

Straight from the "Hart"

May 21, 2023 – Ascension Sunday



Sharing the journey
to know, love, and serve

Welcome to Hartland UMC's "Straight from the "Hart"". We are really glad you are here and participating in today's time of worship. This Worship Series, *Embracing God's Friendship*, is loosely inspired by William A Barry, SJ 's "A Friendship Like No Other: Experiencing God's Amazing Embrace"

This is Ascension Sunday, the day we remember that the resurrected Christ returned to heaven and left to his disciples the mission of bringing God's love to the world. We won't be talking about it this year but thought we should at least acknowledge that this is that day.



Donna Allmond (not pictured on piano), Kathy Novak (flute), and Randy Bell (bass guitar) accompany the music.

Opening Prayer

Holy God, we have come to open ourselves to the power of your Holy Spirit. Through us, and these gifts, may others know that when anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old way ends, and new life begins. Amen.

ad from © 2004 Brian Wren in UM Song & Worship, Leader's Edition.

(Series) Responsive Call to Worship w/ 2226 (Ref only) *Bind Us Together*

Come, all who have experienced and entrusted their lives to the love of God in us. Come, all who desire to live faithfully in love and in God. God is love, and truly lives in us and we in him if we love one another.

We have come so that God's love will accomplish its mission in and among us.

Inspired by 1 John 4:16,12b (VOICE)

Bind Us Together

Words and Music: Bob Gillman, 1977 © Kingsway's Thank You Music

Bind us together, Lord, bind us together with cords that cannot be broken.

Bind us together, Lord, bind us together, Lord, bind us together in love.

Baptism

Bible Reading

Paul gives us one of the more popular biblical explanations of the meaning of baptism, the rite used to initiate someone into God's family.

... all of us who have been immersed into Christ Jesus were immersed into His death. Through immersion into his death, we were buried with him; so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious [power] of the Father, so we too might [habitually] live *and* behave in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will also be [one with him in sharing] his resurrection [by a new life lived for God]. We know that our old (unrenewed) self was nailed to the cross with him so that the entire body of our sinful propensities might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For someone who has died is freed (loosed, delivered) from [the power of] sin. Now since we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him.

Romans 6:3b-8 (AMPC, CJB)



A modern paraphrase takes that somewhat technical lawyer-ese speech and attempts to explain it this way:

If we've left the country where sin is sovereign, how can we still live in our old house there? Or didn't you realize we packed up and left there for good? That is what happened in baptism. When we went under the water, we left the old country of sin behind; when we came up out of the water, we entered into the new country of grace—a new life in a new land! That's what baptism into the life of Jesus means. When we are lowered into the water, it is like the burial of Jesus; when we are raised up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus. Each of us is raised into a light-filled world by our Father so that we can see where we're going in our new grace-sovereign country. Could it be any clearer? Our old way of life was nailed to the cross with Christ, a decisive end to that sin-miserable life—no longer captive to sin's demands! What we believe is this: If we get included in Christ's sin-conquering death, we also get included in his life-saving resurrection.

Romans 6:3-8 (MSG)

Music So let's invite the Spirit's presence to fill us and this place during this baptismal sacrament. Let's sing Holy Spirit...

Holy Spirit

Words & Music: Katie Torwalt & Bryan Torwalt © 2011 Jesus Culture

There's nothing worth more that will ever come close,
no thing can compare, you're our living hope.

Your presence, Lord.

I've tasted and seen of the sweetest of loves,
where my heart becomes free and my shame is undone.

Your presence, Lord.

Holy Spirit, You are welcome here.
Come flood this place and fill the atmosphere.
Your glory, God, is what our hearts long for,
to be overcome by Your presence, Lord.

Let us become more aware of Your presence.
Let us experience the glory of Your goodness.

(Repeat 3 x)

Holy Spirit, You are welcome here.
Come flood this place and fill the atmosphere.
Your glory, God, is what our hearts long for,
to be overcome by Your presence, Lord.

(Repeat)

Introduction

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Through the Sacrament of Baptism, we are initiated into Christ's holy church. We are incorporated into God's mighty acts of salvation and given new birth through water and the Spirit. All this is God's gift, offered to us without price.

Presentation of Candidate

Today, Jason Michael Weaver is presenting himself for baptism, and standing with him are Jerry and Lisa Weaver.

Renunciation of sin and profession of faith

On behalf of the whole Church, I ask you, Jason: Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin?
I do.

