

# *Straight from the "Hart"*

August 13, 2023

**Prepare -- To Be Faithful**



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 through this script.

## **Musical Statement of Faith**

### **Our God Saves**

Words: Paul Baloche, Brenton Brown Music: Arr. by Scott Harris  
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#### Chorus

In the name of the Father, in the name of the Son,  
in the name of the Spirit, Lord, we come.  
We've gathered together to lift up your name,  
to call on our Savior, to fall on your grace.

#### Repeat

#### Refrain

Hear the joyful sound of our offering  
as your saints bow down, as your people sing.  
We will rise with you, lifted on your wings, and the world will see that:  
our God saves, our God saves. There is hope in your name.

#### Chorus, Refrain

Mourning turns to songs of praise. Our God saves, our God saves----!

Hear the joyful sound of our offering  
as your saints bow down, as your people sing.  
We will rise with you, lifted on your wings, and the world will see that:  
yes the world will see that:  
Our God saves. Our God saves. There is hope in your name.

Mourning turns to songs of praise.

Our God saves! (4x)

**Opening Prayer** O God, we recognize that we have been blessed with great abundance. In offering these gifts, may we be strengthened to proclaim your faithfulness and salvation. Lord, you are with us and our spirits. To you, our hearts are open, our deepest desires and secrets are known. Cleanse us from errant thoughts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and

be worthy to revere your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Updated language and adapted from "A Service of Word and Table IV" [WT-IV]

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**Call to Worship** We've come to whisper words from our soul, seeking strength for the feelings and actions we can't control, looking to be made whole. Here and now, Jesus calls us to come away with him to a quiet place, apart from the world with its frantic pace. To pray, reflect, and enter God's loving embrace of all who come in hope of grace.

ad. from "Come Away With Me" by Mary Nelson Keithahn

**Music** Join the praise band in worship of the One who invites us, as in song we recount Christ's mighty acts when he lived among us. Let's sing "Jesus".

### Jesus

Words and Music: Chris Tomlin, Ed Cash

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There is a truth older than the ages. There is a promise of things yet to come.

There is one born for our salvation, Jesus.

There is a Light that overwhelms the darkness.

There is a kingdom that forever reigns.

There is freedom from the chains that bind us.

Jesus, Jesus.

### Chorus

Who walks on the waters, who speaks to the sea.

Who stands in the fire beside me.

He roars like a Lion. He bled as the Lamb

He carries my healing in His hands, Jesus.

There is a name I call in times of trouble.

There is a song that comforts in the night.

There is a voice that calms the storm that rages.

He is Jesus, Jesus.

### Chorus

Messiah, My Savior, there is power in Your name.

You're my rock and my Redeemer, there is power in Your name, in Your name.

You walk on the waters, You speak to the sea,

You stand in the fire beside me.

You roar like a lion, You bled as the Lamb,

You carry my healing in Your hands.  
 God, You walk on the waters, You speak to the sea,  
 You stand in the fire beside me.  
 You roar like a lion, You bled as the Lamb,  
 You carry my healing in Your hands.  
 Jesus, there is no one like You. Jesus, there is no one like You.

### Intro to and Bible Reading 1

It seems to be a pattern in the Bible – and in life – that often on the heels of a high point, there is either an obstacle tempting to knock us back down, or to face a difficult challenge of clarifying how we are going to build on that victory. An example of the first is when Jesus went up into the mountain with his inner circle and they saw him in all his glory, and a voice from heaven telling them to listen to Jesus. They came back from the mountain and found the other disciples arguing with religious leaders over their failure to accomplish a particularly difficult healing, possibly sucking all the air out of that good experience. And in today's story, we have the challenging example of how to build on a victory. Jesus is baptized by John in the Jordan River, signifying the beginning of his public ministry. We see the Spirit descend on him like a dove and a voice from heaven proclaiming his pleasure in what Jesus is about to do. But then, all



At once, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for forty days and nights, where he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them, he was hungry.

The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread. Jesus answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered him, "It is also written: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours.”

