

Straight from the "Hart"

August 20, 2023

Prepare- with Discipline



Sharing the journey
to know, love, and serve

Welcome to Hartland UMC's "Straight from the "Hart"". We are glad you are participating in today's time of worship by reading this script.

Statement of Faith

(P – Pastor, R2 – Reader, **R1 – Reader 1 w/ Congregation**)

P: We believe in one God:

R1: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

R2: He is the true and living God,

R1: worthy to receive glory and honor and power.

R2: He created all things;

R1: by his will they existed and were created.

P: We believe in the Lord Jesus Christ;

R1: all things came into being through him.

R2: He is the image of the invisible God,

R1: the firstborn of all creation.

R2: In him all things in heaven and on earth were created.

R1: He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

P: Being in the form of God, he emptied himself,

R1: he took the form of a slave and was born in human likeness.

R2: Being found in human form, he humbled himself;

R1: he became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

R2: Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures;

R1: he was buried; he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

P: God also highly exalted Jesus:

R1: he gave him the name that is above every name.

R2: God has put all things under his feet:

R1: he made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body.

R2: We believe that Jesus died and rose again:

R1: through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.

R2: As all die in Adam,

R1: so all will be made alive in Christ.

P: Thanks be to God

R1: who gives us the victory. [Amen].

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Money Verse Today's affirmation focused on who Christ is and what God grants us through him. This is because throughout the service, Jesus asks a question that is meant to ring in the ears and through the years of every generation. "But who do *you* say that I am?" Here are a few answers from John and Paul:

For God expressed his love for the world in this way. He *gave* his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but will have everlasting life.

[And when many people who had started following Jesus decided not to receive the gift of God's son after all, Jesus asked if they were going to quit too, and]

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, if we were to go, who would we follow? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and recognize that you are the Holy One sent by God.

And Paul tells us that because of what God has done through Jesus,

"all things are yours. [Despite whoever is your human leadership] the world, life or death, the present or the future – it all belongs to you, and you of Christ, and Christ is of God. John 3:16, 6:68, 1 Corinthians 3:21b-23 (NIV, VOICE)

If our answer to that question comes anywhere close to what John and Paul's is (about who God is and what he has given us, and we are to be becoming like him, then it will be in our nature to be graciously generous too as we support his message of eternal life.

Offering/Opening Prayer

On our own, what each of us has to give doesn't amount to much in the light of all you have given to us and in the face of so much need. But put together as a

congregation, and with other congregations, what we offer you here in love becomes more -- not simply added together, but somehow multiplied in its usefulness. We ask you to bless our gifts and with the addition of your blessing, just as it was with the loaves and fishes, there is enough for all. In



Jesus Name, Amen. From: Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, presbyterian.org.nz

Call to Worship

Come in the name of the Lord Jesus -- the sheep gatherer -- bread breaker -- and cross carrier. May the serenity of the Lord Jesus -- peacemaker -- temple disturber -- friend of sinners -- and the companion on the road -- be with us all. Let us draw close to the Lord Jesus -- our Savior -- healer -- and teacher --- to worship him -- and to ask ourselves, "Who do we say that he is?"
ad. from www.spillbeans.org.uk



Music A composer provides one answer to the question through his music. Let's sing.

Fairest Lord Jesus

Words: Munster Gesangbuch, 1677; trans. by Joseph August Seiss, 1877

Music: Schlesische Volkslieder, 1842; arr. by Richard Storrs Willis, 1850

1. Fairest Lord Jesus, ruler of all nature,
O thou of God and man the Son,
Thee will I cherish, Thee will I honor,
thou, my soul's glory, joy, and crown.
2. Fair are the meadows, fairer still the woodlands,
robed in the blooming garb of spring:
Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer
who makes the woeful heart to sing.
3. Fair is the sunshine, fairer still the moonlight,
and all the twinkling starry host:
Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines purer
than all the angels heaven can boast.

4. Beautiful Savior! Lord of all the nations!
Son of God and Son of Man!
Glory and honor, praise, adoration,
now and forevermore be thine.

