

Straight from the "Hart"

August 27, 2023

Prepare – for the New Normal



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 manuscript.

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

This affirmation about the Bible, as it is our centerpiece of thought today...

P: The Bible is alive. **C: It speaks to us.**

P: Hear its pure, inspired voice, not like thunder, but like a whisper, it beckons us.

C: It draws us near. Speak to us now, living Word.

P: Feel its work, like a double-edged scalpel, dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, thoughts and attitudes.

C: It determines what needs to be removed and what needs to be healed.

P: The Bible is alive. **C: It has quick feet.**

P: It pursues us, chases us down, and lights our path.

C: It captures us – so that we can become free.

P: The Bible is alive. **C: It has strong hands.**

P: Its powerful grip is like praying hands, It carries us as it bares (reveals) our burdens.

C: Through it, the Word made flesh grabs hold of us.

P: He kneads and molds us like the potter shapes the clay.

C: He lifts us up and fills our cup.

P: The Bible is alive. **C: It has appeal.**

P: It draws us near like a magnet.

C: Its spiritual force works like a faithful mirror.

P: It displays what is right, wonderful, everlasting, pure righteousness.

C: It is Bread from heaven. We eat, we drink, it makes us think.

P: The Bible is alive. **C: It lives and grows.**

P: Tell the whole world it is pure as gold.

C: Tentacles spread, it must be read.

ad. from Steve Brown "Gospel Reflections: inspired, in part, by Hebrews 4:12-16 and Psalm 119", on "Worship Ideas You Can Use" sjbrown58.wordpress.com

Opening Prayer Lord, we come and give with praise and rejoicing because you remember us. We celebrate the great things you have done for us. In every generation you have shown mercy on those who honor you. You stretch out your mighty arm and lift up the lowly; you fill the hungry with good things, you keep your promises to us. You come to help; to show us your love. Accept the gifts of our hands and the praise of our hearts. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

ad. from portions of "Prayer of Approach: based on Luke 1:46-55"
by Michael Perry in "Bible Praying", on The Jubilate Group: jubilate.co.uk

Call to Worship

Come --- gather before the God of peace who causes us to rejoice in him always, who enables us to be gentle to everyone, who keeps us from being anxious about anything. Come boldly before him -- ask for what we need -- and find the peace that guards our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ our Lord.

ad. from "Prayer of Petition: based on Philippians 4: 4-7" by Michael Perry in "Bible Praying", on The Jubilate Group: jubilate.co.uk

Music And to find that peace in our hearts, we must be willing to open minds to the light and inspiration and work of the God within us. Let's sing...

Blessed Jesus, at Thy Word

Words: Tobias Clausnitzer, 1619;

trans. by Catherine Winkworth, 1858 Music: Johann R. Ahle, 1664

1. Blessed Jesus, at thy word
we are gathered all to hear thee;
let our hearts and souls be stirred
now to seek and love and fear thee,
by thy teachings sweet and holy,
drawn from earth to love thee solely.
2. All our knowledge, sense, and sight lie in deepest darkness shrouded,
till thy spirit breaks our night with the beams of truth unclouded.
Thou alone to God canst win us; thou must work all good within us.
3. Glorious Lord, thyself impart! Light of light, from God proceeding,
open thou our ears and heart; help us by thy spirit's pleading;
hear the cry thy people raises; hear, and bless our prayers and praises.



Theme Today's theme focuses on the plant – this plant was a desktop plant that you (the church) gave me when I arrived what seems like yesterday and forever both. But it actually a bit over three years now. It hasn't had an easy life because I don't have a green thumb. I took it home and it has survived two re-pots. I've almost

never had a plant survive one of my re-pots. I brought it back to the church where I think there are more green thumbs, and it is coming along and can stand as a backdrop to our wilderness without anything to stand on but its own pot on the floor. It is doing well, and we are glad about that. It proudly stands as a symbol of our stubborn growth to maturity, and it goes along with the a major tool of that growth – the Bible -



- which for this week we have placed into the center of our wilderness – the idea is that as we plant our lives in God’s word, and God plants his Word in our lives; as we root ourselves in his covenant relationship with us and us with him, he can stretch us to new heights of growth in unwavering faith. Ironically, we sometimes see that kind of faith best in the young, as this poem by James T Fields says:

We were crowded in the cabin,
Not a soul would dare to sleep--
It was midnight on the waters,
and a storm was on the deep.

‘Tis a fearful thing in winter
to be shattered by the blast,
and to hear the rattling trumpet
thunder, “Cut away the mast!”

So we shuddered there in silence--
for the stoutest held his breath
while the hungry sea was roaring
and the breakers talked with Death.