Jesus answered, “Away from me Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”

When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time. He was with the wild animals, and angels came and attended him.

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Mark 1:9-15, Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-4,9-12,5-8,13 (NIV)

**Comment** Let’s move back a bit into that story. As Jesus comes out of the baptismal water, the Spirit descends and a voice declares him his Son (with a capital S, so it is more than just a child of God like we are. He is more special than that. Then the Spirit whisks him off to the wilderness to fast in isolation. So today, I draw your attention to the Christ Candle in the wilderness and we join him there.

In the NIV, Mark and Luke say the Spirit led him to the wilderness, where he was tempted for 40 days, while Matthew sounds a bit more like the Spirit led him there *to be* tempted. I am not going to worry about the nuances of these differences, whether the Spirit’s *intent* was to have him tempted; or whether he was tempted for 40 days or tempted after 40 days that he was tempted. The real question is why did this happen? I believe it is because with God’s baptismal declaration like that lover his Son, a person has to figure out what he is going to do about it – what kind of Savior is he going to be? After all, we believe Jesus was not only fully God, he was also fully human, so he is like us in every way. And so with the channeling of focus, being like us, there would naturally come with it the temptation to be a different kind of Christ than the one God wanted and the people truly needed. So let’s put ourselves in the sandals of Jesus, contemplating the details of what his ministry and mission would be –

**Music** and it wasn’t so much he needed to talk to God, as he needed to hear God to speak to him clearly -- away from all the distractions of what would surely



become a frantic paced life. Jesus didn't just do this for 40 days and then was done, we know it was his custom to go away, alone, to pray.

Throughout his ministry, he made God living in him the very essence (the breathe of his being) , and the bread (the sustenance, the source) of his life. Therefore, let's chase his example by singing together "Word of God Speak", (we need him to speak to us) and then we will prepare our hearts for prayer by singing "Breathe" immediately after.



### **Word of God Speak**

Words: Peter Kipley, Bart Mallard Music: arr. by David Shipps  
© 2002 Simpleville Music

I'm finding myself at a loss for words, and the funny thing is, it's okay.  
The last thing I need is to be heard, but to hear – what you would say.

#### Refrain

Word of God, speak; would you pour down like rain,  
washing my eyes to see your majesty?  
To be still and know that you're in this place;  
please let me stay and rest in your holiness.

Word of God speak.

I'm finding myself in the midst of you, beyond the music, beyond the noise.  
All that I need is to be with you, and in the quiet, hear your voice.

#### Refrain 2 x

I'm finding myself at a loss for words, and the funny thing is, it's okay.

### **Breathe**

Words & Music: Marie Barnett arr. by Jeff Anderson © 1995 Mercy/Vineyard

This is the air I breathe, This is the air I breathe; Your holy presence living in me.  
This is my daily bread, This is my daily bread; Your very Word spoken to me.

And I --- I'm desperate for you. And I --- I'm lost without you.

(Repeat all)

And I --- I'm desperate for you. And I --- I'm lost without you.

I'm lost without you. I'm lost without you.

**Prayers** Lord, as we live in the wilderness with you, we also try to put away all the distractions of our lives – what we experienced last week, what we are looking forward to next week. We set all that aside and just try to sense your presence and your holiness in our lives, and realize how much we need you. In your love, you have poured out so many amazing blessings on us. You forgive our sins, you cover each of them with your love, freeing us from their captivity and restoring our destiny. We aren't your child in the sense that Jesus was your Son, but because of him, through faith and belief in him, we are your children. Therefore fill us, your people, with the spirit of truth, of unity, and with godly love, that we may serve you and others in holiness. For like Jesus, we do so want you to be proud and pleased with us. Each day we start fresh, returning to you our love as best we can, as you renew our hearts and revive our spirits. Now pour out even more love on us. Reveal even more of your kindness, comfort all who are in trouble, having sorrow, are in need, or sickness, or any other adversity.

