

Straight from the "Hart"

July 30, 2023



Welcome to Hartland UMC's "Straight from the "Hart"". We are really glad you are here and participating in today's time of worship.

Statement of Faith (P – Pastor, C – Reader with Congregation)

P: Do you believe in God the Father?

C: We belong to God, eternal and infinite, Creator of all things and all that is to come.

P: Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

C: We follow Christ, who comes to us from God, and reveals God to us. He heals people and transforms lives, and calls us to join in his ministry. He was crucified, died, and was raised by God, and reigns over all Creation; and he bids us to die and rise with him in the service of the healing of the world.

P: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

C: We live by the Spirit, together with the communion of saints, as members of the Body of Christ, God's holy universal church. We are confident in the forgiveness of sin, the power of resurrection and the reality of eternal life. In all things it is our desire to follow Christ, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, for God's glory. Amen.

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in Worship & Song, Leader's Edition (W&S, LE)

Opening Prayer God of grace, We offer ourselves because you first gave your only Son for us, that we may be saved and empowered to daily live in your love – receive us as a sign of our willingness to faithfully follow your steps and pursue your vision for us and what we can become in you. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Call to Worship Rejoice that Jesus Christ has gathered into one body all his people from every heritage and generation. Give thanks that the gospel has reached us. Offer praise with purified hearts. Be instructed in his Word. Be refreshed and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Come and worship, that we may follow in the ways of faith and bring glory of God.

Loosely ad. from © 2011 Constance Cherry in W&S, LE.

Special Music George Atkins wrote, *Brethren we have met to worship, and adore the Lord our God; will you pray with all your power, while we try to preach the Word? All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down... Let us love our God supremely, let us love each other, too; let us love and pray for sinners, till our God makes all things new.* These are just a few of the lyrics of Brethren We have Met to Worship Listen as Donna, Kathy and Randy play...



Brethren, We Have Met to Worship

Music by William Moore, 1825

Music Now let's move deeper into worship by singing just the second verse of

Open My Eyes, That I May See

Words and Music: Clara H. Scott, 1895

2. Open my ears, that I may hear
 voices of truth thou sendest clear;
 and while the wavenotes fall on my ear,
 everything false will disappear.
 Silently now I wait for thee,
 ready, my God, thy will to see.
 Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Theme

In the last weeks, Peter's point as most of God's people lived in a temporary situation with no status, freedom, or justice -- was to act in a way that did not draw attention or ire to themselves by those who had power -- a power that required no social responsibility or accountability to acting properly or fairly. Hopefully, this would make things go not as bad for them in the short term, and their strong and peaceable behavior may even be positively noticed and begin to affect change that would ripple through society and society would change.

The modern-day metaphor was to "stay under the radar". If driving, and you don't want to draw attention to and be stopped and penalized by those in authority, you keep near what the posted speed limit is, right? And hopefully, they'll leave you alone. If we were to push the metaphor into today's words and meaning, I think we'd have to say this way.

We don't keep our cars at 25 mph in a residential area *just* because a sign says "25 MPH" and we might get in trouble if we don't do that. We do it because we want to drive safely for ourselves and for others in places where, to use my own subdivision as an example – cars, dog-walkers, walkers, joggers, strollers, golf carts, atvs, bikes, mini-bikes, scooters, children, pets, basketballs and all sorts of other things, sometimes moving in dark clothes at night, suddenly dart out in front of you. If you are not staying slow, something bad could happen. The motivation goes deeper than avoiding the consequence of a ticket" it is about doing what is best for everyone who might cross our path, whether they play by the rules or not – and if not, if we are, we still may have a better chance of avoiding collisions, conflicts in life, if we do the right thing.

A friend told me once about an older friend of his whose vision was not that great anymore. My friend asked him how he managed to drive, and the man answered, I center my car on the double line in the middle of the road.

And sometimes it is not those kind of desperate moves, sometimes it is being just plain defiant. Another friend was driving 45 in a 45, in a double yellow lined section of road. Someone came up from behind and ripped around them, paused long enough beside them to blast the horn and give them -- an unfriendly gesture – and then zoomed on ahead. Some people have not figured out that those yellow lines and posted speed limits are for. They think they are meant to irritate and confine, not for their safety and the freedom to continue living with a car that works.

