

Straight from the "Hart"

July 16, 2023



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

Affirmation of Faith (P- Pastor, C - Reader with Congregation)

P: We are not alone, we live in God's world. We believe in God:

C: who has created and is creating, who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by the Spirit.

P: We trust in God. We are called to be the Church:

C: to celebrate God's presence, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.

P: In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us.

C: We are not alone. Thanks be to God. Amen.

POpening Prayer Father of all blessings, your risen Son renews our hope. We respond to your divine love and unfailing promises by offering ourselves in service to you. We faithfully give -- in hope that others will be enabled to encounter you as we have experienced you. In Jesus name Amen. Please remain standing for the Call to Worship and first song.

Call to Worship

Reader: Come, let the Lord make our hearts places of peace and our minds harbors of tranquility. Let our worship sow in our spirits true love and reverence for him, and to root deeply within us friendship and unity with each other so that together we may we sincerely give and receive peace beautifully as Jesus leads us. Let's sing together "He Leadeth Me"...

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Leader's Ed.



Music**He Leadeth Me**

Words: Joseph H. Gilmore, 1834-1918, Music: William B. Bradbury, 1816-1868

1. He leadeth me: O blessed thought! O words with heavenly comfort fraught!
Whate'er I do, where'er I be, still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.

Refrain

He leadeth me, he leadeth me, by his own hand he leadeth me;
his faithful follower I would be, for by his hand he leadeth me.

2. Sometimes mid scenes of deepest gloom,
sometimes where Eden's bowers bloom,
by waters still, o'er troubled sea, still 'tis his hand that leadeth me.

Refrain

3. Lord, I would place my hand in thine, nor ever murmur nor repine;
content, whatever lot I see, since 'tis my God that leadeth me.

Refrain

Intro to and Bible Reading 1

Reader: Last week we heard Peter tell readers, who because of their faith in Christ, were rejected from society or about to be rejected from society -- that their true home and citizenship is in heaven. To people who were deemed worthless and without status, Peter says that in Christ they are accepted, are treasured as precious, and have an identity as God's people and nation.

Jesus taught that this heavenly kingdom was not of this world, and that through him, it had arrived. But before the disciples learned to adopt the values of heaven to their daily living, they applied the cultural standards of power and status to this new kingdom. Jesus corrects them when...

A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them [ruling as emperor-gods]; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors [and well-doers]. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves... I am among you as one who serves..."

Peter wrote about Jesus' model of life...

For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps.

He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone.

He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly. He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed. Once you were like sheep who wandered away. But now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls.

Jesus concludes by assuring the competing disciples that stand by him}

I am among you as one who serves... And I confer on you [the privilege and decree] (of) a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, ^{30a} so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom...

Luke 22:24-27b (NIV with [AMP]), 1 Peter 2:21-25 (NLT),
Luke 22:27b,29-30a (NIV with [AMP])

Theme

Jesus is the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls. If we pretend that we are a sheep, and the shepherd came toward you with this [holding up a shepherd's crook], (but much bigger than this small version) how would you feel? Scared? Sad? Relieved? Happy? It might depend (a) on the type of relationship you have with the shepherd, right? If it is a shepherd you like and can trust, maybe you'll feel okay. (b) And it may also depend upon what situation you are in because the staff has multiple purposes. (1) If he is using it to pull you away from a squabble that you started, you might not be too happy about it. (2) if he uses it to gently, or not so gently if you are stubborn, to nudge you back on the right path because you've wandered away, you might not like that so much. (3) But for sure, you'd be relieved if he used it to pull you out of a hole you were trapped in, or away from a dangerous place like a cliff edge. (4) or to hit a wild animal that is trying to eat you - (though he may use his rod for that), but he might use his staff for lots of good things for us.



So, if you like to wander, you may not always like the staff or the shepherd using it. But Peter and Psalm 23 reminds us that the Lord is our Shepherd, and his goal (with or without the staff) is always intended to help us, to keep us safe, to protect us from danger, and to help guide us to a place where we will be happy in the long

run because we will have learned how to live well on the path to our destiny.

So whether we have stayed or strayed or on right on course, we can always return to the overseer, the shepherd or our souls whose overcoming love and protecting presence is wrapped around us. And if we follow that model, then we too will follow the shepherd into the places and times of danger in an effort to be with, and bring some sort of healing to those [other sheep] who are hurting as well...