As thus we sat in darkness,
each one busy with his prayers,
“We are lost” the captain shouted,
as he staggered down the stairs...

But his little daughter whispered
as she took his icy hand,
“Isn’t God upon the ocean
just the same as on the land?”

Then we kissed the little maiden,
and we spoke in better cheer,
and we anchored safe in harbor
when the morn’ was shining clear.

Special Music The Seasonal Singers are going to come. James Wells and R.E. Winsett saw sea storms as a metaphor for life when they wrote lyrics about the faith that overcomes the world. Listen as we sing about that kind of faith we strive to grow into.

Living by Faith

I care not today what the morrow may bring,
if shadow or sunshine or rain.
The Lord, I know, ruleth o’er everything,
and all of my worry is vain.



Refrain

[() = bass line sung between the melody line's phrases]

Living by faith -- (Yes, living by faith) in Jesus above -- (in Jesus above)
 Trusting confi-- (Trusting confiding) ding in his great love -- (yes, in his great love)
 Safe from all harm -- (I'm safe from all harm)
 in his sheltering arm -- (his sheltering arm)
 I'm living by faith (I'm living by faith) and feel no alarm (feel no alarm)

Tho' tempests may blow and storm clouds arise,
 obscuring the brightness of life,
 I'm never alarmed at the overcast skies;
 the Master looks on at the strife.

Refrain

I know that he safely will carry me thro',
 no matter what evils betide.
 Why should I then care,
 tho' the tempest may blow,
 if Jesus walks close to my side?

Refrain

Our Lord will return to this earth some sweet day,
 our troubles will then all be o'er.
 The Master so gently will lead us away,
 beyond that blest heavenly shore.

Refrain

Responsive Bible Reading 1 (R: Reader P: Pastor w/ Congregation)

R: How can a young person keep their life on the path of purity?

P: **By living according to your word.**

R: We seek you and trust in you with all our hearts; do not let us wander away from your commands.

P: We have hidden your word in our hearts so that we won't sin against you.

R: Lord, we give praise to you. Teach us your decrees. With our lips we recount all the laws that come from your mouth.

P: Following your covenant laws gives us joy -- just as great riches give joy to others.

R: We meditate on your precepts. We consider how you want us to live. We take delight in your decrees.

P: We will not neglect or fail to obey your word.

R: Let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts.

P: We will let the message of Christ, in all its richness, fill our lives.

R: Always give thanks to God the Father through Christ.

P: Whatever we do in word or deed, we will do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Psalm 119:9-16, Colossians 3:15a,16a,17 (NIV, NIRV, NLT, ad. to be responsive)

Music If we are going to live like that, we will need to keep God and his word in front of us. Let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing

Thy Word

Words: Amy Grant 1984 Music: Michael W Smith, 1984 arr. by Keith Phillips
1984 Meadowgreen Music Co./ Bug and Bear Music

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

When I feel afraid, think I've lost my way,
still you're there, right beside me.

Nothing will I fear, as long as you are near.
Please be near me to the end.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Now I will not forget your love for me
and yet my heart forever is wandering.
Jesus be my guide, and hold me to your side,
and I will love you to the end.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Prayers

Lord of light, illuminate our path so we can walk steady and true. You have called us to reflect your light, that those walking in darkness may see your great light. Open our awareness of you through the gift of nature's order, through the witness

of words and deeds of others, but especially by the gift of your Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, and the Word that you have given us.

We ask that you enlighten our hearts, because there may be areas of our life to which we are not paying attention, or things that we may think we understand, but you know we don't. Grace us with open hearts that you may continue to teach us your ways, for we truly do want to walk faithfully as your children. We do want to live lives in pursuit of what is pleasing to you, that our hope may remain steadfast and our inheritance in you is secure. It is our confidence in you that encourages us to lift up our praises, and our needs and concerns. **Petitions** Specifically, Lord, today we continue to pray for: Emily Ann (from Sherrie Rice) who is having several challenges, * Jan Martin's brother Reese and Calvin, whose trial started and are still trying to figure that mess out * Jan's son Brian's daughter Kaylynn with a dislocated knee, * Jeff & Linda's friends Kay and Al recovering from an accident * Jan Martin's son's mother-in-law, Fannie Williams, recovering from open heart surgery * and Mary Jo Bell's niece's husband Michael, with cancer * Karen's husband Rich – awaiting what we hope are good test results * Pastor Chuck's friend's granddaughter Victoria, who is still waiting to go into full labor, probably in the next day or so as she went back into the hospital as of last night * and there are others that we have not named out loud today but they are always close to our hearts and on our minds...