**Petitions** Therefore, we pray. \* Jan Martin again asks prayers for her brother Reese and his son Calvin, that they can go to court and win the battle and can remain at home and not have to go into a special place. That trial is set for August 21<sup>st</sup> at this point. We continue to pray for \* Cheri Holt's cousin Kevin Cohee who has cancer, \* a close friend of Margaret Melville, Jan Caloia, seeking a treatment plan for cancer \* for Noah Campbell \* for Ben Williams \* and there are other things going on among us, people are traveling and camping and involved in all sorts of things – we pray a special touch on them as well, that it might be a time of refreshment and renewal for them. And there are others beyond us that we have not named but they are close to our hearts and on our minds.

Lord, let us hear in our hearts your promise of peace -- for we long to hear and feel your assurances. Shine on us with your power and presence and peace. Hover over us with your glorious majesty, allowing your faithfulness to bloom into our life as your goodness shines down on us like the sun, as your love pours down on us blessing after blessing, preparing a path for your coming even as we live as you taught us to pray, **Lord's Prayer**

## **Theme**

The main point of Jesus in the wilderness (gesture to Christ candle in display) was for him to reject choices and power in ways that people still crave today (in the wrong ways) -- and to hone his desire to be faithful to his mission for which he

was sent. Faithful to the God who sent him, and faithful to the people to whom God sent him.

So today we have a story that comes from one of the two great epic poems of India. The theology and events of the story don't necessarily line up with our own, don't be thrown by that – I'll tell you which section that brings this story to our attention today when we get to that point. I've also dropped most of the names, because I can't even begin to pronounce most of them, and I didn't want to spend a lot of time researching pronunciations on the internet which may or may not be accurate. From the source I grabbed the story, it is called Yudisthira (You-dis-tra) at Heaven's Gate, and our editor describes the story as "loyalty is literally the test to gain entrance to heaven." So already we are off on theology, for while a loyal commitment is important, our entrance is granted by grace.

Good King Yudisthira had ruled over the people for many years, and had led them in a successful, but very long war against giant forces of evil. Finally, he felt that he had enough years on earth, and it was time to go on to the kingdom of the Immortals. When all his plans were made, he set out for a particular high mountain and then travel from there to the celestial city. His beautiful wife went with him, and also his four brothers. Very soon, they were joined by a dog which followed quietly behind him. But the journey to the mountain was a long and sorrowful. Yudisthira's four brothers died one by one along the way, and after that, his beautiful wife. The king was all alone then except for the dog which continued to follow him faithfully up the steep long road to the celestial city. At last, the two, weak and exhausted, stop before the gates of heaven. Yudisthira bowed humbly and asked to be admitted.

Sky and earth were filled with a loud noise as the Indra –

[Now I had to research this: Indra is the king of god-like deities and heaven and associated with sky, lightning, thunder, storms, weather, (been active lately, huh?)]

-- Indra arrived to welcome the king to Paradise. But Yudisthira was not quite ready. "Without my brothers and my beloved wife, I do not wish to enter heaven." Indra replied, "Have no fear, they came before you and are already here!"

But Yudisthira had another request. "This dog has come all the way with me. He is devoted to me. Surely for his faithfulness I cannot leave him outside! And besides my heart is full of love for him!"

Indra shook his great head and the earth quaked. “You yourself may have immortality and riches and success and all the joys of heaven. You have won these by making this hard journey. But you cannot bring a dog into heaven. Cast off the dog, Yudisthira, it is no sin!”

Yudisthira demanded, “But where would he go, and who would go with him? He has given up all the pleasures of earth to be my companion. I cannot desert him now.

Indra was irritated at this. “You must be pure to enter Paradise,” he said firmly. “Just to touch a dog will take away all the merits of prayer. Consider what you are doing, Yudisthira. Let the dog go.”