There is a story long ago about a monastery. At one time it had been a thriving center where many dedicated monks were making a big impact on each other and the surrounding community. Now only five remained, and they were all over 70. They commiserated with each other about their situation, and talked in empty circles about what they could do about it. There was a hermit who many considered to be a prophet who lived not far away, and they decided to seek his advice. After a discussion the hermit finally told them, "Yes, times have changed, the spirit has gone out of a lot of people. They don't care about the old things anymore. I don't know how your monastery can be saved. The only thing I can tell you is that one of you is an apostle of God."

The monks left disappointed -- and puzzled. But they also began to ponder his final statement. Could he really mean one of us old and insignificant five is an apostle of God? And each began to evaluate the other 4, mentally making a list of their strengths and shortcomings. "He's this, but he's also that." And they also considered themselves, "He couldn't have meant me, could he. Is that possible?"

Then, on the off chance that one of the other four might be a true apostle, they began to treat them with immense respect, and on the unlikely possibility that it was they themselves, they treated themselves with respect, and treated others as they saw a true apostle would treat others.

The monastery happened to be in the middle of a place of great beauty with many trails that attracted many tourists and locals to travel through and even have picnics there. Some would go into the chapel to meditate. When they did, and especially if they encountered any of these five monks, they sensed a -- an aura of something special, something attractive and compelling. Without really realizing why, they began to picnic more often on the grounds and invite their friends as well.

As more came, some started to talk with the old men, and occasionally, one would ask if they could join them. Then another. Then another. Over time the monastery once again became a thriving center of light and spirituality to each other and to the community -- thanks to the hermit's gift of transforming constant complaints

about how things have changed to restoring a bond of respect and love for all and for each other -- for who they are, and for the potential that may be beyond their perception, but saw them as God saw them.

Music Hear Donna (piano) and Kathy (saxophone) play *Blest Be the Tie That Binds* our hearts in Christian love where we share kindred minds in Christ, where we share burdens and struggles and prayers and comforts together.

Special Instrumental Music **Blest Be the Tie That Binds**



God Moments

(The Congregation's Testimonies were not scripted)

Now let's prepare our hearts for prayer by reminding ourselves how much God loves us in song.

Music

O How He Loves You and Me

Words and Music: Kurt Kaiser © 1975 Word Music, Inc

O how he loves you and me! O how he loves you and me!

He gave his life. What more could he give?

O how he loves you; O how he loves me; O how he loves you and me!

Jesus to Calvary did go; his love for sinners to show.

What he did there brought hope from despair.

O how he loves you; O how he loves me; O how he loves you and me!

Pastor's Prayer Life-giving God, we thank you for all the wonderful deeds you have done generation after generation, inspiring music about your great works, and hearing testimonies about what you are doing in the lives of your people. You invite us to reflect on what you have done and increase our faith in you. May we always live aware of and welcoming your presence in us and among us. You don't ask for mere motions of rituals, but to express and experience them in a way that transforms our lives and builds our trust and faith in your power and mercy, your grace and your love. You hear our prayers, and so we offer to you the requests of our hearts on behalf of ourselves and our neighbors, and the world -- that all may discover your peace, and comfort, and courage.

Praises and Petitions * Pat Schleh offers thanks for the improvement of friends Ron and Donna after their surgeries. * Sherrie Rice offers praise for her cousin who is doing well after heart surgery.* For the family and friends of Alex Bedenis,

(close friends of Jan Martin) who died suddenly leaving a wife and 3 young children. * For John & Lynett McCoullum, He has melanoma, and will soon be retesting to see if they got it all. * Their son David had a severe heart attack in the past (he was on our list then), and now is going to have surgery to put in 3 stents, which will be more dangerous than normal because of the previous heart damage. So we pray for him as he goes through the operation on Tuesday. We also continue to pray for * Jan Martin's brother Reese and his son Calvin. * Pastor's friend, Fred - recovering from a painful knee surgery replacement.

Quilt and finally, for the * Melville's friend Mark Harper was diagnosed with cancer and will continue to have tests, so we pray for wisdom for the decision made and the effectiveness of those treatments, and for whom we now dedicate this quilt.

We dedicate this quilt to your service -- for Mark Harper, trusting that your love will go with it, making it more than just skillfully and beautifully sown pieces of material – but a very tangible expression of your love. When Mark receives it, may his trust in your goodness and hope in your faithfulness increase, even in the midst of this unknown journey. Let him be filled with patience and joy, removing all doubt and fear from his heart, knowing that you are beside him in every moment of every day.