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves? **I do.**

Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races? **I do.**

According to the grace given to you, will you remain faithful members of Christ's holy church and serve as Christ's representatives in the world? **I will.**

To those standing with the baptismal candidate:

Jerry and Lisa, Will you who support and encourage Jason in his Christian life?
I will.

To the Congregation

And now the rest of you, who today speak for the Church across the world, representing all the additional Christian influences that will interact with Jason...:

Do you, as Christ's body, the church, reaffirm both your rejection of sin and your commitment to Christ? **We do.**

Will you nurture one another in the Christian faith and life and include Jason now before you in your care?

With God's help we will proclaim the good news and live according to the example of Christ. We will surround Jason with a community of love and forgiveness, that he may grow in his trust of God, and be found faithful in his service to others. We will pray for him, that he may be a true disciple who walks in the way that leads to life.

Let us join together in professing the Christian faith as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Jerry will lead you on the yellow font.

Do you believe in God the Father?

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, [who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, as crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy universal church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Thanksgiving Over the Water

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

Let us pray. Eternal Father: When nothing existed but chaos, you swept across the

dark waters and brought forth light. In the days of Noah you saved those on the ark through water. After the flood you set in the clouds a rainbow. When you saw your people as slaves in Egypt, you led them to freedom through the sea. You brought their children through the water to the promised land. In the fullness of time, you sent Jesus, nurtured in the water of a womb. He was baptized by John and anointed by your Spirit. He called his disciples to share in the baptism of his death and resurrection and to make disciples of all nations.

Pour out your Holy Spirit, to bless this gift of water and the one who receives it, to wash away his sin and clothe him in righteousness throughout his life, that, dying and being raised with Christ, he may share in his final victory. **Amen.**

Baptism with laying on of hands

Jason, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.** The Holy Spirit work within you, that being born through water and the Spirit, you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**



Anoint with Cross of Oil

Jason, child of God, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own forever.



Prayer Let's pray... Lord of Love, You never forget Your own. Thank you for claiming Jason as one of your beloved. Assure him

that as he grows in your family of the human race and the heavenly kingdom, that your Presence will never let go of his life. Watch and guide his steps. Be his constant companion in good times and in struggles. May he always sense your compassionate love. Protect him from evil and lead him away from temptation. May he shine with your glory all his days.

We also pray you bless his parents, extended family as spiritual models for his life; that he may continue to learn of and grow in love and forgiveness, of grace and acceptance, of spiritual gifts and empowering maturity. May they keep you ever before him. In the busy-ness of life, prompt them to remind him about you, as

they sit together, as they walk together, when they relax and when they work, that he and they may learn to love you more and more with heart, soul, mind, and strength.

We also pray for Christian friends and churches he may experience throughout his travels in life, that he will encounter people who will encourage and nurture him in the joy of your salvation, the meaningfulness of your mission, and the vision of your purposes, so that like your Son, he may grow in wisdom and stature, and in favor with you and with humanity. We pray this through the grace of your Son, our Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Now it is our joy to welcome our brother in Christ.

Through baptism you are incorporated by the Holy Spirit into God's new creation and made to share in Christ's royal priesthood. We are all one in Christ Jesus. With joy and thanksgiving, we welcome you as a member of the family of Christ.

Closing Blessing to Baptism

Now may the God of all grace, who has called us to eternal glory in Christ, establish and strengthen all of us by the power of the Holy Spirit, that we may live in grace and peace. Amen.

Music As the Weavers return to their seat, let's sing Baptized in Water.

Baptized in Water

Words: Michael Saward Music: Trad. Gaelic Melody
© 1982 Jubilate Hymns, adm. by Hope Publishing Co.

1. Baptized in water, sealed by the Spirit,
cleansed by the blood of Christ, our King;
heirs of salvation, trusting his promise,
faithfully now God's praises we sing.
2. Baptized in water, sealed by the Spirit,
dead in the tomb with Christ, our King;
one with his rising, freed and forgiven,
thankfully now God's praises we sing.
3. Baptized in water, sealed by the Spirit,
marked with the sign of Christ, our King;
born of one Father, we are his children,
joyfully now God's praises we sing.

Music Let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing

His Name is Wonderful

Words and Music: Audrey Mieir, 1959

© 1959 renewed 1987 Manna Music

His name is wonderful, his name is wonderful,
his name is wonderful, Jesus my Lord.
He is the mighty King, Master of everything;
his name is wonderful, Jesus, my Lord.
He's the great Shepherd, the Rock of all ages,
almighty God is he; bow down before him, love and adore him,
his name is wonderful, Jesus, my Lord.