[Okay, let me stop the story for a second, because I can feel the hairs on the back of our necks are bristling. I did some research about the culture and its attitude toward dogs, for this was overpowering the story for a minute with me. I did find a couple of references (on what I consider one of the most unreliable resources on the internet) about dogs being unclean for various reasons. Most references, though, made it clear that the culture of India treasured dogs and viewed them as almost, if not, sacred. So, I still don't have a good answer, but at least I feel a little better. We'll just have to say at this second, for the sake of the movement of the story, dogs were considered a religious violation, even though it doesn't seem to fit with the culture. But let's go on with the story.]

But Yudisthira insisted, “It is very difficult for a person who has always tried to be righteous to do something that he knows is unrighteous even in order to get into heaven. I do not wish immortality if it means casting off one that is devoted to me.”

[I'm thinking about Peter and his visions about unclean animals. That just popped into my head, that was not part of the story either]

Indra urged him once more. “You left on the road behind you your four brothers and your wife. Why can't you also leave the dog?”

He replied, “I abandoned those only because they had died already, and I could no longer help them or bring them back to life. As long as they lived, I did not leave them.”

“You are willing to abandon heaven then for this dog's sake?”

“I have steadily kept this vow –

[and now we get to the section of the story that is important for us and what brings it to our attention today]



“I have steadily kept this vow – that I will never desert one that is frightened and seeks my protection, [or] one that is afflicted and destitute, or one that is too weak to protect himself and desires to live. Now I add a fourth. I have promised never to forsake one that is devoted to me. I will not abandon my friend.” Yudisthira reached down to touch the dog and was about to turn sadly away from heaven when suddenly before his eyes, a wonder happened. The faithful dog was changed into Dharma, the god of righteousness and justice.

Then Indra said, “You are a good man king Yudisthira. You have shown faithfulness to the faithful and compassion for all creatures. You have done this by renouncing the very gods themselves instead of renouncing this humble dog that was your companion. You shall be honored in heaven, O King Yudisthira, for there is no act which is valued more highly and rewarded more richly than compassion for the humble.

So Yudisthira entered the Celestial city with the god of righteousness beside him. He was reunited there with his brothers and his beloved wife to enjoy eternal happiness.

ad. from “Yudisthira at Heaven’s Gate” in The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories, ed. with commentary by William J Bennett.

Put it our context. I am reminded of Moses. At one point, because of the consistent rebellion the people, God said he no longer wanted to go with them to the promised land and told Moses to go on ahead with them (the thought of the Scripture was that God might get so mad he would destroy them if he continued with them). But Moses did not say, “Okay, Lord, you and me that’s all that matters.” No, he didn’t say that. He said, “Lord, if you don’t go, I’m not going either.”

If we are going to be able to intercede like that, if we are going to be able to love even rebellious people like that, if we are going to, regardless of the cause of circumstances, be that kind of faithful to those who need comfort, to those who need help, to those who need compassionate care, and yes, to those who are faithful to us – like Jesus has been faithful to us -- then we are going to need someone to walk with us, who understands us, who will bring us to the gates of heaven.

## **Bible Reading 2**

We are blessed and our grace by God through Jesus to get all the help we need. The author of Hebrew is put it this way:

Because God’s children are human beings — made of flesh and blood — the Son also became flesh and blood; he shared in their humanity. For only as a

human being could he die, so that by his death he could break the power of him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil. Only in this way could he set free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of dying. For surely the Son did not come to help angels, he came to help Abraham's descendants. Therefore, it was necessary for him to be made like us so that he might become our merciful and faithful high priest in service to God. Then he could offer a sacrifice that would make atonement for the sins of the people. Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing when he was tempted, he is able to help us when we are being tested.

So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands and empathizes with our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same temptations we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us in our time when we need it most.

Hebrews 2:14-18, 4:14-16 (NLT, NIV)

**Music** because Jesus did what he did, we are restored, we can live faithfully, honoring the one who has done so much for us. If you're comfortable standing let's do that as we sing "You are My King"

### **You are My King, Amazing Love**

Words: Billy James Foote Music: Arr. Jeff Anderson

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I'm forgiven because You were forsaken, I'm accepted, You were condemned.