Theme

Today, hopefully we will discover that being in the wilderness will help us develop a deep compassionate love for God and others -- people for whom we want to do everything to reach out – because of who God is and what he wants to do for his world. We responded last week by refusing to succumb to a temptation to be something besides what God wants us to be and happens to be best for us as well. Hear this story.

In Europe, there are not that many monuments to women, and most of them are queens and princesses, beautiful and richly dressed. But in a little square in the old business part of New Orleans, there is a statue of a plainly clothed woman sitting in a low chair, with her arms around a child who is leaning against her. Some may say she isn't pretty. Short, stout, square-chinned face, but her eyes look at you like your mother's. This statue is of Margaret Haughery, but she is best known by just her first name, Margaret, and this is her story.

Margaret was born in Ireland in 1813, the 5th of 6 children. Her parents ran a small farm. After 2 consecutive bad seasons, like many Irish farmers in those years, they could not afford to care for their families. In desperation, they decided to risk migrating to Baltimore, Maryland. They could only afford to bring the 3 youngest children. Margaret was 5 at the time. Things did not go well. At 9, she lost both of her parents and sister to yellow fever. She was taken in by a neighbor who made her work. She entered the workforce, eventually, as a domestic servant until she was 21, when she met someone and was married. Almost immediately moved with a steady stream of people heading west to find a better life. They settled in New Orleans, where they had a child, Frances. Very shortly after Frances's birth, her husband grew sick and went back to Ireland to try and regain his health, but he died shortly after arriving there. A few months later, Frances also passed away. Margaret was all alone. At that time, Irish immigrants were not popular with Americans for some of the same reasons we hear today. Without a husband or father, she had little legal or economic protections.

The Sisters of Charity gave her a place to live and helped her find a job. She ironed clothes all day long in a hotel. As she did, she could see out the window

little children who were at work and play from a nearby orphanage that was run by the community of nuns where she was staying. A deep sickness swept across the city, and orphans flooded the orphanage – more than they could handle. But what was a poor laundry worker to do?

She went to the sisters who ran the orphanage and told them she was going to give them part of her wages and work for them as well. Sometimes she gave as much as $\frac{2}{3}$ her salary to support the children. She worked so hard that she was still able to save money from her wages. With this she bought two cows and a delivery cart that she drove around the city. The fresh milk, butter, and cheese went to the orphans, and the rest she sold to customers. As she went, she begged for leftover food from the hotels and rich houses and brought it back to the hungry children in the orphanage. During hard times, this was sometimes the only food they got for the day.

She continued to donate from her income and after a few years they were able to build a bigger and better orphanage. Margaret was so careful and good at business that despite her generous giving, she was able to buy more cows and earn more money. But she still spent all her free time and money supporting the orphans of New Orleans, and helped build an additional home for orphaned babies and called it her baby house. (In fact, eventually, she helped build *seven* orphanages in New Orleans).

Later, Margaret had a chance to buy a failing bakery. She carried bread instead of milk in her drivable cart, and she became known as the bread-woman rather than the milk-woman. Every night she would distribute unsold goods to the poor, and she continued to work for and give to the orphanage. Then came the Civil War. Throughout those troubled days of yellow fever sickness and fear, Margaret served as a nurse where needed, continued driving her cart of bread, and always managed to do her best to have enough left to give to those who needed it in times of extreme food shortages, even eventually securing permission from the occupying Union army to go wherever she needed to provide her humanitarian aid. Despite all this generosity, she earned enough that she was able to build one of the first steam powered bakeries in the south. By this time, everyone in the city knew her and all the children loved her. She used to sit at the open door of her office, and she gave a good word to everyone, poor, rich, business and community leaders.

She grew ill in 1882 and was given the comfort of last rites by the pope. When she died the whole city mourned. The mayor led the procession, the Lt. governors helped carry the casket, which they could barely get down the center aisle because the cathedral was so crowded, and the archbishop led the service.

They also discovered, even with all her giving, that she had still been able to put away quite a bit of money, and in her will, which she had to sign with a cross, because she had never had the opportunity to learn how to read and write. She had left every penny to all the different orphanages in New Orleans. Her explicit instructions for all her donations, even prior to the will, were that the institutions should serve all children in need regardless of their race, religion, ethnicity, or social class, [remember this was before, during and after the Civil War] for Margaret always said, “They are all orphans alike.”