We are thankful for those who gathered to make this quilt with loving hands and prayed for the one who would receive it. And now, as you always have, you hold him in your heart. May this quilt serve to give comfort in difficult days, warm his heart with your love, and remind him that no matter what the journey, he is not alone, but is always in your loving arms. We pray this in the name of Jesus, who sustains all of us with grateful hearts, renewing us so that we can soar like eagles, enabling us to live as you taught us to pray. **Lord's Prayer**

Bible Reading 2

Reader: One of the driving motivators that pushes us to great lengths and ambitious endeavors is to satisfy the desire to be accepted, respected, and needed – to make someone proud of us.

In the life of faith, even though we cannot earn our heavenly citizenship, for it is only granted by accepting



God's grace thought Christ, we do desire to live in a way that pleases God. Peter reminds us that God's approval is met when we respect ourselves and others as God does. He applies this principle to specific examples that don't easily translate into our current culture and arguably, is often misapplied to modern relationships. Nevertheless, this is what he writes:

[Make the Master proud of you by being good citizens. Respect the authorities.] Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people [who think you're a danger to society.] Live as free people [by serving God], but do not use your freedom as an excuse to do evil. Respect everyone, and love the family of believers, [revere] God, honor the emperor.

Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For God is pleased if someone patiently endures the pain of unjust treatment because they are conscious of God. [There is no particular virtue in accepting punishment] for doing wrong. But if you [are treated badly] for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

Peter then writes about the example of Christ as a "suffering servant" that we heard earlier, now he continues.

Wives, in the same way, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the Good News [about God], your godly lives will speak to them without any words. {They} [will be captivated by your life of holy beauty] by observing your pure and reverent lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. [What matters most is not your outer appearance.] Rather, you should clothe yourselves with the beauty that comes from within. [Cultivate] your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God. For this how the holy women of the past who put their trust and hope in God made themselves beautiful. They submitted themselves [were good, loyal wives] to their own husbands like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are

her daughters if you do what is right, [unanxious and unintimidated] and do not give way to fear.

In the same way, husbands, give honor to {and} be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect and understanding. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner as heirs with you in God's gracious gift of new life. Treat her as you should so nothing will hinder your prayers.

1 Peter 2:13-20, 3:1:7

Music Before the sermon and series prayer, let's sing,

Lord, Whose Love, Through Humble Service

Words: Albert F. Bayly, alt. © 1961 Oxford University Press

Music: Attr. to B.F. White, 1844; harm. by Ronald A. Nelson, © 1978 Lutheran Book of Worship

1. Lord, whose love through humble service bore the weight of human need, who upon the cross, forsaken, offered mercy's perfect deed; we, your servants, bring the worship not of voice alone, but heart consecrating to your purpose every gift that you impart.
3. As we worship, grant us vision, till your love's revealing light in its height and depth and greatness dawns upon our quickened sight, making known the needs and burdens your compassion bids us bear, stirring us to tireless striving your abundant life to share.
4. Called by worship to your service, forth in your dear name we go to the child, the youth, the aged, love in living deeds to show, hope and health, good will and comfort, counsel, aid, and peace we give, that your servants, Lord, in freedom may your mercy know, and live.

Series Responsive Prayer with (Ref only) They'll Know...By Our Love

L: God has mercifully chosen us to be his people, set apart and equipped to represent his excellence.

P: Lord, as members of your kingdom, may we reflect your radiance while we live on this earth. Amen.

Inspired by 1 Peter 2:9-12, 2 Peter 1:3

They'll Know We Are Christians By His Love

Words and Music: Peter Scholtes © 1966 FEL Publications, assigned 1991 to Lorenz Corp

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love;
yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love

Sermon Breaking Negative Escalation

The key to this passage is found in the next verses. Let me read just 2 of them.

Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate, tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. Do not repay evil with evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. On the contrary, pay them back with a blessing, because this is what God called you to do, so that you may inherit his blessing.

1 Peter 3:8-9 (NIV, NLT)

There is a mutual-ness to everything he wrote, all that we have heard today from Peter. Last week, Peter, as the reader told us, Peter calls believers "heavenly citizens" who represent Christ while living in this foreign land called earth. Now he gives some practical advice about how that plays out in earthly relationships in the context of the 1st Century Roman Empire.