And that is why we will always need law and signs of instruction, because everyone will not learn, much less internalize what is the loving and safe and unselfish way to live. And none of us will always instinctively know what is truly best – not every intersection, for example, is it clear as to who has the right of way if it weren't marked with signage. It helps us communicate with each other. And even if we know, that doesn't mean all the others do (or we won't make mistakes). We all need signs that will guide us on our way. We are always in the process of learning what principles are rightly applied in given circumstances, and as a matter of safely communicating with others what is best for all of us to avoid disasters and to live the fullest life possible.

Peter will be telling us that our motivation for life in Christ is not begrudgingly following rules because there is a sign in the Bible that says "you must do this" because "God said so." Even though we may need those signs, our motivation goes deeper than the avoidance of repercussions for not following them, but

internalizing what the purpose of those signs are there for. It is understanding that what God says is true, and it is right, and it is fair and is loving, and it is gracious for all people; and it is by far the best way to live life. Therefore, we don't do it grudgingly, we are eager to learn his principles and crave to follow Christ's guidance with enthusiasm, because we know in our hearts that is what is best. When we experience that we experience divine freedom, we feel the joy of a child who has God's Word engraved on their heart, and we are free to do as we please, because what we please is genuine from within and it is good and it is right because our hearts are right, and becoming more right as we grow to spiritual maturity. And that can be challenging. The inner challenges to this understanding and growth can be difficult enough, but can be even more difficult when you don't have support. Remember that Peter is writing to people who are attempting to grow in Christ despite outside resistance, naysaying and worse, every endeavor of these new Christians – kind of like plant trying to grow in a hostile environment.

Intro to and Bible Reading 1

Since this series has already presented and dealt with most of the primary ideas in this section, we'll just lift the relevant highlights as a way of review. Peter again encourages us to imitate the example of Jesus as the way to live well, and to be ready for resistance because of how different this new life of grace and love is from the cultures and religions that surrounded them. He writes,



Since Christ suffered physical pain in his body [for our sins], then prepare yourselves with the same attitude. [Anyone who suffers in their body for Christ's sake has put sin's power to death and is] done with sin, and is no longer in its grip – so that you may live the rest of your life on earth controlled not by earthly desires but by the will of God. For you have already wasted enough time in the past doing the evil things that godless people in the society around you enjoy... giving time and allegiance to things that are not godly. When you don't play the same games they do, when you no longer plunge into the flood of wild and destructive things they do – that's why they heap abuse on you. But someday they will have to give an account to the One who judges the living and the dead... The end of all things is near, therefore be earnest and disciplined in your prayers...

Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through... for these trials make you partners with Christ in suffering so that you may be that much more joyful when his glory is revealed. ...none of you should ever suffer [because you earned it by doing] evil things. But it is no disgrace to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being called by his name! ... So even if you should suffer now for doing God's will, continue doing what is right, and trust your lives to the God who created you, for he will never fail you.

Selections from 1 Peter 4:1-7, 12-19 (NIV, NLT, VOICE)

Music As Jesus did, he calls us to do, to consider it a privilege of representing the heavenly Father well, whether it brings a positive or negative response, and to lean on God's strong arms to sustain us through every trial that may come. Let's sing



Leaning on the Everlasting Arms

Words: Elisha A. Hoffman, 1887 Music: Anthony J. Showalter, 1887

1. What a fellowship, what a joy divine,
 leaning on the everlasting arms;
 what a blessedness, what a peace is mine,
 leaning on the everlasting arms.

Refrain

Leaning, (leaning on Jesus) leaning, (leaning on Jesus)
 safe and secure from all alarms;
 leaning, (leaning on Jesus) leaning, (leaning on Jesus)
 leaning on the everlasting arms.

2. O how sweet to walk in this pilgrim way,
 leaning on the everlasting arms;
 O how bright the path grows from day to day,
 leaning on the everlasting arms.

Refrain

3. What have I to dread, what have I to fear,
 leaning on the everlasting arms?

I have blessed peace with my Lord so near,
 leaning on the everlasting arms.

Refrain

Music And in the next reading, we will be encouraged to lean on him by casting every anxiety on him. Let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing

Cares Chorus (2x)

Words & Music: Kelly Willard

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I cast all my cares upon you --- ,
 I lay all of my burdens down at your feet,
 and any time I don't know what to do,
 I will cast all my cares upon you.