I'm alive and well, Your Spirit is within me because You died and rose again.

Amazing love, how can it be that You, my King, would die for me?

Amazing love, I know it's true; and it's my joy to honor You.

(Repeat)

In all I do I honor you.

(Repeat all above)

You are my King! You are my King! You are my King! Jesus, You are my King.

Amazing love, how can it be that You, my King, would die for me?

Amazing love, I know it's true It's my joy to honor You.

(Repeat)

In all I do I honor you. I honor you.

In all I do I honor you. I honor you.

## Bible Reading 3

Enabled to remain faithful, David prays for all of us -- how we can honor God by remaining faithful to his covenant, and what God does for those who do. He wrote:

O Lord, I lift my life to you. I trust in you. Do not let me be disgraced, don't let my enemies gloat over me. No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame. Disgrace awaits those who break faith for no reason, who are treacherous without cause, who try to deceive others. Make me know your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths, point out the road for me to follow. Guide me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God who saves me, my hope is in you all day long. Remember your compassion and grace, O Lord, which you have shown from long ages past. Do not remember the rebellious sins of my youth. Remember me in the light of your unfailing love, remember me according to your grace for the sake of your goodness. The Lord is good and does what is right and fair. This is why he shows the proper path to those who go astray, he teaches sinners the way to live. He leads the humble to do what is right and teaches them to live his way. The Lord leads with unfailing love and faithfulness. All the Lord's paths are grace and truth to those who keep his covenant and instructions.

From Psalm 25:1-10 (NIV, NLT, CJB)

### Sermon Prepare to Be Faithful

Our primary text comes from Mark and Mark spends only two sentences on the wilderness event and moves right on to the jailing of John, after which Jesus begins his active ministry and in the next verses calls his disciples to follow him. We added in the details of Matthew and Luke because it is during this interlude between the baptism of Jesus and the commencing of active ministry that Jesus first stops in the wilderness to prepare himself, and that is where this series calls us to tarry, to wait, to reflect, to prepare ourselves.

When we talk about the wilderness as a metaphor for life, it could be pictured as the opposite of Eden. Eden is that place of flourishing connection where we experience healing and wholeness. In the wilderness, we find ourselves forced into a barren, dry, isolated, harsh, empty, broken place; that lends itself to unsettling desperation, wandering lost without a timetable or a map (no GPSs, you know) – unable to find anything resembling Eden, and of course, it is a place where we are tempted to give up trying to find our way home and settle for something else.

But that is not all the wilderness is. Some adventurers love the wilderness. They crave the experience -- where they must work for water and food and impose limits on their normal patterns of behavior and on their relationships, enabling them to experience solitude, to retreat from the distractions of everyday life, making space and time for their spirit to connect with God's Spirit in concentrated awareness and focus. I believe this is what moved Jesus out into the wilderness. On being publicly declared the beloved Son of God; he removes himself to deeply ponder the implications of how that is to be carried out.

Thanks to the worship team, the wilderness idea has been conveniently placed before us for the series, along with symbols of the tools we will need along the way for that preparation to take place for us. To look intently again at what kind of Christian we are called to be as God's children. I invite you to follow Jesus and enter into the wilderness so that as he is directed and prepared for what kind of Messiah he is going to be, we can be directed and prepare for what kind of Christian we are becoming and continuing to become.

### **Temptations**

And it seems that the first thing we find, even entering the wilderness with intent, is the temptation to do something else -- something other than what we are meant to be. Despite our high-tech world, our high-octane lifestyles, our high-stress jobs / or studies, or other activities; and the high-risk stakes that may challenge us; the temptations we face are still surprisingly similar to these three insidious temptations put to Jesus in the wilderness. I'll just talk about each one very quickly. First,

Turning stones into bread is the temptation to seek God's power to misuse it. Now there is nothing selfish about wanting God to meet our personal needs, but this

**Turn stones to Bread –  
Misuse of God's power**

is not what the temptation is about. It is just cleverly disguised to sound like it is legitimate. The real temptation here is to use power exclusively for personal selfish gratification, to selfishly care for our own needs without consideration for God or others or for what is even best for ourselves. If Jesus had fallen for this, he may have led a life of leisure, and people may have flocked to his charisma and ability to manipulate people and circumstances, but the world would know nothing of saving grace. If we fall for this, Christianity becomes a self-serving institution that seeks to empower itself and manipulate others into service of it, and will have no impact or relevance on moving people to God or impacting his world. The true essence of life is the nourishment *of doing God's will*.