God Moments (Testimonies by congregants – we are not able to script these but here are some of the people who shared what God was doing in their lives...)



Prayers

Lord, as we look about us, we see your wisdom at work in the vast variety of works you have made, both large and small. Creatures look to you to feed them. When you provide, they gather it up and are satisfied with good things... you renew the face of the earth. We celebrate all you have made and sustain by your powerful hand. We've heard the testimonies, families and friends and influences – your way of showing us that you're there – with us, leading us, guiding us, watching over us, caring for us.

In response, we just ask that our meditations may be pleasing to you. In those days that we feel broken and dried up, restore and refresh our life by your word. Breath into us again and remind us that you are our Lord; that we may stand in strength. **Petitions** This is our prayer for all we name in our heart, and including * Jan's brother Reese and son Calvin, whose court date was postponed – which they consider the beginnings of the answer of their prayers, and so we continue to pray for that situation, * for Jes who will be studying abroad in her ministry program

in June, * for Randy Bell who will be undergoing radiation treatments and tests in the weeks ahead, * for Charles' sister Beverly for surgery recovery and surgery coming * and we again celebrate with Jason and the Weavers for his baptism and graduation and continue to ask your blessing on his future endeavors; that he and all of us, may find the inner strength to live as you taught us to pray, **Lord's Prayer**

Bible Reading

Jesus tells a story in public about a farmer sowing seeds, and how those seeds hit various types of ground that makes them take root or not. Then in private he explains to his disciples the story was about how various people respond to his message about God. He follows this pattern so his enemies do not understand, but his disciples will.



Here is another story Jesus told: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field. But that night as the workers slept, his enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat, then slipped away. When the crop began to grow and produce grain, the weeds also grew. “The farmer’s workers went to him and said, ‘Sir, the field where you planted that good seed is full of weeds! Where did they come from?’ “An enemy has done this!’ the farmer exclaimed. “‘Should we pull out the weeds?’ they asked. “‘No,’ he replied, ‘you’ll uproot the wheat if you do.

Then, leaving the crowds outside, Jesus went into the house. His disciples said, “Please explain to us the story of the weeds in the field.” Jesus replied, “The Son of Man is the farmer who plants the good seed. The field is the world, and the good seed represents the people of the Kingdom. The weeds are the people who belong to the evil one. The enemy who planted the weeds among the wheat is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world, and the harvesters are the angels. “Just as the weeds are sorted out and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the world. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will remove from his Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. And the angels will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father’s Kingdom. Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!

Matthew 13:24-29, 36-43 (NLT)

Music Our hymn expands on what it means to be a seed in the field of God's world...

You are the Seed

Words: Cesareo Gabaraín, 1979 tr. by Raquel Gutiérrez-Achon and Skinner Chávez-Melo

Music: Cesareo Gabaraín, 1979 harm. by Skinner Chávez-Melo, 1987

© 1979 Ediciones Paulinas, tr. © 1989 The UM Publishing House,
harm. © 1987 by Skinner Chávez-Melo

1. You are the seed that will grow a new sprout;
you're a star that will shine in the night;
you are the yeast and a small grain of salt,
a beacon to glow in the dark.
You are the dawn that will bring a new day;
you're the wheat that will bear golden grain;
you are a sting and a soft, gentle touch,
my witnesses where'er you go.

Refrain

Go, my friends, go to the world, proclaiming love to all,
messengers of my forgiving peace, eternal love.
Be, my friends, a loyal witness, from the dead I arose;
"Lo, I'll be with you forever, till the end of the world."

2. You are the flame that will lighten the dark,
sending sparkles of hope, faith, and love;
you are the shepherds to lead the whole world
through the valleys and pastures of peace.
You are the friends that I chose for myself,
the word that I want to proclaim.
You are the new kingdom built on a rock
where justice and truth always reign.

Refrain

3. You are the life that will nurture the plant;
you're the waves in a turbulent sea;
yesterday's yeast is beginning to rise,
a new loaf of bread it will yield.
There is no place for a city to hide,
nor a mountain can cover its might;
May your good deeds show a world
in despair a path that will lead all to God.