Repeat

Prayers Almighty Father, we praise you for your willingness to guide us each day -- not only as individuals, but as your gathered body of believers. We thank you for sending Jesus to teach us and model for us the way of love. You come to us – sustaining us by your redemption, making us your children, offering to pour out your strength and courage upon us, that together we may be good stewards of the resources, gifts, and graces you provide. May we always be prepared to rush to make you welcome, be it in your coming or in your presence in the lives of others you have called us to serve. May we do so generously and faithfully in your name. We give all of ourselves to you for your use as you see fit, so that we will always be ready, going about your business and leaving the light on for your arrival--in your ultimate coming, or in coming to our hearts again today. Peter and James both called us to humbly cast all our cares on you.

Petitions Therefore, we offer our prayers today for * For family and friends of Alex Bedenis whose celebration of life was held yesterday, 38 years old, leaving 3 daughters under the age of 9. We pray for that family, and the friends too. Cheri Holt requests prayers for the family of the Butterfields, who lost both daughter Karen and sister Gail in one week. We pray for the family and friends of the Butterfields as well. * Pat Schleh requests prayers for Noah Campbell who is struggling, as many teenagers do. We continue to pray for * the family and friends of Don and Sue Coleman's cousin Glenn Sasse who died in a motorcycle-deer

collision , * For those traveling/camping or away for other reasons, we pray your special touch on all of them, * Pat Schleh's two friends who are about to begin chemo. * and for her daughter-in-law Joan who damaged her knee in a fall. * Laura Walker broke her leg, * and there are others on our minds that may not have been named out loud, but they are on our hearts, and we lift them to you, knowing that you will answer in your time and in your way, and we will become strong through whatever it is we face because you are with us, comforting us strengthening us, guiding us.

You are the Creator and re-creator of all that is – so call us again and reveal to us again just how to love and serve you in body, mind, and spirit; loving your creation with each life we touch as we live how you taught us to pray: **Lord's Prayer**

Intro to and Bible Reading 2

Peter now finishes his short letter by giving some final instructions to what some versions call elders, but this was prior to it becoming an official position in the church. It refers to the mature Christians (and those who were striving to become so) and how they fulfilled their responsibilities as God's people. For time and focus, we'll just be reading the key verses.

Most important of all, love each other deeply, as if your life depended upon it, because love makes you willing to forgive many sins. Open your homes to each other and share your food cheerfully, without complaining. God has shown you his grace in many different ways. So be good servants and faithfully use whatever gift he has given you in a way that will best serve others.

... [Oversee your responsibilities in] God's flock with all the diligence of a shepherd. Not because you have to, but because you are willing and want to please God. Not calculating what you can get out of it but acting spontaneously. Not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve. Not ruling over those you are responsible for, bossily telling others what to do, but tenderly showing them the way by being good examples to them. Then when Christ, the Chief Ruling Shepherd of all comes, he'll see that you've done it right and commend you lavishly with a crown of glory. But all of you, leaders and followers alike, put on a humble attitude in dealing with each other. Do this because Scripture says in Proverbs 3:34: "God opposes those who are

proud. But he gives grace to those who are humble.” So be content with who you are. Humble yourselves under God’s mighty hand. Then he will lift you up at the right time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be alert, control yourselves, and be careful! Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in your faith, because you know that you are not alone in your suffering. The family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. God always gives you all the grace you need. So you will only have to suffer for a little while. Then God himself will build you up again. He will restore you and make you strong and steady. He has great plans for us in Christ. He has chosen you to share in his eternal glory because you belong to Christ. All power is his for ever and ever. Amen. May God give peace to all who walk in Christ’s ways.

Key verses from 1 Peter 4:8-11, 5:1-14 (NIV, NIRV, ERV, MSG)

Music God gives grace to those who humbly cast their cares on him and place themselves under his mighty guiding and protecting hand. This next song is sung as a round. If you are using the Powerpoint, the white font is the first line (sung by Pastor Chuck, the light gold (sung by me). It is the echo which begins at the asterisk of the line before, while that word is held by the white font singers through the echo.. If there is not asterisk, the phrases are sung right on the heels of each other, and the dark gold is sung altogether in unison. If you read music, and you are physically in the room, it might be easier to use the thin Faith We Sing books in the pew. Choose your line, color, or song leader and if comfortable, let’s stand before the responsive series prayer and song -- and sermon -- and sing. Humble Thyself

Humble Thyself in the Name of the Lord

Words and Music: Bob Hudson

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Humble thyself in the sight of the * Lord ----.