**Prove yourself –  
Self-glorification**

Secondly, throwing yourself down to prove yourself legitimate. This too, has a hint of legitimacy to it, for everyone says they would like proof of God's existence and his love, implying that if they only had proof, they would listen and obey. This one reminds me of the joke about the flood. There was a great flood and a man sat on his roof waiting to be rescued while the waters continued to rise nearer and nearer his roof line. He felt he had great faith and confidence in God's miraculous power; and he saw it as an opportunity to prove it to everyone. A rowboat came near, and they offered to pick him up and take him to safety. He said, "No, I have prayed, and I know God will rescue me." The waters passed the gutters and were about a ¼ way up the roof now. A small motorboat pattered by, and they had plenty of room – they offered to rescue him, but he waved them on. "No, I have prayed, and I know God will rescue me." The waters continued to rise, and they were about ¾ the way up to roof now. A helicopter surveying the damage spotted him and wanted to rescue him, but he waved them off, somehow communicating to them above the noise that "No, I have prayed, and I know God will rescue me." The water eclipsed the roof line and the man found himself standing at the entrance of heaven. He was livid. "I prayed! I trusted you!" he screamed at the gates. "How could you let this happen to me." The ex-fisherman, Peter who knows stuff about water and storms and floods and even walking on water, came to the gate and poked his head out. He listened to the man ranting on and on until he finally ran out of breath in exhaustion, and since his lungs were filled with water, that didn't take too long. Then Peter said, "I checked the records, yes, we heard your prayers, we always hear everything, you know. We sent a rowboat, a motorboat, and a helicopter, but apparently, you were too good for any of them."

This temptation is to use God's gifts and graces – not to serve and glorify God and his mission by loving him and caring for others, but to prove to the world how great we are. The truth is, if God tried to prove himself, for most, it would only prove that most people believe that hoaxes exist or coincidences exist, and they'd still refuse to believe. One person's miracle is another's coincidence. Jesus said, "if you don't believe the sign Jonah, (which is his rising from the dead) you won't believe anything." (See Matthew 12:38-40) More importantly, if faith is rooted in the fantastic, it is not faith. Do not test God by taking stupid, senseless risks expecting him to bail you out in the nick of time. Do not make him prove himself by the miraculous. Miracles are born -- not for proof, not for glory of the one who received

it, but for compassion, and for teaching, and for building up the faith of the faithful, not for showing it off...

And finally, Since Jesus came to be king, to gain the authority of all the kingdoms also sounds like a very

**Get Kingdoms for bowing down –  
Compromised means to reach the end**

appropriate thing. But life is just as much about how we live the journey – and not just the end of it. And arriving even at a worthy end by unholy means may gain us the world but it will cost us our soul, Jesus said in other places. (See Mark 8:35-37) The true essence of life in Christ is worshiping God and God alone. [Pause]

So here are, in the wilderness. Today's text reminds us that we are not alone. We will discover that Christ has gone before us, and is waiting for us, and eager to make the journey with us. Like the angels who tended to him, Christ the Shepherd will tend to us. He understands how difficult it is. He understands because he has been there himself. Never forget that he is with us always.