Lord, we know you are a loving God who wants to meet our every need. It is in your glorious nature to always show compassionate mercy. You are the hope of the world, and of our hearts. In easy times or in difficult times, our hope remains in you. Continue to make yourself known to us that we may reflect your life as you enable us to live as you have taught us to pray: **Lord's Prayer**

Intro to and Bible Reading 2

The Bible gives us one of God's promises through the prophet Jeremiah, when he talks about how the days of depression and chaos they were experiencing will end. With an everlasting love and unfailing kindness, God will rebuild those who survive the wilderness. They will be like a well-watered garden. Sorrow will evaporate into comfort and joy. Mourning will turn to dancing with joy, for they will once again be a part of a flourishing community of which they can be proud. He will send a leader from among them



who will have access to God like none other. The promise speaks to their immediate restoration after Babylonian exile, but also of a final restoration with Christ. (See Jeremiah 30:18-21, 31:1-13).

When those days come, people will no longer say, “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” Rather, each will die for their own sin; whoever eats sour grapes – their own teeth will be set on edge... The Lord says, “I will make a new covenant with [my] people... It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by their hand to lead them out of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them.

This is the covenant I will make... I will put my law within them, in their minds, and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach their fellow community members, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord’, for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more.”

Jeremiah 31:29-34 (NIV, CJB)

Music So let’s pray that what Jeremiah predicted will come true in our lives. If you are comfortable to stand, let’s do that as we sing

Spirit of God, Descend

Words: George Croly, 1867 Music: Frederick C. Atkinson, 1870

1. Spirit of God, descend upon my heart;
wean it from earth; through all its pulses move;
stoop to my weakness, mighty as thou art,
and make me love thee as I ought to love.
3. Has thou not bid me love thee, God and King?
All, all thine own, soul, heart and strength and mind.
I see thy cross; there teach my heart to cling.
O let me seek thee, and O let me find.
5. Teach me to love thee as thine angels love,
one holy passion filling all my frame;
the kindling of the heaven-descended Dove,
my heart an altar, and thy love the flame.

Sermon Prepare for the New Normal

This series offers us opportunities to reflect, take stock of our spiritual condition, and if necessary, to realign our lives. We're putting the titles, the main ideas, on the banner outside so you can look at it and remind yourself of where we have come. So far we have asked:



What temptation to action -- or inaction -- is trying to hinder you from being the ever-more-faithful person God wants you to become?

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 discipline in my life?

Of course, the intent is not to ask and answer the question and work on it for the moments before the water, or the day, or the week, or the series; but to make adjustments in order to create a new normal way of living, a way that is ever growing ever closer to God and his ways.

It is not easy. And it is easy to make excuses. The excuse in Jeremiah's day was that life was hard because of the decisions and examples set by those who came before them. The proverb they spoke, that the sour grapes the previous generations ate and that is now the bad taste in their own mouths is a colorful way of saying "The parents sinned, and we are the ones who are suffering the consequences of *their* bad actions. ("It is always the mom's fault, right?" (No.)) "We are innocent victims of our parents and environment", they claimed, as they struggled against sin's consequences and maintaining their side of God's covenant relationship with them.

Jeremiah answers the excuse through a new warning – The day is coming when you will be held accountable for your own sour grapes, your own sins. This was already true, always a truth; but they didn't think so, so Jeremiah said, "There is a day coming that it will be". The Bible recognizes that if we act badly, it can have bad influences on those who follow – both around us and those who come after us. But we are held accountable not for what circumstances and influences we have received, but for our own choices, and that has always been true.

But with this warning, Jeremiah is also offering a new day and a new hope. Because we are ultimately responsible for our own decisions, we can choose to

leave behind all those influences of others' bad actions that we have received. Jeremiah offers this hope because he believes God's purpose and power is still working for and in his people -- and new days are coming – and a new covenant. And while he doesn't spell it out in this particular text, the new covenant will be effective for several reasons.

First, because it is based on God's initiative. It always has been. God sought us in the Garden of Eden, he sought us when he called Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, he sought us as (through Moses), as he led them out of slavery and into the promised land, he sought us in the prophets, priests, and kings, and then more prophets, and ultimately in Jesus who said, “[I have come] to seek and to save those who are lost.” (Luke 19:10 (NLT))

God's new covenant relationship is effective because (GNCRiEB): it is based on God's initiative.

The new covenant will also be effective because God's goal and mission is that he will always have a community who are his chosen people. The covenant

GNCRiEB it is meant to fulfill God's purpose

formula “I will be their God and they will be my people” (Jeremiah 31:33b) was well known. It started in Genesis and is a thread throughout the Bible and is quoted again in Revelation. It meant and means that there is an intimate personal knowledge which arises between two persons who are completely committed to one another in a relationship that touches mind, emotion, and will. That is what God wants with us.