* Humble thyself in the sight of the * Lord ----.

* Humble thyself in the sight of the * Lord ----.

* Humble thyself in the sight of the Lord *.

and he (and he) shall lift (shall lift) you up

higher and higher and he (and he)

shall lift (shall lift) you up

(Repeat)

Series Responsive Prayer (P - Pastor C- Congregation)
with They'll Know...By Our Love

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

C: 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 Four Habits

Maturity and Motivation. Theologian Friedrich Nietzsche describes three stages of the spiritual quest, which holds generally true no matter what is our belief system, or lack of belief system. We begin as **camels**. In the beginning, we need this. Traditions, customs, beliefs, ways of acting and reacting to life are loaded on to us by parents, teachers, friends, fictional and real-life heroes, cultural norms; whatever it is around us that influences and impacts us. Everyone is telling us what to do and be, and if you are three years old, that is a good thing. Right?

If it wasn't so scary, it'd be humorous how many couples told me in pre-marital counseling that if or when they have children, when it comes to passing on the faith (or their value system), they offered the noble idea that they wanted their children to decide for themselves, as if we are born into some sort of constantly neutral world that attempts to give free and equal choices to *everything* in life. As if not exposing someone to something is not an influencing choice as well. I always wondered if they were going to do the same for the food, and taking them to the doctor and dentist, or school – “You are 5, do you want to go to school or not?” “Brush your teeth, or not – it doesn't matter.” You are an adult, you can choose for yourself (when you are 3 years old). Or whether they are going to vaccinated or not – or the recreations and musics and entertainments they will be exposed to.

Every once in a while, I enjoy (with much guilt) a donut or two from the local donut shop. (I'll be gracious with myself leaving it at 1 or 2.) When I am in that shop, and it isn't too late at night, I am offered a wonderment of choices to which I can participate or refuse. But if no one had ever invited me to a donut shop, if there was no sign on the road saying “Donuts”, I'd assume it was just a gas station and not expect to see such treats. If there were no ads on the telly, if at most all I heard

of was a rumor of some good treat out there somewhere in the world -- I would probably never experience the joy of a donut because I had been denied the option of knowing it was an option, and where to get it. Our world is not a neutral field waiting for us to discover and choose everything that is possible. I am pretty sure that those future parents were not planning on giving a fair expose to the faith when they said they were going to let them choose whatever they choose...

I know some kids that we were picking up to bring to church each week and they were really enjoying it until one day they were confronted with a parent who had just walked back from the pizza joint up the street, and so she walked up and had this box of fresh, hot pizza just as we were pulling up and the kids were getting into our van, and she said, "Well, do you want pizza or are you going to go to church." I was tempted to stay for the pizza, and I was the pastor! 😊 Naturally they stayed. And we never saw them again.

If anyone is going to transmit values to the next generation, I would hope it would be the parents who know them the best and love them the most and will crave what is best for them to embrace. Their influence will be the most powerful regardless of what they do or do not do – whatever they say or do not say. All of it is influence. A "lack of influence" is an influence.

Back to the next sentence of our theologian. We carry these influences with us like a **camel** carries its burden.

Some of this weight may be excellent luggage, some might be better labeled as bad baggage. But it has been thrust upon us from the outside, and this load, he says, is called a **dragon**. The dragon's problem is not whether what we carry is good and true or bad and false; the problem is that we are carrying it because it comes from the outside. Every scale of the dragon has is a push from someone else on us. And we realize we are not living our own life, but we are living the life of influencers (oh that is a funny word today, isn't it?) who tell us what we are supposed to think, say, do, and become. And when we realize that it is time to live our own life and not someone else's, our theologian says, we change from a camel to a **lion**. The role of the lion is to slay the dragon that is named "You should...!" that comes from the outside.

To move to the other end of the pendulum swing, when I was a young pastor and talking to some people who were my current age, they said, "I will never go to church because I was made to go as a kid." And I wonder what was in their experience with their parents that drug them, or the experience with church people

when they were there that made it so horrific that they would never go back. I bet their parents made them eat, and by the looks of most of them, they still ate. I'm sure most of them went to the dentist, and back then especially, very few people liked going to the dentist, and yet they were probably still doing that. At times as a child I was forced to go to a restaurant when it was the last thing I wanted to do. I still tend to go to restaurants now and then. What made these people decide church was the one thing that had to throw off and shed – like I should be shedding the donut shop?