Don't fall for these or any other temptations to attempt to misuse faith or our status as God's children to get or do something that is contrary to God's will. I've given you tips to resisting temptation before based on other Bible passages that I've touched on in previous days . Today, on the basis of this Bible passage, I lift up only one strategy: I prepare best for temptation and resisting temptation and remaining faithful --- by deciding ahead of time, before the temptation ever comes -- what kind of person I need to become. Knowing that "end hope" helps me make the right choices now, to resist those paths that lead me away from that final goal, sometimes ever so subtly from what God wants me to become. And sometimes the temptation comes quickly, even drastically. Instead, with the goal ever in front of me, I push ahead on those paths that helps me become what God wants me to become. Paul said that in Philippians (See Philippians 3:10-15a) Lean on Christ in the wilderness; lean on God in your life...

Then quickly, from David's prayer that was written as a covenant festival song about how to stay true... We only read the first half earlier, because like much music, it repeats, the second half is pretty much the same as the first, just a bit different in detail and wording, but the essence is the same. These are things that help us make the right decisions about what we can become in God. David says:

We begin by lifting our whole personality, body, and spirit – the whole of our life - into the hands of God in total trust. It is only in him that our hopes are on sure footing – everything else is sinking sand that will be proven false and put us to

shame. Just as the body needs daily food to function properly, so we need to lift our lives to God each day to (1) find insight and strength (2) and to navigate God's path in a treacherous world.

Firmly assured of our close relationship with God, we are conscious that we cannot fully exist or walk in God's way without God's gracious help and mercy. We ask him to teach us his paths – to show us his ways, ways that most of us, though fewer with each passing generation, have known from our youth. (So many of us have grown up in the church – with each passing generation, there are fewer and fewer people that have grown up in the church and understand what God is about. Someone likened the request to this: Make your truth *come alive* in me, that I may *intimately experience* in my life what I learned in Sunday School.

Then we make two requests of God – (3) that he remembers his compassionate, graceful, steadfast covenant love that he established with his people at the dawn of creation. The greatness of God's faithfulness, by comparison, highlights to us depth of our sinfulness – and leads us to ask for forgiveness. David asks forgiveness three times in this covenant song (See vv 7,11,18). (4) We are asking, then, that God's remembrance of who he is and what he has established will overshadow and swallow up our unfaithfulness to him; that he will in his mercy, forget the sins of our past and present that haunt us.

It is only because of God's lovingkindness that he seeks out the sinner. And all that we receive is because of God's goodness. God's goodness is also good for us. God's goodness is not merely a grace that withholds punishment from what we deserve, which is amazing enough – but that he actively works for good on our behalf (See Romans 8:26-28). Even instructing sinners (if they are humble enough to hear it) in the way that leads to life. And in fact, that is what he expects us to do for others – to not only avoid treating others badly, to avoid falling to those three types temptations that Jesus faced, but to work graciously on the behalf of others to bring blessing and healing and wholeness to their life... not only to seek and receive forgiveness from God, but to freely forgive others as we have been forgiven -- that we, and all, may experience that paths of the Lord, all of which are graceful, loving and faithful. David is having us sing that the life that is based on faith and finding peace is abundantly full and blessed.

When our journey is successful, the change or changes we strive to make will not stop as a temporary discipline but become a natural part of a permanent lifestyle change, and ultimately lead to a more mature journey with Christ.

**Invitation to the Water** At the beginning of worship, you received a piece of paper. On the edge of our wilderness, there is a “butterfly pool”, an oasis of transformation and refreshment if you will – but more importantly a symbol of the waters of our baptismal covenant, or for those not baptized, an invitation to the living waters and our desire to respond to Christ’s invitation, *Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink, and rivers of living water will flow from within them and well up to eternal life.* (See Jn 7:37-38, 4:14)



I am going to ask you a question. We will play some music while you ponder and write, or write in code, or imagine writing your answer to that question on the slip of paper. Here is the question: **What temptation to action -- or inaction -- is trying to hinder you from being the ever-more-faithful person God wants you to become?** What temptation to action -- or inaction -- is trying to hinder you from being the kind of ever-more-faithful person God wants you to become? Or to put it more simply, **how am I being tempted to be less faithful to God and the mission to which he has called me?** What is getting in the way of me fulfilling the mission God has called me to do?

