have the option of laying these things down and out of our life... We would not have had that option if he had not done what he did. The Sidewalks prophets who sang those lyrics I quoted earlier: I am the thorn in your crown, the sweat from your brow, the nail in your wrist, Judas's kiss, the one who tried to bury your grace ... between each one of those phrases, they sang this [Pause] but you love me anyway [Pause] – and then they go on to say -- Oh God, how you love me, it's like nothing in life that I've ever known, yes you love me anyway, how you love me...

And now God's work in Jesus for salvation is completed on this earth, but his work *in us* continues in our hearts and lives. Therefore, the one question for tonight comes from Philippians 1:6, Will you allow Jesus to finish the work that he began in you and let him carry it on to completion? Will you allow him to continue to work in you, on you, through you?

^ **Music** If so, as we sing this last song, let's set our finishing stone at the cross as a sign of that desire. **The Old Rugged Cross**

Text: George Bennard, 1913, Music: George Bennard, 1913

1. On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
the emblem of suffering and shame;
and I love that old cross where the dearest and best
for a world of lost sinners was slain.

Refrain

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross, till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross, and exchange it some day for a crown.

2. O that old rugged cross, so despised by the world,
has a wondrous attraction for me;
for the dear Lamb of God left his glory above
to bear it to dark Calvary.

Refrain

3. In that old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine,
a wondrous beauty I see,
for 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died,
to pardon and sanctify me.

Refrain

4. To that old rugged cross I will ever be true,
its shame and reproach gladly bear;
then he'll call me some day to my home far away,
where his glory forever I'll share.

Refrain



Prayer Let's pray. O God, we feel the foreboding lonely darkness gathering as we hear your words from the cross. Our romanticism wants to feel we would not have abandoned you in your time of need, that we would have plunged ahead in service regardless of how we feel or do not feel your presence in the moment of crisis. But we also know the reality of our track records. Too often, we turn away from you when it is not expedient, when the pressure is on. Too often, we give up when our feelings turn numb.

Forgive us when we fail to be faithful. Forgive us when we lean on our own understanding. Forgive us when our faith *seems* too small for our task. Forgive us when we can only see life's dark seas and cannot see you. Strengthen us to call

out to you. Strengthen us to trust, strengthen us to continue following in your plan of our salvation. Hold us up, lead us on. So that when the time is right, we, like Christ before us, will endure our cross, suffer and sacrifice and die with him, that we may also like him, conquer death and be rewarded again with the crown of eternal life. We pray this in the name of the One who knows how we feel.

Blessing So as we leave in silence while darkness covers the land of faith, remember that no matter how abandoned we may feel -- we are not alone – God will not abandon us just as he did not abandon Jesus -- As we wait for God to bring his vindication and victory – we go to wait and watch for the hope that defies despair, the life that defies death, the beginning that defies the end. Amen.

(ad. from parts of Rev Gord's blog worshipofferings.blogspot.ca)

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