I am amused, sometimes irritated, by people who say religion is something we should outgrow and throw off because it tries to tell everyone how to live and think and believe – while on their podcasts, day in and day out they are telling us how to live and what to think and what we should believe about every given topic and personality in the world. And sometimes the thoughts the spew aren't even their own often – they are the views of whoever is paying them to do that podcast, sometimes not even based in fact and truth.

I know one person who stopped coming to church because her therapist told her she needed to “grow up” and become her own person. Yes it is true that you need to shed your parents' faith and internalize it to become your own, but I couldn't help but wonder why that one individual doctor (if it was a doctor) was so able to tell her what to do while centuries of the best spiritual wisdom that humanity has to offer was “childish” and had to be thrown out.

Children will eventually decide to live for themselves no matter what their influences are (good or bad by our opinions). They will accept and internalize what they believe to be true and reject and refuse what they believe is not. As we persist in this quest to truly become ourselves, our theologian says, we are transformed from the lion to a **child** (and experience the joy and freedom children are meant to experience) because we have accepted and internalized who we are and what we can become.

I think this Peter is trying to get at in the end of his letter. Yes, there certainly are some very definite Christian values informing us of what we should believe, say, do and can become. But that living will be difficult and fall flat if it is *only* for the meeting of external motivations or pressures, of fitting some perceived “Christian mold”. If you can overlook the irony of this sentence: *We must* live out our faith in action, but those actions must come – not from an outward “must”, but from an inwardly transformed heart -- one that is motivated, not by the external pressures

of ought, / or greed, or popularity, or the desire for power or control, or any other kinds of things – but they must come from the inner core of our being, which I believe was designed primarily to please God and love each other.

Our habitual actions and behaviors will reveal our internalized motivations and values. In Marcel Proust's classic *Remembrance of Things Past*, one of the characters is Charles Swann. He visits the Duke and Duchess of Guermantes, but his friends are preparing to leave for an evening of entertainment. The duchess observes that Swann looks very, very ill. But she diverts the topic by inviting him on their next trip to Venice. Swann replies, "But, my dear lady, by then I shall have been dead for several months."

Her husband impatiently calls from the carriage for her to hurry. Caught between the demands of her social life and the confession of a dying man, the duchess pretends to not take Swan seriously. "Oh, you must be joking," she says as she heads toward the carriage.

Then the duke sees that his wife has committed a grave error: her black shoes do not match her red dress! [I'm glad I'm male. My black shoes go with everything!] He orders her back to the house and to go upstairs and put on some red shoes...

There are not enough minutes in the day to comfort a dying man, but the carriage can wait while the lady changes her shoes. Think about that.

Author Diane Cole wrote that there are a growing number of people for whom only their own lives matter... other people's suffering lies beyond their reach, beyond their care... Out of fear, ignorance, or sheer indifference... they seek to escape the demands made by friendship or love, as if (to combine illustrations) as if they were dragon scales that needed to be yanked off rather than internalized as a part of who they are. Their hearts remain closed.

Peter's plea for us as mature Christians, is that we can move past the camel, past the lion and the dragon, and begin to want / to crave / to be *inspired* (literally inspired) to do, and then in fact, diligently move to do -- what are the most important things in life – to live freely as a child – a child of God.

And when the motivation is right, Peter says God will commend you lavishly. Motivation leads to **Reward of Motions (Habits)** motion. Peter offers four practical motions, four habits that the maturing Christian practices which God reinforces by growing us into the freedom of that maturity and those practices.

The first to motion is to live like a team. A proud man liked to lay down the law for others. He said that he would make a pilgrimage to the holy land, climb mount Sinai, and read the Ten Commandments aloud. Mark Twain suggested that it'd be better if he stayed home in Boston and *kept them*. Good teams humbly treat each other equally importantly despite the variation of roles and gifts.

(1) Team – Humble - :Lifted

Teams that are internally competitive, jealous, comparing each other's gifts, abilities, energies and resources, or attention received, knocking each other or themselves down – in the long run, those teams lose often and eventually fall apart. This is not humbleness, it is humiliation; either toward others or toward ourselves.