While you ponder that, we are going to have a responsive litany prayer. I will pray. Each section of the prayer ends the same way, which includes a cue from me, and a response from you in the bold font. Let’s pray.

**Responsive Litany Prayer** (bold print – congregation joins the pastor)

Dear Lord, as much as we try to map and calendar every moment of our lives, we know our planners do not tell us where we are with you. Our schedules often serve to distract us from the reality that we and many of our neighbors are not in the Eden we like to think we are.

Here, in this wilderness, O God, **prepare us for your way.**

With persons in poverty of resources or of spirit, who are in fear from abusers, terrorists, and oppressors, who face an addiction of any kind, who are targeted for unjust treatment simply because of who they are;

Here, in this wilderness, O God, **prepare us for your way.**

With leaders in religious, political, economic, and social life; with our families, friends, and neighbors; and with all who work to sustain and protect our lives as



military, civilian workers, and first responders;

Here, in this wilderness, O God, **prepare us for your way.**

With those people who are on our prayer list or that we named earlier in worship, or are embedded deep within our hearts, people who need comfort, or healing, or strength to resist vices, or reconciliation in their relationships, or recovery from brokenness, or return to wholeness after violence or natural disasters.

Here in this wilderness, O God, **prepare us for your way.**

For those who are willingly stepping into the wilderness to focus and find your direction, who desire to promise to serve you in fresh ways without misusing your power, or seeking personal glory, or compromising the free path to you,

Here, in this wilderness, O God, **prepare us for your way.**

And now Lord, as we hear the sounds of assurance that you will lift us up on your wings, we write on our paper what you place in our minds about the obstacle, the action or inaction that is hindering our next step to becoming even more faithful to you and your world.

Meditate and write. After you see me come to the pool, then you can feel free to come and drop your paper in the pool as a prayer that dissolves into the hands of God as your way of giving it to him to allow you to work on you and in you. If nothing has yet come to mind about that, then we offer what *is* on our mind, or a blank paper representing ourselves as a gift to God, our living water. If you have trouble moving, feel free to give your paper to another to bring forward for you. I will stand and keep the waters, moving to help the papers dissolve. Return your seats and remain standing as comfortable. After I start singing, you may listen, or join me as you choose.

Now Lord, Guide and direct us, not only this day, but all days, according to your covenant faithfulness, that we may be refreshed by your living waters as we make our commitments to you and you alone.



### **On Eagle's Wings**

Words: Michael Joncas, 1979 Music: Michael Joncas, 1979  
harm. by Carlton R Young, 1988  
© 1979, 1989 North American Liturgy Resources

And God will raise you up on eagle's wings, bear you on the breath of dawn,  
make you to shine like the sun, and hold you in the palm of God's hand.

Repeat

**Music** And now let's join the praise band in singing a similar sentiment that comes from Isaiah – that the everlasting God lifts us with his strength and refreshes all who need it as they put their hope in him.

### **Everlasting God**

Words and Music: Brenton Brown and Ken Riuley  
© 2005 Thankyou Music

Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord,  
we will wait upon the Lord, we will wait upon the Lord.

Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord,  
we will wait upon the Lord, we will wait upon the Lord.

Our God, you reign forever. Our Hope, our strong Deliverer.  
You are the everlasting God, the everlasting God.  
You do not faint, you won't grow weary.  
You're the defender of the weak, you comfort those in need.  
You lift us up on wings like eagles.  
Repeat all above  
Then repeat from top of this page

### **Series Blessing**

Do all the good you can, by all the means you can,  
in all the ways you can, in all the places you can,  
at all the times you can, to all the people you can,  
as long as ever you can.

18<sup>th</sup> Cent. aphorism, attr. to John Wesley

### **Go to the World**

Words: Sylvia G Dunstan, © 1991 GIA Publications, Inc.  
Music: Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1906

Go to the world! Go into ev'ry place.  
Go live the Word of God's redeeming grace.  
Go seek God's presence in each time and space.  
Alleluia. Alleluia.

Pastor: Amen. **Congregation: Amen**

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