Refrain

Sermon Patient, Positive Relationship Building

Last week we said that one way to better experience God's friendship is to read and put yourself in the Bible stories where God's love for us expressed, and to feel his assurance of his love for you. When we enter the deeper stages of friendship, friends will mutually be *for* each other anything and everything within their power that the other one needs them to be. Agreed? Therefore, at some point, we will need to put ourselves into those bible stories where it isn't all sunshine and rosy smiles. We'll need to enter into the stories where Jesus experienced conflict, pain, betrayal and death and feel that as well, if we are going to be his friend. We heard it in our baptismal Bible reading. If we are going to live with him, we must die with him. (See Romans 6:1-10)

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Just as in any human relationship, before we can enter *that* kind of a deep commitment, we will need to develop the earlier stages of friendship. We touched on this a little bit last week, and will hit it again this week. In human relationships, once we meet someone and want to become friends, we begin a process of growth that may move quickly for or very slowly for others, just depending upon personalities, backgrounds, current circumstances and schedules and other variable factors.

First, you find out more things about the other person. You look for common interests and values **Begins by self-revelation** that can be connecting points upon which you spend time and get to know each other better. That requires us people to reveal more and more of themselves to each other. That is always a fun and scary thing, isn't it?

By reading and meditating and reliving the Gospels, we are asking Jesus to reveal himself to us. When we read about his birth, we think about, or should be, "What was Joseph and Mary thinking when all that was taking place. When Jesus tells the parables, we become a part of the crowd and react to his words. When Jesus talks to the woman at the well, or Nicodemus; we imagine we are those people and hearing Jesus speak to us... what feelings are invoked, what would he say to you if you were at that well, if you were following him on the road? What does Jesus reveal of himself to them, and to us?

The more we will know who he is, what he likes, what he doesn't, what are his dreams, what he forgives, how he loves. And through prayer, even though he already knows us, we share our lives with him anyway. We tell him our thoughts, our complaints, our hopes and dreams, what we like and what we don't. If we don't

reveal ourselves to God, we will feel like he doesn't know us, even though he does. So we need to do that in the process of prayer.

This mutual self-revelation draws us to each other. As we learn more and more

Grows to challenging inspiration

about each other, we begin to have hopes and dreams for each other, and we may say and do things to inspire and challenge each other to better fulfill our direction in life. We tell God what we hope he will do for us and in his world. Then we listen for his response, and we have a dialog. Because we don't always get it right – agreed? And we need to be open to that too – to corrections. Envision ourselves not only in the good stories, or the good people in the stories, but also get in the shoes of the rich young ruler that went away, the man who wasted his talent, Peter when he tried to pull Jesus aside and put him in his place but got himself put in his place instead... When we put ourselves in those places, see if Jesus has some words about our life in those stories as well...

Is there something Jesus may want us to do? Maybe something we don't really want to do? Or stop doing? Talk to him about it -

Be transparent

- open yourself up to him... friendships develop through mutual transparency.

Relationship challenges: Culture is wounded / ing to healthy relationships

This is where it may get challenging on at least three different levels. (1) It can be difficult because our culture is wounded and wounding – and I think that is true more today than I have ever been aware of in my lifetime. Maybe it was worse when I was young and not paying attention, but now that I am paying a little more attention, I've never seen it as bad as it is. But then again, I've read preachers from the 1700s saying the same thing, so... But there is evidence all around us of violence, and hatred, and war, and fear, and destruction of creation. On a less obvious level, we live within a social system that say many idealistic words but often fall far short of that ideal. It may be beyond our awareness, or our power to do anything about it, but we are caught up in that system.

Cultural values can fool us about how to develop relationships

As a result, it is easy to get fooled for our world is often a dark and confusing place, and it is easy to get caught up in one of the many voices calling out with such confidence what is right in their own minds. "*Boy, he sounds like he really knows and is sure of himself, he must be right...*" But maybe he isn't. This reinforces the need to read and meditate and relive the passages about the

religious guides of Jesus' day -- I am thankful that I was not living then -- caught up in the norms of those days which all seemed so right and proper for the faithful followers. But in Jesus we discover Someone who, because he paid close attention to his heavenly Father, saw through the artificial standards, teachings and practices of his world – and even his religious world -- that led the faithful astray. So many so fooled -- that all we can do is pray that when history looks back on us, they won't be shaking their heads at us and saying the same kinds of things. Another reason we are not to judge but have grace with each other. Right?

And then perhaps flowing out of these, the third difficulty is much

We fool/reject ourselves in our relationships

more deep and personal... We realize we ourselves have failed or disappointed the other person or disappointed God or both. And when we do, we may want to hold back that part of our life, fearing the other may reject us, not forgive us, think less of us, hold it against us, and cease to be our friend. And in these fears, it is very hard to transparently reveal ourselves, to be open to receiving challenging inspiration, requirements for deepening friendships. The rich man walked away from following Jesus rather than expose his addiction to riches, even though Jesus already knew what he was.