We have to recognize that once the game is over, the king and the pawn go back into the same box. Life is not lived successfully by going it all alone, allegedly above others. We are not dependent, or co-dependent, but we are mutually interdependent with each other. We build each other up. When your strengths overcome my weaknesses and my strengths overcome your weaknesses, and when we join our strengths with God's strength; the promise is that, in his time, he will lift us up with his mighty hand. Team, humble, lifted up.

Live like a humble team that is lifted, and then we live lean. Meaning, when we recognize what God's mighty hand has done and continues to do, then it makes perfect sense to cast our cares on him, lean on him. Our problem is that we know fishing too well. And when we cast our cares, we do it like we fish. We cast, but we leave the line attached to the worry, and then we reel it right back in, and we keep on worrying. I used to say, once you cast, cut the string, let it go -- leave it there at God's throne. But that is not easy, not realistic, sometimes. I don't think that is necessarily a lack of faith, it is the reality of persistently pressing problems. So if you have reeled back in your problem, don't fret about that, just do what fishermen do and cast it again. Just keep on casting your cares back to God over and over again. Jesus and the disciples recognized the legitimacy of this by saying that we ought to pray without ceasing and to be persistent in prayer - until we catch the answer, or are clearly told to stop asking for that particular instance because that answer isn't going to come the way you want it. And then be thankful, because the promise is, as we cast our cares on him, we know that he cares for us. Believe in that care, trust in his love. We team humbly and we are lifted, we lean and know we are cared for, and then we dream.

(2) Lean - Cast – Cared For

(3) Dream – Resist – Directing Grace

That doesn't mean wishful thinking or fantasizing, and it will all come true because we wished it. In this context, it means to be alert to our spiritual life, our relationship with God; to be aware of his presence with us as we go through our days. Peter calls it alertness combined with self-control.

Self-control has to do with the discipline of ignoring momentary passions that tempt us from keeping our hearts and minds focused on God and the long-term benefits of staying true.

Being alert is a military term that describes a good soldier on guard duty in a time of war. When the lookout sees the enemy, it is not his job to take care of the enemy, it is his job to call and report that the enemy is there, and then wait for instructions. So when temptation comes your way, report to God, wait for instructions, be prepared to do what he tells you to do. When temptation comes knocking, invite the Lord to answer the door. Our good Shepherd is always willing to lay down his life to protect us. Resist evil, by trusting that God, the great Protector, will fight the battle for us as we stay alert and rely on his power and do what he tells us to do, and we can fight off any temptation.

Temptation is here described as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Now I've only seen lions in zoos, but I've had cats. And they are kind of in the same species. And I've seen films – some cartoony ones, but some real ones too – of lions. And I've noticed that when my cats, or lions, are on the attack, they don't roar. They are stealth fighters. They crouch low and sneak slowly one careful step at a time, until all of a sudden, they pounce right on top of them. A roaring lion is one that is too old, or too slow, or too weak to pounce or run down anything. So they will roar loudly and viciously hoping that some unalert, uncontrolled animal will panic and run toward the roar or toward partner lions lying in wait on the other side.

What Peter is saying is that evil is weak but it can make a lot of noise, tempting and enticing, hoping to catch the Christian off guard and out of discipline, separating us from the team and devouring us in our panicked wanderings. But God will always give us the grace we need, as long as we pay attention to his Spirit in our spirit, and are prepared to do what he asks.

We team humbly and are lifted, we lean and know we are cared for, we dream alertly on God's presence with us and we receive his grace and direction to do what we need to do.

And even if, once in a while, we temporarily fail the team, or leaning, or dreaming, if we stay faithfully at it, we may still yet be able to beam, or beam again (if need be).

This is a powerful concept for Peter, for as you know, he was the one who so dramatically failed in a critical moment of life but was just as dramatically restored by Jesus after the resurrection. I use the word “beam” in both senses of the word. Beam as in a strong support. It is what Peter became in church. We don’t call them beams, we call them pillars now. “Pillar of the church”. Beams -- strong and steady and built up (again). But also beaming in the sense revealing God’s light. We are chosen to share in his glory because we belong to Christ. In both senses of the word “beam”, strength and light, it comes from his promise of *his* eternal power. All power is his. Which leads us to the question of the day:

(4) Beam – strength, light – power

When we transform from camel to lion destroying the dragon, leaving you free to become the child and to choose what kind of a life and values we are going to internalize -- what kind of life is that going to be? What kind of life will we lead? At one point, I considered the answer to this question a 5th habit, but now I consider it a choice that shapes the details of the first 4 habits)

What kind of life will you choose to lead?