The people of New Orleans said, “She was a mother to the motherless, a friend to those who had no friends. She had wisdom greater than schools can teach. We will not let her memory go from us.” They made, what at the time, was only the second statue in the country constructed in honor of a woman. It depicts her just how she used to look, sitting in her office door dispensing wisdom, or driving her little cart, in calico gown and little shawl, memorializing the great love and the great power of “plain” Margaret Haughery, of New Orleans, the [philanthropist] known as “the mother of orphans” and “Angel of the Delta”.



ad. from Margaret of New Orleans, by Sara Cone Bryant in:
The Moral Compass: Stories for Life's Journey, ed. with commentary by William J Bennet
 (with additions from New York Historical Society (wams.nyhistory.org)
 and The Historic New Orleans Collection (hnoc.org))

Though she lived and worked with nuns and was buried with the rites of the Catholic church, none of the references spoke directly about her faith; but I think it is safe to say that at least one of her ethical pillars was in sync with Christian teaching. For James said, “The Christian who is pure and without fault, from God the Father’s point of view, is the one who takes care of orphans and widows,

From James 1:17b (TLB)

It is nice to hear such a positive story that flows out of a life with so many setbacks, and the positive response that she generally received. I wonder how people (esp those not receiving help from her, and maybe even then) would respond to her today? We discover from the Bible that at times, it doesn't matter what we do or say, people may not always respond the way we think they might, or hope, or should; nor can we always meet the expectations of others and still be true to God at the same time.

Responsive Reading 1

(R1 – Reader 1, R2 – Reader 2, **PC – Pastor with Congregation**)

R1: When the people heard Jesus' words, they acknowledged that God's way was right. But the religious leaders rejected God's purpose for themselves...

PC: Ultimately, people pursuing God cannot please people who are not pursuing God.

R1: Jesus said that this generation is like children playing in the marketplace:

R2: We played peppy music and you scowled. We sang a sad song and you would not weep.

PC: Nothing godly appeals to those not seeking God.

R1: John the Baptist came fasting and strictly disciplined.

R2: They judged that he had a demon in him.

R1: The Son of Man came eating and drinking.

R2: They judged him as an undisciplined rebel who loves traitors and transgressors.

PC: So what are we to do?

R1: Work to please God rather than humans. Sinful humanity killed Jesus by hanging him on a cross, but God raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him as Prince and Savior.

R2: He did this to bring us to repentance and forgive our sins.

R1: He gives the Holy Spirit to (guide) those who obey him." So if you do not want to be blown back and forth by the winds of doubting expectations, ask God for wisdom, who gives generously to all without finding fault.

PC: He will give us single-mindedness and stability on *his* course.

R1: Wisdom calls out into the clamor of the world. "I possess knowledge, discretion, insight, and power. Don't seek to fit in, or gain acceptance from, or become like the arrogant, who speak and practice evil."

R2 Those who search for wisdom find this as the answer:

PC Revere God and keep his commands.

ad. from Luke 7:29-35; Acts 5:29-32;

James 1:5-8; Proverbs 8:1-4,13-14; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Music God calls us recognize who he is and respond to Jesus by seeking to do what he says. Some, but not everyone, answers as positively as Peter did. But some rejected him no matter what he said or did. Sydney Carter wrote a quick summation of the life - the dance -- of Jesus -- and how people responded to him...

Let's sing

Lord of the Dance

Words: Sydney Carter, 1963

Music: 19th cent. Shaker tune; adapt. by Sydney Carter, 1963; harm. by Gary Alan Smith, 1988

© 1963, 1989 Galliard, Ltd.

1. I danced in the morning when the world was begun,
and I danced in the moon and the stars in the sun,
and I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth.
At Bethlehem I had my birth.

Refrain

Dance, then, wherever you may be; I am the Lord of the Dance, said he.
And I'll lead you all wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.