And, the covenant will be effective also because it recognizes our inability to hold our part up. Historically, God's people have always been

GNCRiEB it recognizes (and deals with) our inability

happy to bask in all that God had given them, but many have also been unwilling, or if willing, unable; to live up to God's expectations of being his holy people. Everything breaks apart on the sheer stubbornness of our sinful nature.

Therefore, even if we don't make excuses and do take responsibility, we still are forced to acknowledge the challenge to change. I don't know what answers you've been throwing in the bowl over the last few weeks, or in the weeks to come, what God may be wanting you to think about or work on, but I know for me, this isn't the first time I have throwing these areas to work on in a bowl or some other visual or in prayers.

Jeremiah acknowledges this challenge early in his writings when he wrote:

Can a [person change the color] of his skin or a leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil. (Jeremiah 13:23)

Yet even so, Jeremiah recognizes that from the very beginning, they knew the people were unable to fulfill the covenant. Right on the heels of the people promising to obey, Joshua said, “No you can’t” (That’s my translation)... and he may have just been trying to motivate them to really get committed, “Yes we can!!”, but there is truth in the statement too, for all through the Old Testament, again and again, a big part of the story is how they broke covenant. But God chases them anyway.

For on the other hand, this has never deterred God from working and reworking with his people. He has always been faithful even when his people were not -- . It is for this reason that the covenant succeeds. We keep pressing forward, and Jeremiah promises a new day, and a new covenant, because God simply refuses to give up and keeps working not only his side of the covenant, but working on our fulfillment of the covenant as well.

(See Jeremiah 31:33b, Also see Ezekiel 11:19) God’s new covenant relationship is effective because it moves us from stone to heart, it moves us from the old way of an external response to outward demands. It becomes what it was always intended to be – God’s will written on our minds and in our hearts; and because he reaches deeply into our lives, our positive response to God becomes second nature – because it comes from him from within -- deep within our conscience.

GNCRIEB: it moves us from Stone to Heart

(Jeremiah 31:34) God’s new covenant relationship is effective, says Jeremiah, because it is empowered by the Spirit he gifts to our hearts

GNCRIEB: it moves us from Conformation to transformation

when we believe in him. Therefore, we no longer try in our own strength, but the strength of the Spirit is added to our efforts to accomplish God’s desire for us. Because it is already written within all God’s people, “we will no longer have to teach each other right and wrong – everyone will already know” all of that stuff -- because God transforms everyone from the inside out. Jesus doesn’t just show us how, he enters us and helps us die to sin and rise to life. And once he is within, we are able to live it — out.

(Jeremiah 31:32) God's new covenant relationship is also effective because our faith is no longer found in lineage, in our historical heritage. In the old

GNCRIEB: it moves us from heritage to inheritance

ways, everything pointed back to the Exodus and being in the lineage of their ancestors Abraham and Moses. But God's constant care – combined with God's people perpetually failing the covenant -- led Jeremiah (and other prophets), to shift from primarily looking back to what God had done for them (as it didn't seem to be sufficient enough of a motivation) and begin looking forward to what God was going to do for them – and especially in the the coming of the Messiah – in Jesus.

We too, look back to the Old Testament salvation story of the Exodus yes, but primarily to the New Testament salvation story of the cross – but we also look forward to a new day; a new heaven and a new earth; and we are living in that present day, day by day – step by step – with the Spirit of God residing within, moving toward that new day as new people... We have something to look forward to, not just something to look back on.

(Jeremiah 31:34b-37) But the biggest reason that makes God's new covenant possible, then, now, and in the future, is God's promise to be faithful to

GNCRIEB: it moves us to God's gracious forgiveness

us. Jeremiah expresses it eloquently, but I'll just summarize his words... The God who makes the sun shine by day, the moon and stars by night – who stirs up the seas so that the waves roar – only if *all of this vanishes* will my people ever cease being my people, in spite of what they have done. The day you can accurately and physically measure the heavens above and explore the foundations of the earth below is the day that I will reject my people for all their sins. In other words, God is saying, "I will *never* abandon you," because none of that stuff is possible to do. Instead, he says, "I will forgive them and remember their sins no more"...and I'll add, and God's children, we will become more and more like him as he is revealed in the Messiah, in the life of Jesus.

With a God like the God we have, who did what he did in Jesus and in the Spirit of God, creating a new covenant and willing to transform us to become the best people of God we can become; how could we not desire and strive to be the best people we can be?