We tend to reject and beat ourselves up and fool ourselves into thinking that must be how the other thinks about us too, or would feel about us if they knew what our failure was: "I'm angry at me so anyone who knows must be angry at me too!" Right? That projection is always there. We need to get past that. On the human level, there is a risk that that is how they feel. But in our relationship with God, hopefully we have learned that the One who loves us so much that he sent a very willing Jesus to die at our hands while we were yet sinners -- he would not end his love or acceptance for us because of – anything that we've done.

Therefore, seek to remain in God's presence, and as we see failures, openly confess them and put it on the prayer table and get it dealt with and with God's help – hopefully not do it again, but if we do slip up and do it again – sincerely strive to bounce back and keep on trying.... It is like riding a bicycle – just because you fall off once, you aren't done, are you? No, you get back up and try again – does that mean you are never going to fall again? No. And do you go all the way back to the beginning of your trip just because you fell somewhere? No, you just pick up where you are and keep on a going. Make it right as best you can and keep on going.

Hopefully we will do the same in our human relationships. We will reflect God's grace and forgiveness and through that acceptance remain in a place where we can be inspired and inspire others to new heights. But even as we seek to inspire, we cannot force the growth of another anymore than we can make a plant grow by pulling on its leaves and snapping it around – it is not going to grow any more. All that will do is uproot it and destroy it, (or like I sometimes tend to do is drown it with water). Whatever happens, you have to let the plant take its natural course, and its decisions to grow at its own pace. (And the same is with people).

Jesus talks about how wheat is planted, and then the weeds are planted by the devil in the night, (which incidentally, if you don't know, the weeds they are talking about is darnel, which looks pretty much identical to the wheat until they are in full bloom and they show their true color). You can't very easily tell which is which until it is harvest time unless you are an expert. So the servants ask, "Should we go pull up the weeds?" and Jesus says, "No, lest some wheat gets pulled up in the process. Wait till the harvest, and then the *angels* will take care of it.

I can't explain it, maybe it is because our culture fast-tracks everything, or because

Give relationships time to develop

Christians talk about love and care so much that some feel it is a given and they can jump over the early stages of relationship building -- of being introduced, of getting acquainted, of finding commonalities, of spending time to develop closeness, of beginning to reveal ourselves – sometimes we skip over all that and plummet straight to the depths of the challenging/inspiring speeches to each other. It is almost like we introduce ourselves with our weeding gloves on; and trying to pick everybody apart -- what we perceive as people's character flaws and failures; and sometimes even before we know their name, or that they exist, we are out judging.

But if we take the time to go through the steps of building a friendship, however the words come out... well, this is my comparison. If you have developed a really good friendship, then no matter what is said to you, it will almost always be heard like this: "I care and love about you, I know you and what you want to accomplish for you. I'll do anything to help you get there. Maybe you should try this..." and you will consider it seriously because of the friendship.

But if we skip all those relationship steps and go straight to the "This is what you ought to be or do" – even if they are the exact same words as the first example, if you are not in that relationship, even with identical words of the close friend, then

what is most often heard is a snarky: “This is what is wrong with you!” Right? And then they wonder why their victims become defensive and think Christians are judgmental and graceless when they had done it all in the name of love...

If challenging, inspiring conversation is offered without the hearer’s invitation and without the

Don’t weed out relationships

context of building a *mutual* loving relationship, it is like prematurely weeding the field, and assuming the weeder can tell the difference between what God’s grace can do or not do in a person before harvest time comes. If allowed to grow, some that may look like darnel to us now may turn out to be very wheat-y after all. And maybe if we hang around them, maybe our wheat-yness may rub off on them and they will become wheat. Who knows but that God may transform them into prime wheat just like he is in the process of doing for each of us as well.

I love this parable because we’ve all been at least a little bit

Exercise diligent patience as God does for us

weedy in different times and ways and areas of our lives. I’m glad that when I have failed and do fail, God did and does not quickly put on his gardening gloves and yank me out of his field. Aren’t you glad?

My friend compared this work of relationship building to housework. The longer it is neglected, the worse it becomes and the more overwhelming it is to restore that relationship (to the house). It initially takes a lot of work to get to know the house, develop the patterns of how to care for it -- to make the time to do it, and keep after it each day. But the more consistently you make the time and spend your energies on the house, (on the relationship, she is talking about); the better it becomes and the easier it is to maintain.