2. I danced for the scribe and the Pharisee,
but they would not dance and they would not follow me;
I danced for the fisherman, for James and John;
they came to me and the dance went on.

Refrain

3. I danced on the sabbath when I cured the lame,
the holy people said it was a shame;
they whipped and they stripped and they hung me high;
and they left me there on a cross to die.

Refrain

4. I danced on a Friday and the sky turned black;
it's hard to dance with the devil on your back;
they buried my body and they thought I had to gone,
but I am the dance and I still go on.

Refrain

5. They cut me down and I leapt up high,
I am the life that'll never, never die;
I'll live in you if you'll live in me;
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he.

Refrain

God Moments (These testimonies were not scripted)

Music

Even though not all people respond positively, our testimonies show that we have. And Jesus still calls, inviting all to join him in the dance of a full life. His invitation continues to sound throughout the ages. Let's continue accepting his invitation and prepare our hearts for prayer by singing...

I Love You, Lord

Words & Music: Laurie Klein

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I love you, Lord---, and I lift my voice---
to worship you, O my soul rejoice.
Take joy, my King---, in what you hear---,
may it be a sweet, sweet sound in your ear.
Repeat

Prayers

Lord, we know you are a loving God who wants to meet our every need. It is in your glorious nature to always have mercy. That's why we love you. But then knowing this, it also becomes tempting for us to use our faith in you as an escape — a way to avoid the pain of being human and alive. Or as a path to success — a way to persuade the universe to give us what we want. Or a system of control — a way to bend others to our will. But the faith you offer is different. It is more dangerous and more compelling; It's the faith that carries the cross, that embraces death and lays itself down for the sake of others. Be gracious to all of us who seek to faithfully move through this world with you. We know you are a Lord who walks beside your people. We pray for people who walk for justice. You are a Lord who raises up those who are bent low. We pray for those held down by the grindings of life and the indifference of the world. You are a Lord who feeds the hungry. We pray for all who long for nourishment, and the means to provide it. You are a Lord who celebrates the small and the seemingly insignificant. We pray for children and for those who are rarely noticed. You are a Lord who says, 'Follow me'. So we pray for courage and faith in our hearts, that we may take up the cross and find that it leads to life. **Petitions** Specifically, Lord, we have requests that have come in that we want to pray for: * Sherrie Rice requests for Emily Ann who is having several challenges, * Jan Martin requests we keep praying for brother Reese and Calvin, the court date they have is now August 23rd, so that Calvin can

stay at home, * Jan also asks for her son Brian's daughter Kaylynn who dislocated her knee Friday, * Jeff & Linda ask that we pray for friends Kay and Al who were in an accident a week ago. She is recovering at home and he is still in the hospital. * Gar and Vivian request prayers of comfort for the family of Howard Gilmore whose Memorial is today, * and Jan Martin's son's mother-in-law, Fannie Williams, is having open heart surgery tomorrow, * and Mary Jo Bell asks prayers for her niece's husband Michael that was just diagnosed with stage 4 prostate cancer, so prayers for acceptance and clinical trial [and your healing touch], * and Karen Nowak asks we pray for husband Rich, that he will have positive test results, * and Victoria Carver, a granddaughter of Pastor Chuck's friend who is waiting to go into full labor, * And we continue to pray for * Cheri Holt's cousin Kevin Cohee who has cancer, * a close friend of Margaret Melville, Jan Caloia, also with cancer, * and there are others that we have not named out loud today but they are always close to our hearts and on our minds. * We lift them up to you in faith. for it is only faith that can lead us to resurrection, to life renewed and overflowing. We praise you for this faith. Open our hearts to receive it as we pray the prayer you taught us to pray.

Lord's Prayer

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Intro to and Bible Reading 2

Jesus feeds 4,000 people. The Pharisees ask for a miracle as a sign from God to prove his authority. If you heard last week's sermon, you heard that this was one of the temptations Jesus faced in the wilderness. Therefore, he is prepared to not fall for this kind of pressure and replies that he doesn't give "prove yourself" miracles. [That is not what miracles are for].