While there were notable exceptions, many of those joining the new faith were women, slaves, and Jews – the first two were considered property, were not even considered people, and the last were at best tolerated and managed. Slaves were prisoners of war, so they varied in skill sets and education, but like women, they lived in a society that would offer them no education, no status, no freedom, no rights, no justice, and no protection. Married women could be dismissed for the slightest offense – into a compassionless culture that would not help them if that happened.

Peter implies, and Paul says it directly at times, that in Christ there is no difference, that in Christ's kingdom, every citizen from the most civilized and powerful to the most barbaric and powerless -- is cherished and is greatly valued. This was encouraging and emboldening news for many of these people who were not even considered people. The temptation would be to assert this newfound value in themselves to those around them in a society that would not tolerate it.

One of the principles of life is that you reap what you sow. Offended-ness births offensiveness. Anger produces anger, violence begets violence, and its tendency isn't to even out and settle down, but to become a cycle of escalating viciousness. If so, the last thing you want to do if you live in the harsh, ruthless, Roman Empire is to make them mad at you – or a masculine power who has all the power in the home – in both cases, they don't even need *any* justification to escalate against you. It was seen as their right to treat you in any way they saw fit without consequence.

Peter suggests that in this context – even with Nero as emperor, that the best way forward is not to try and convert the secular society, but to “stay under the radar” until Christ returned, which they likely still believed was going to happen any day. The goal, minimally, was to avoid negative escalation, and hopefully, eventually, to break the cycle of negativity.

If you drive down the road, and you keep to the speed limit, even if you think it is posted as too slow for what you think you can do

**Avoid Negative Escalation (ANE)
Stay the radar**

safely. Those in power – you, know, those with the lights on top – they’ll leave you alone if you stay under that limit. They will let you to go about your business. Peter suggests that in their context, it is best to live under the radar; to stay within those limits, and not draw unnecessary attention and conflict to themselves. The fickle wrath of others in power and against our faith will bring about enough conflict without us going out of our way to offend *their* sensibilities. A person in prison may be treated badly, but if they do their best to do good and not stir up the wrath of those around them, they will likely survive a bit better than if they went out of their way to make everyone mad at them.

In the meantime, Christ came to break the cycle, and calls us to break the cycle by

ANE: Break the Negative Cycle

following his example. He did not threaten or retaliate. Instead, he trusted God and graciously yielded his divine power, putting himself in the hands of humanity, willingly dying for our sins. His goal was not to set up another powerful controlling regime that would simply take its turn at the top of the wealthy and privileged pyramid, which would inevitably be replaced by another power-hungry group.

It worries me when people who claim to have certain values mercilessly try to force all others to comply while devaluing and stigmatizing everyone who holds a different view. It will just be a matter of time before those in power will no longer need the support of the ones who put them there, and then they will reap what they sowed when they were in favor and needed. No, Jesus came with an entirely different value system where there is supposed to be a voluntarily offered *mutual* respect and value that is given from the heart.

Stephen Beck wrote that driving down a country road, he came to a very narrow one-lane bridge with a posted yield sign. There was no oncoming traffic, so he proceeded through, did his business and then returned. He came to the same bridge, and he saw a yield sign. He drove across and looked back. Sure enough,

there were yield signs on both sides of that bridge. Drivers from both ways were told to give, yield, the right of way to the other side. It is a reasonable and gracious way of preventing a head-on collisions. Being gracious, you may not always get your "right of way" but you may avoid a whole lot of collisions in life". That works really well when we are with gracious people who are also willing to yield. You ever think of road rage? Nowadays if you get mad at someone, they might just run you right off of the road, or pull a gun on you. Best to just leave it alone

Peter is asking a very threatened, and powerless people to, as much as is possible, avoid interpersonal head-on collisions by offering a gracious response in the face of unyielding gruffness by those in power.

Peter's call for the freedom of yielding is *not* an eternal principle that encourages us to be complicit with injustice, to compromise our

ANE: Yield (Work for mutual), but not to be run over

beliefs, or to suffer abuse from the world or household. Our faith is not intended to be a placebo that pushes us into passiveness no matter what is done to us by others, or to allow ourselves to be controlled and manipulated by whoever threatens power over us. While the vast majority of that early church had little to no status in the secular society, the only real option to avoid Rome or husbands from singling them out and coming after them was – if it didn't conflict with heaven's values; to not act out, but to stay under the radar by living in such an unchallenging, gracious way that people were even impressed, by how well they controlled themselves, possibly even reacting positively to them, and maybe even joined this new way of living in mutual love and respect.