And when I say “lead”, I use it also in the sense of two definitions. What way are you going to go with all of this – which way does your life lead? What direction are you going to go? What are you going to choose to internalize and make - you? But I also mean “lead”, as in, by your example, what kind of influence will you leave? For as I said, everyone is putting examples and influences on everyone, whether we want to or don’t, by what we do and what we don’t. So what are you going to be influencing others with? How are you going to lead? As mature people, people are now looking at us and thinking, *How does he live? How does she live?* What kind of quality luggage or bad baggage are we throwing on others -- by our example? And while it is never too late, the sooner we make a choice of what we are going to do (and live it) the better.

A teacher was walking with a young student through the forest. At one place he stopped and pointed out some plants nearby. The first was just beginning to peak above the ground. He told the student, “Pull it up!” The student reached down and pulled it up without any trouble at all because it was just starting, it barely had any roots or anything.

A continued on and a few minutes deeper into the forest the teacher pointed out a second plant had rooted itself pretty well into the earth. “Pull it up!” It was a little more difficult this time, he had to work at it a little bit, but he got it up.

They continued on and eventually came upon a third plant. This one was a small bush. “Pull it up!” The student had to kick at the dirt and get it scraped away, and had to chew at it (not with his mouth 😊) but chew away at the roots by kicking at them with his feet. He put both arms around that bush and yank at it. It scratched his arms; but he pulled and rocked it with all his strength; and finally, he was able to wrestle it up and out of the ground.

And finally, a bit deeper in the forest, the teacher pointed at a full-size tree, “Pull it up.” The student couldn’t even get his arms around the trunk and though he shook it with all his might, the mighty tree’s leaves barely moved.

Then the teacher said, (to put it in our context) This is what happens when we internalize things, they will work themselves in and out and they will become our habits and they will grow; and they will be played out in the attitudes, words, and actions of our life. And the longer we have them, the stronger they will become.

If we begin a bad habit, if we get after it right away, we can remove it from our life easily. But it gets harder and harder if we allow it to get more and more into us. The opposite is also true -- if we begin a good habit, we can easily lose it if we don’t stay self-controlled and alert. But the longer we maintain it and nurture it, the more solidly it will grow and the more easily we will hang on to it, and the stronger it will become. And just to add to that metaphor that the teacher gave – full grown trees in the woods rarely have isolated root systems, they don’t just go down, in fact they don’t go down all that deep, they mostly go this way (sideways) and all those trees intertwine all their different root systems together that makes them almost an impenetrable and indestructible team of trees.



So, I ask again -- What values, principles, beliefs, motivations and motions will you adopt and internalize as your own? What life will you lead?

Prayer Lord, we want to be more than words and theories and principles and externals. We do want to live from the heart and come to believe that in you we

can become the most genuine people we can be and that we will be stronger with you and your people than on our own. For we who have lost our way, who have allowed things to grow in our life that shouldn't -- help us to rediscover the motivation and motion to become mature children of you; as we humbly team to be lifted, and we lean to find we are cared for, as we dream and are gracefully directed, and as we beam in strength and influence of others - by you and for you, in Jesus name, Amen.

Music In the words of James, as we draw near to God, he will draw near to us, and as Peter remembered by his time on the seas, (when he walked on the water) we seem to be drowning in life's circumstances and temptations and sins and opposition, focusing on Jesus will lift us up with his salvation. Let's sing.

Love Lifted Me

Words: James Rowe, 1912 Music: Howard E Smith, 1912

1 I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore,
Very deeply stained within, sinking to rise no more;
But the Master of the sea heard my despairing cry,
From the waters lifted me— Now safe am I.

Refrain:

Love lifted [even] me, love lifted [even] me,
When nothing else could help, love lifted me;
(Repeat)

2 All my heart to Him I give, ever to Him I'll cling,
In His blessed presence live, ever His praises sing.
Love so mighty and so true merits my soul's best songs;
Faithful, loving service, too, to Him belongs.

Refrain

3 Souls in danger, look above, Jesus completely saves;
He will lift you by His love out of the angry waves.
He's the Master of the sea, billows his will obey;
He your Savior wants to be— be saved today.

Refrain

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)