He and the disciples then cross the lake and while doing so Jesus warns them of the yeast of religious

leaders and Rome, meaning their errant teachings, but the disciples, thought he might be talking about the fact that they only brought one loaf of bread with them. Jesus heard their debate, and in essence told them, didn't you just see that we will never have a food shortage problem? Don't you understand [who I am] yet?

They arrived at Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to Jesus, and he healed him. They traveled about 10 miles north to Caesarea Philippi. Perhaps Jesus still had in his mind the religious leader's challenge to prove who he is. For



as they were traveling among the towns in that area, he asked his followers who people were saying that he was. They answered John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets. Jesus follows it by the more important question as we pick up the reading...

(Summary of Mark 8:1-28)

Then Jesus asked, "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

Jesus told the followers, "Don't tell anyone who I am."

Then Jesus began to teach his followers that the Son of Man must suffer many things. He taught that the Son of Man would not be accepted by the older Jewish leaders, the leading priests, and the teachers of the law. He said that the Son of Man must be killed and then rise from death after three days. Jesus told them everything that would happen. He did not keep anything secret.

Peter took Jesus away from the other followers to talk to him alone. Peter criticized him for saying these things. But Jesus turned and looked at his followers. Then he criticized Peter. He said to Peter, "Get away from me, Satan! You don't care about the same things God does. You care only about things that people think are important."

Mark 8:29-33 (ERV)

Music It isn't enough to make great proclamations of insight into who we think Jesus is. We can't say he is Lord of our life and then speak like we are Lord of his. It is only until we can fully get on board with Jesus and his will that we can become free to serve and live at our fullest capacity as Christians. Let's sing

Make Me a Captive, Lord

Words: George Matheson, 1890, Music: George J. Elvey, 1868



1. Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free.
Force me to render up my sword, and I shall conqueror be.
I sink in life's alarms when by myself I stand;
imprison me within thine arms, and strong shall be my hand.

2. My heart is weak and poor until it master find;
it has no spring of action sure, it varies with the wind.
It cannot freely move till thou hast wrought its chain;
enslave it with thy matchless love, and deathless it shall reign.

3. My power is faint and low till I have learned to serve;
it lacks the needed fire to glow, it lacks the breeze to nerve.

It cannot drive the world until itself be driven;
its flag can only be unfurled when thou shalt breathe from heaven.

4. My will is not my own till thou hast made it thine;
if it would reach a monarch's throne, it must its crown resign.

It only stands unbent amid the clashing strife,
when on thy bosom it has leant, and found in thee its life.

Sermon Prepare – with Discipline

Jesus questions his disciples about his identity. Peter answers that he is the Messiah. The Son of God sent to save them. Now could it really be that after 3 years of nearly 24/7 with Jesus -- were the disciples really, finally, going to get it?! Do they understand who he is and what he is about?

And then we go on to the next verses. Right on the heels of what Jesus calls heavenly-given insight (See Matthew 16:17). Jesus begins to explain how his Messiahship will move forward. Peter pulls Jesus aside to put him in his place and redirect his path, revealing that the disciples haven't figured it out at all.

It is easy to find fault with Peter and the disciples. What seems so obvious to us seems to elude their grasp time and time again. But we have the blessing of growing up in a generation and culture that sees it all from the point of view of the Monday morning quarterback. We have the benefit of hindsight, and church culture has shaped much of what we think about Jesus. Peter and the disciples didn't have that advantage. In fact, they spent their entire pre-Jesus lives being shaped by their religious centers into a very different point of view of what the Christ would be like. They were expecting one who would forgive sins, yes, bring peace with God yes. But they did not believe that that atonement, that "at-one-ment" with God was going to be primarily expressed through a transformation of the traditional religious system. Instead, they believed the Messiah would set up that system and take power as the promised kingdom as the Jews currently practiced it and restore it to its glorious prosperity like back in the days of David – and that would begin with the overthrow of Rome. And yet, maybe it isn't all that different from some of the teachings we might hear today in some places. One person expressed that kind of thinking in the modern form now: "Everything in us personally, much within our culture... and even some of the theology we pick up from our churches, (he says) teaches us [that Christ is there so that we can] fulfill ourselves, stay out of harm's

way, and escape [struggles]...because being a Christian is like a magic pill that we can take in order to avoid the suffering that is part of life.” The end goal of God in our life, this teaching claims, is to receive peace and comfort and joy and ease, to live above and without any problems that life would throw at us (regardless of how we live to inherit some of those problems) and redefines godly success and prosperity so that it more nicely fits with the cultural patterns of success – beauty, brains, brawn, fortune, popularity, power, pleasure, status, political and material gain ...