This gracious way of living is characterized by a positive passion for people. Christ left

ANE: Positive Passion for People

the bliss of heaven, entered this world, participated in its discussions, debates and conflicts, giving blessings as well as warnings. He did this not to make a name for himself, not to be a rebellious jerk against the powers of Rome or religions; but because of his passion for people, especially the oppressed, the beaten down, the depressed, the hurting, the diseased, the injured, but also for those who suffer from the effects of greed, pride and power (on both sides of that coin). He hurt because they hurt. He suffered with those who suffer in order to bring hope and healing and transformation. He stood tall against the corrupted powers of humanity, suffering at their hands to show the pain that broken, sinful systems can cause.

Likewise, we follow Christ into the sufferings of others not for sensationalism, or romanticism, or self-interest or to earn heavenly points; but because we have a pure, passionate, holy love for others, especially those who are hurting, and that passion drives us to be a part of the solution that helps people and changes systems. Passive placebos don't do that.

On a practical level, we don't bring healing by returning and escalating pain, anger, frustration and violence. We may more easily stir reactions, especially if it appears to be done in the name of justice; but normally they are seen as responses of resistance and maybe even additional negative escalation is what will happen. Positive change in personal relationships are rarely achieved through negative, wall-building tactics.

ANE: Positively work for change

I had a friend who worked at a daycare while we were at seminary. They received a new boss. The boss came in an opening letter to them quoted this text, equating master with boss, and employee with slave, and with that preface, told them to be good, compliant employees. That was not received very well, as you can probably imagine.

A store owner sat in a rocking chair on the stoop of his dying business. Once in a while he'd call out to those passing by trying to entice them to come in for a good deal. He wasn't having any luck. One window shopper in the know answered him.

"I will not shop from you. I heard how you treat your customers. You follow them around and if they don't want to buy your products, you call them names. If they don't buy deodorant, you call them Stinky. If they don't want to buy food, you call them Anorexic Monkeys. If they buy too much of your food, you call them Fatties. If they don't buy your shampoo, you call them Nappy Head. If they don't buy your toothpaste or mouthwash, you call them Bad Breath. You don't respect anyone that comes in your store." The grumpy old man thought for a minute, "I guess you're right -- you critical dimwit."

In the long term, we will never succeed in climbing the ladder of accomplishment by pulling others off of the ladder. It will catch up with us sooner or later. On the other side of that negativism, no matter how people treat others or ourselves, we still have response - ability. We can choose how we are going to respond.

We are not helpless victims, we do not need to descend to the low road, we should not allow others' attitudes and behaviors to determine who we are and how we are going to

ANE Ascend to the high road

live. We don't need to pass on to others the anger and frustration and violence that we receive -- but we are to stand, in a firm and positive way, even when the favor is not returned.

An upscale kitchen store sold unique, fancy kitchen tools and fresh specialty coffee beans. The beans were in self-serve bins. At the end of the day, the boss told Katie, one of the employees, to sweep up the spilled beans from the floor and put them back in the bins. She *politely* refused. It probably cost her, but she was a citizen of a different value system. She wouldn't do what was wrong, she didn't make a stink out of it, she just politely refused to do what was wrong, to take advantage of unsuspecting customers, even if they never knew because no one was looking.

Outside of a few Old Testament prophet-like actions, Jesus sought respectful communication, working for a win-win situation that makes the world a better place. We respect others not only by the words we have but by the life we live, and sometimes actions are the only way.

A national leader tried one of those enhancement filters to try look better on social media. Someone said something about how that wouldn't help that person because they were rancid. This is a negative example both ways, at this point. Apparently, the person didn't know what the word meant and didn't bother looking it up, and assumed it was ridiculing her selfie image and replied with accusations of misogyny and harassment. See how easily things can negatively escalate? I don't think either was playing by Peter's rules. A commenter tried to clarify the situation by saying the commenter was not talking about the poster's looks, her enhanced selfie, but about her soul, and quoted poet Kahill Gibran who said, "Beauty is not in the face, beauty is a light in the heart."