Of course, she said, a house isn’t human, so it is not a two-way street, there is not a mutualness – the house doesn’t care for you – well in some ways it does, but it doesn’t actively, proactively or interactively do that because it is not human – it doesn’t move, it doesn’t act. But this mutual-ness is required of a relationship with God or another person. Then my friend wrote this: The ultimate example of the importance of hard work, perseverance, and determination to bring you to the culmination of a lasting, intimate relationship, has already been given to each one of us... by God sending his own Son to dwell and live as one of us, thus gaining that trust in him, so that we would know God. Without that selfless sacrifice...where would any of us be today? (Pause)

The prophet Habakkuk felt the same way as the prophet Isaiah, that God had created this world where there would be no guilt or pain because everyone would know (and be friends) with God and they would treat God and others the way God wants us to treat each other, and him. (Isaiah 11:9). But they also saw reality – the nation was full of injustice... and real justice was coming (they warned) – from a nation, and in Habakkuk’s case, from a nation even more unjust than themselves. Habakkuk did not like that and argues with God about this, as good friends sometimes do – they’ll go head to head if they have that kind of relationship that allows it -- but God gives an answer, and Habakkuk understands, then calls people to an awed silence before God who is in his temple, to stand in awe of his deeds, and he pleads for God to act again as he has in the past, and then there is an affirmation that no matter what happens on earth, there would remain the joyful strength of his heavenly friendship that allows him to leap on the heights. (See Habakkuk, especially 2:29-3:2, 17-19) That’s what faith can do. Do we have that kind of faith?

Prayer Let’s pray. Lord, thank you for coming so close to us in Jesus Christ. Thank you for growing relationships with us that you are willing to say *anything* that we need to hear, and we can say back what need to say, what we feel, and your love will remain true.

Lord, we live in the midst of a weedy society. We hear the prayer of Etty Hillesum, prayed this in 1942 but still has power for us today. It is sometimes hard to take in and comprehend, Oh God, what those created in your likeness do to each other in these disjointed days. But I no longer shut myself away in my room, God, I try to look things straight in the face, even the worst crimes, and to discover the small, naked human being amid the monstrous wreckage caused by man's senseless deeds. I don't sit here in my peaceful flower-filled room, praising You through Your poets and thinkers. That would be too simple, and in any case, I am not as unworldly as my friends so kindly think [of me]. Every human being has his own reality, I know that, but I am no fanciful visionary, God, no schoolgirl with a "beautiful soul." I try to face up to Your world, God, not to escape from reality into beautiful dreams—though I believe that beautiful dreams can exist beside the most horrible reality—and I continue to praise your creation, God, despite everything. And then this Jewish woman living in Nazi occupied Amsterdam tossed a note out of the train on the way to Auschwitz that said simply “We have left the camp singing.”

Lord, grace us with the power of Habakkuk and the prophets to see the strength and joy of your friendship in even the worst of days. And when you discover any weedy-ness in us; please treat us gently and prune it away, that we may become even closer to you and you to us. Remind us of the long and difficult relationship work you did in buying us back from weedom and into wheatdom, by your work on your cross, that we may more and more live under your shepherding care. And it is in the name of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, that we pray. Amen.

Music Jesus is our shepherd-guide, our friend and guardian defender who receives us and relieves us with his freeing and cleansing mercy. Som in response, we seek to fill our hearts with his love and strive do his will.

Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us

Words: Attr. to Dorothy A. Thrupp, 1836 Music: William B. Bradbury, 1859

1. Savior, like a shepherd lead us, much we need thy tender care;
in thy pleasant pastures feed us, for our use thy folds prepare.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Thou hast bought us, thine we are.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Thou hast bought us, thine we are.
2. We are thine, thou dost befriend us, be the guardian of our way;
keep thy flock, from sin defend us, seek us when we go astray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Hear, O hear us when we pray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Hear, O hear us when we pray.
3. Thou hast promised to receive us, poor and sinful though we be;
thou hast mercy to relieve us, grace to cleanse and power to free.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! We will early turn to thee.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! We will early turn to thee.
4. Early let us seek thy favor, early let us do thy will;
blessed Lord and only Savior, with thy love our bosoms fill.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Thou hast loved us, love us still.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Thou hast loved us, love us still.

Blessing Now as we go to share in a celebration with the Weavers, we ask you would bless that food and fellowship. As a child of the Father, as Christ's friend, then go out to the world in the power of the Spirit -- with your heart set on Christ who draws all people to himself and binds us together in love. Amen.