So how shocked we are when we keep ending up with the conflict that comes from lack of control, the stress of unmeetable needs, the confusion from a lack of answers – out in the barren tempting wilderness, and in arguments even with God himself. I suspect many of us probably don’t need to look too hard at our prayer life, our thought life, our attitude life; and find that from time to time, we ourselves have taken Jesus by the elbow and pulled him aside, saying – I know who you are and what power you have and I am expecting something different than this!

Our version today calls Peter’s complaint a criticism, and Jesus’ reply as a criticism. Most versions use the word rebuke. In the original The Rap language, the word is rap, and the imagery is like a rabbi rapping the knuckles of a student who was either not paying attention or giving an answer that is waaaay off track. It is a startling jerk back to attentiveness. Did Jesus really think Peter was *that* far off – that he was representing Satan?

In the wilderness, Jesus is tempted to fulfill his Messiahship through a means by which God wouldn’t want it to be fulfilled. This is exactly what Peter was doing, trying to tell him to be a different kind of Savior than the Father sent him to be. The difference is that while Satan’s motives were evil, deliberately trying to pull Christ off course of the divine plan; Peter and the disciples were motivated by love and admiration and a desire to protect Jesus from harm -- at one point they warned him not to go back to Jerusalem where the leaders there had already tried to stone him to death. (See John 11:8). They wanted to lovingly redirect Jesus onto the path that would usher him into the leadership they thought he was destined to assume as Messiah and King. It would have never occurred to Peter or any of them that they were trying to prevent Jesus from fulfilling God’s mission on earth. They thought they were redirecting him to it.

Veterans and martyrs can probably understand this better than most when a television show that concludes each episode with a narrator’s moralism -- said at

the end of one episode: “In the struggle between life and death, sometimes survival is not the only way to win.” (Outer Limits – Better Luck Next Time) (Sometimes there is a bigger cause). This idea would have never crossed the disciples’ minds – they were expecting to be leaders, dwelling in a palace. They were trying to be helpful for Jesus. They didn’t realize, at that point, that his death was the only route that could bring victory for everyone.

But even not understanding, even admiring and caring; it is not a disciple’s job to guide and protect their leader (protect Jesus). It is their job to follow and trust that he knows what he is doing. We can trust that, can’t we? I hope so. It is not our job to tell God how to be a successful God. It is our job to listen to how we are to be faithful disciples.

This scenario reminds me of the dialog between parent and child.

The parent begins, (softly and compassionately) "Tell me how you feel. I know it's hard being a student, but I'll try to understand."

"No, you'd think I'm stupid."

"No, you can tell me! You know how much I care for you. Why are you sad?"

"I don't know."

"Come on, what is it?" Finally, the child relents and shares, "Well, I just don't like school anymore."

(Loud and fast with anger) "What!? What do you mean you don't like school?! And after all the sacrifices we've made for your education! Education is the foundation of your future. If you'd apply yourself like your older sister does, you'd do better and then you'd like school. Time and time again, we've told you to settle down. You've got the ability, but you just don't apply yourself. Try harder. Get a positive attitude about it!" Pause, and the softly and compassionately as at first), "Now go ahead. Tell me how you feel."

It’s like Peter is coaxing Jesus (softly and compassionately) “I know you are the Messiah. Tell me how you feel about that.”

And Jesus finally says, “Well, this is going to kill me.”

And Peter saying (angry, fast and loud) “What?! That isn’t what the Messiah is supposed to do, that’s not what this is like! You’ve got the power to do better than that -- if you just applied yourself, you could really take this world by storm!”