One woman came to see her pastor about her unsaved spouse, "I *drag* him to church every Sunday hoping he will accept Christ. Every morning I eat breakfast with him and weep and tell him how much I wish he would accept Christ. Then he comes home from work, and we have dinner and I weep and tell him how much I wish he would accept Christ. This pastor said, "I wouldn't care to be in that atmosphere!". He suggested she stop talking. "You mean I am not supposed to be a witness?" The pastor replied, "No, I mean when words don't work, then you witness by how you live. What kind of a life are you living before him?"

The woman realized that her life was not very winsome. But she resolved to be different. She stopped her words and corrected her living, revealing, by Christ's

grace, her inner attractiveness. In this case, in about 6 months the husband came to know Christ personally.

It is this inner attractiveness that draws and transforms. As I said, we tend to reap what we sow. Just as frustration, anger, and violence can escalate and cycle back to us, if we sow seeds of peace and plant gentle answers, and cultivate love; over time, then that too may escalate and cycle back to us... Peter is hoping that the old cycle will be broken and a new and different type of cycle will begin.

Create a new, positive cycle

One boy was not having a happy life. He took his frustrations out on others. He went around town shouting, "I hate you!" No one knew how to respond to him. One day he came to a steep cliff at the edge of town and shouted into the valley, "I hate you!" The valley echoed back, "I hate you!" That startled him and he ran home and cried to his mom, "A mean boy in the valley shouted he hated me." The wise mother took the boy back to the cliff and told him to shout, "I love you!" He did, and the valley replied: "I love you!" From that day on, the little boy wasn't angry anymore. Oh, if it were only so easy, yes? But the story's moral does try to illustrate what Peter is trying to show by these principles.

The question is, "Can we trust enough in God's shepherding, uniting love to be response - able? Even when things don't go the way we expect? Can we reach out in love even to those who haven't been that way for us? Can we live so that people will come running for the attraction that true love offers?"

A new attraction had opened at the St Louis Zoo called "Big Cat Country". It allowed lions and tigers to roam free in very large enclosures. Visitors watched by walking on elevated skyways that were above the habitats. Kathy and her friend brought their kids to visit. They began to ascend one of the skywalks, the friend's baby blanket got tangled up in her stroller's wheel. They stopped to work at untangling that blanket and as they did, Kathy didn't notice that her 3 and 5 year old boys had run on ahead. When the stroller was successfully untangled, Kathy looked up to discover that her children had innocently walked through a child-sized gap in the fencing and had climbed up on some rocks inside the habitat with the lions 20 feet below.

From that hazardous vantage point, and not knowing how much danger they were in, they pointed to the lions below and called out, "Hey, Mom, we can see them!" Kathy wasn't sure what to do. The gap in the fence was too small for her to get through, If she screamed, it might startle them while they stood on the uneven

stones (and alert the lions). Finally, she knelt down, spread her arms, and said, "Hey boys, come get a hug." And they came running for the love that saved them from danger that they didn't even know they were in.

With a similar type of love, our Savior beckons us from the tempting danger of escalating evils that would devour our world, and calls us to break the cycle by a *mutual* giving of ourselves for the sake of each other and in the name of Christ's uniting grace who opened his loving arms to receive us. Let's pray.

Prayer Lord, we are grateful for the freedom you have given to us. We are free to find in you the shepherding strength we need to break negative cycles that within us and around us, and to work to offer to help do the same for those that we come across in our journeys on this earth, so that we may build mutual relationships based on lives that hope in you. Bless us, that we may live in such a way that others have nothing negative they can legitimately say of us. May our ambitious endeavors not lead us to negative cycles of escalating unhealthy contention, but lead us to loving, respectful acceptance of people for whom you have willingly died, regardless of their present station in life, united not by our control or success, or power, but by your free offer of grace that leads to gracious living. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

Music Let's sing Jesus, United By Your Grace

Jesus, United By Your Grace

(to tune of O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing)

Words: Charles Wesley, 1742 Music: Carl G. Glaser, arr. by Lowell Mason, 1839

1. Jesus, united by your grace and each to each endeared,
with confidence we seek your face and know our prayer is heard.
2. Help us to help each other, Lord, each other's cross to bear;
let all their friendly aid afford, and feel each other's care.
4. Touched by the lodestone of your love, let all our hearts agree,
and ever t'ward each other move, and ever move t'ward thee.

Blessing "As water reflects the face, so one's life reflects the heart." Therefore, as we return to the world to resume our temporary travels on this earth, remember that every decision we make, every action we take, even word that comes out of our mouth is done in the name of the Lord who is with us every step of the way. Amen.

First line is Proverbs 27:19 (NIV)