See, we worry that God doesn’t understand and isn’t getting it right, and so we rush in to straighten out and fix God up with good advice. We rap Jesus’ knuckles because we need Jesus to pay attention and understand why we are telling him

what we tell him, and why it is for his own good that he does it our way. But we often never stop to listen to understand what he is trying to tell us.

And so, Jesus raps *our* knuckles, then. And right after our text he goes on to say:

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?”

(Mark 9:34-37 NIV)

In other words, Jesus is saying, “My way is not self-aggrandizement, but self-denial. I go straight for the cross. I don’t do that to make your life easy, I do it to make your life better – to make you holy. And you cannot do that unless you are willing to follow me down that same path of sacrificial living.”

Here is an example I heard on the radio recently. People are getting into football. They are getting excited about the Lions, this year especially. (I don’t know why 😊) But the only way the players will succeed at the highest levels is not if they get into football, but if football gets into them. Do you see the difference? They will have to breathe it, they’ll have to live it day in and day out. The other day the radio sports people were making a list of athletes who were stars in high school and college, and looked like they had the greatest potential to be wonderful players in the NFL, or baseball. But they washed out very quickly. Football wasn’t in them – they were into football, but football wasn’t into them, and they couldn’t handle it at the highest levels. You cannot experience the joy of excellence unless you surrender, you make yourself captive to the goal for which you are pursuing, removing *everything* that gets in the way of your pursuit.

We must take up our cross. The original readers knew what that meant much better than we do. It

Deny Self – Take up Cross

wasn’t a metaphor for them. Death by execution on the cross was used by Rome for dangerous criminals. They made them carry their own cross to the execution point as a way of showing not only the criminal but the whole world that Rome was in control and captured criminals were in complete submission to their power and their authority.

When we stop trying to control our own life and we let Christ direct us because we move in complete submission to him, it is then that the power of Christ frees us to experience eternal life and the way to have a full life now. You can’t be a “Super

bowl” winner if you don’t give it your all. You can’t be a great Christian if you don’t – commit yourself – to Christ.

As Creator, he understands much more than we do what real life is meant to be. While we don’t seek out ways to suffer, when it is God’s will to accomplish something that isn’t easy, we don’t shirk that calling just because it may be unpleasant. We boldly move forward if that is what it takes to fulfill his mission and our purpose. Because in the end of it all, what is most valued is not how others see us or how well we meet their expectations, or even our own -- what matters is the potential that God sees in us, in our soul; and how much we allow him to work through us to fulfill our true potential – what he has created us to become ...

All this is contrary to our culturally trained instincts. There are a handful of golfers who can master the game, but most would rather **Discipline** not put in the work and cost – they might get into golf, but golf won’t get into them. Some of us would rather play it on a video game where you can become a near perfect golfer, almost instantly, by pushing a few buttons. Or bowler, or baseball player, or soldier – almost anything nowadays. Just a handful of buttons and a little bit of learning and after a couple days, you are a master at whatever it is you are playing.

In a sense, that is why Christ goes ahead of us and invites us into the wilderness, metaphorical though it may be. It is a place that gets us away from the distractions of our past, of every experience and environment that has shaped us to think in certain ways. And the wilderness puts us alone with the one who wants to shape us into what we were purposed to become. This is why Paul writes,

I do all this because of the good news. And I want to share in its blessings. In a race all the runners run... run in a way that will get you the prize. All who take part in the games train hard. They do it to get a crown that will not last. But we do it to get a crown that will last forever. So I do not run like someone who doesn’t run toward the finish line. I do not fight like a boxer who hits nothing but air. No, I train my body and bring it under control.

From 1 Corinthians 9:23-27a (NIRV)

His meaning is clear. Good athletes, good musicians, good scientists, good – fill in the blank with your choice – , and good Christians -- all go through strict training to be the best athlete, musician, scientist, fill in the blank -- and Christian, that we can become. And when they become the best they can be, they often make it look natural and easy.

Stuart Briscoe relates the story of pianist, composer, politician, statesman and spokesman Ignace Paderewski, who was told by an admirer: “Maestro, you are a genius”.

He replied, “Genius? Perhaps. But before I was a genius, I was a drudge.” He was referring to the many years spent in endless hours of practice, unnoticed and unheralded. He wanted to make clear that however much his talent appeared to be naturally inborn, it nevertheless took a great deal of work to develop. In our culture, we have the phenomenon known as the “overnight sensation.” ... [people who] burst on the scene out of nowhere. We are ignorant of the years they spent honing their skills, paying their dues... Many take “excellence” in others as innate as if it just happened! They don’t seem to have any need to develop or work at anything because it “comes so naturally to them”. But it would come naturally to us too if we chose to go through the training and discipline required to get there. But we don’t want to hear that because we want life skills to come to us like it does in movies and fairy tales or video games -- *easy, quick, and effortless*. We don’t want to give up whatever it might require us to give up in order to spend the time and effort to become what God has purposed us to become.

But like Jesus, like the disciples, like Paderewski, like any great athlete, or musician, or fill in the blank -- what others notice about them, what they see in themselves, what impact their life makes – it is not seen in what they have given up, but in who they became. As that same television show I mentioned earlier said at the end of another episode – “True sacrifice is not what we surrender, but what we ultimately gain.” (Outer Limits - Star Crossed) Jesus looked with joy at the cross not for its painful sacrifice but for what it would accomplish for humanity --- and then he too was lifted to the highest place of honor besides. (See Hebrews 12:2-3)

This leads to our application question for this third Sunday. Get out your piece of paper. Here is the question to ponder: **What (area of) training/discipline must I undergo to get me closer to where God wants me to be?** and **How do I make room for that in my life?** (Repeat) Let’s listen for the answer from God in prayer and meditation... We’ll pray, give you some time to think about it, then you can jot down what that answer is for you, abbreviate it, or just imagine, and then we’ll bring it forward and put it in the pool of transformation, the living water. Let’s pray.

Prayers and Meditation

Almighty Father, when we realize that Peter, your Son’s closest and strongest follower and leader, was confused enough to have so badly mistaken his

expectations about what is your will -- that he begins to try and instruct Jesus about your business, it makes us wonder about the possibilities of confusion in our life - - mistaken expectations that we may have, well-intentioned but errant requests that we may make, maybe even incorrect directives that we give to you, or to others in your name. And yet even when we do, we can hear your gentle voice calling us back into the wilderness, to re-orient our lives and redirect our paths, to take up our cross, and follow according to your direction.

Your Son Jesus followed you, and you call us to follow him and be your people. To do this, we must let go of the expectations that attempt to box you in to a selfish-fulfilling god-of-our-own-making kind of God. We must free ourselves from our own illusions of what the successful spiritual life is; and allow you to show us the true way, the way of the cross, the way that can truly transform us into what we not yet, but what potential you see in us that will make us the best us possible.

Invitation to the Water And so now Lord, as we hear the sounds of “Oh Jesus, I Have Promised”, we write on our slip of paper what you place in our minds about the training or discipline we need to nurture into our lives so that we are in less conflict and more cooperation with your direction of where you want us to be. Or we put on it anything that may be weighing us down today, or an expression of our love and commitment to you, and bring it to the living water, today. **[Pour Water into basin]** So God, 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. Amen. [Instruments play without singing as we place





O Jesus, I Have Promised

Words: John E. Bode, ca. 1866, Music: Arthur H. Mann, 1890

1. O Jesus, I have promised to serve thee to the end;
be thou forever near me, my Master and my friend.
I shall not fear the battle if thou art by my side,
nor wander from the pathway if thou wilt be my guide.
2. O let me feel thee near me! The world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle, the tempting sounds I hear;
my foes are ever near me, around me and within;
but Jesus, draw thou nearer, and shield my soul from sin.
3. O let me hear thee speaking in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion, the murmurs of self-will.
O speak to reassure me, to hasten or control;
O speak, and make me listen, thou guardian of my soul.

4. O Jesus, thou hast promised to all who follow thee
that where thou art in glory there shall thy servant be.
And Jesus, I have promised to serve thee to the end;
O give me grace to follow, my Master and my Friend.

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.

18th 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**