In many areas – perhaps of what we have been putting in the water – maybe something else -- what we are learning is that temporarily going through the process is one thing, but we cannot return to the old habits of living -- or we will

find ourselves back “out of shape”, or “falling off the wagon”, or slipping back to whatever it is we have tried to progress away from, whatever goal God has given to us. Not that the journey is always smooth and straight ahead and there are never any setbacks. I don’t know about you, but not every grape or blueberry or strawberry that I put in my mouth do I realize it is sour until I have actually bitten it, hmm [yes]? or apple, if you want to make it relevant to Bible stories (though the Bible doesn’t actually say that forbidden fruit in Eden was an apple). Sometimes I can kind of tell, and I take a chance anyway, hmm [agree]? That too! Yes... And some people, even though they can really tell – it is obvious – they still do it, especially as we see it as a metaphor for something else. As I said earlier, sometimes that what I placed in the water were not necessarily new topics for me, – we may have setbacks and reversals; but *generally* speaking – over time, if we do not give up, whatever temptations we have we should be being defeating more and more, and whatever disciplines we are incorporating the habit should become more and more engrained in our life, and overall, they will begin to move us from what was old normal to a new normal way of living. So we had the little desk plant that is now up to here...



Paraphrasing Paul into our context, he warns us not to go back...

... now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? ... I fear [everything you have gained will be wasted. (Galatians 4:8-11) (NIV)

Keep going, he is trying to tell us. And the proverb warns

[The one who goes back] in heart will be filled with the fruit of his ways, and a good man will be filled with the fruit of his ways. (Proverbs 14:14) (ESV)

Therefore, the author of Hebrews encourages --

each of you to show... diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised (Hebrews 6:11-12)

And Paul adds,

what really counts is that... if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ... (Galatians 6:15b, 2 Corinthians 5:17-18a)

God faithfully brings newness to us. With the rising of the sun, we have a new start. Day after day after day we can begin again. Unfortunately for some of us, we are left with the temptation to “Ehh, there is going to be a new day, so I’ll just wait for that new day and...” You know how that goes, “Tomorrow will always be there”, right? Then tomorrow never comes and nothing gets accomplished because it is always “tomorrow”. So we have to be careful about that because that will keep us in the old normal. But let us seek to take advantage of the new opportunities God gives us daily, like our struggling plant -- to move a little higher, to get a little greener, to move along in our life and reach new levels of growth. So, the question for the day, as we put our new starts into God’s hands, making ourselves available to work with and within us. Let’s ponder this question for our pieces of paper. ***What new normal, what new pattern, what new habit, what new way of living -- does God want to accomplish in me so I can soar to new heights?*** [Repeat]

Invitation to the Water

Let’s pray. Lord when we recognize the initiative you took to save us, when we consider the purpose for which you have created us, when we realize the lengths to which you have gone to enable us to fulfill our part of the covenant, in essence fulfilling it for us by your gracious faithful love, re-writing your will into our hearts -- where it was always intended to be, shaping and transforming us into what we were created to be, constantly forgiving our failures and focusing on our future potential, how can we do anything less than give you all that we are so that you can make us become what we were meant to be and are meant to be. We are here to make ourselves available to you. Amen.

In a moment, the instruments are going to play *Jesus, We Are Here*. After they have played it a few times to allow you to think about what you want to put on your paper, I will put my paper in and begin singing softly – (you can join me if you desire) and you can bring your paper to the living water where it dissolves in the water as a prayer to God. The song will be repeated until all have brought their paper to the living water or have someone bring it for you if that is helpful. Let’s ponder our new normal while they play.



Jesus, We Are Here

Words and Music: Patrick Matsikenyiri © 1990, 1996 General Board of Global Ministries, GBG Music

Jesus, we are here, Jesus we are here,
Jesus, we are here, we are here for you.
(Repeated until procession of papers is done)

Music Now join me on “God of the Bible” it is a simple tune,, stand with me on the last verse, I and the TVs will let you know when that is....

God of the Bible

Words: Shirley Erena Murray Music: Tony Alonso
© 1996 Hope Publishing Co, 2001 GIA Publications

1. God of the Bible, God in the Gospel,
hope seen in Jesus, hope yet to come.
you are our center, daylight or darkness,
freedom or prison, you are our home.
2. God in our struggles, God in our hunger,
suffering with us, taking our part,
still you empower us, mothering Spirit,
feeding, sustaining, from your own heart.
4. Not by your finger, not by your anger
will our world order change in a day,
but by your people, fearless and faithful,
[birthing new systems*]. lighting the way.
5. Hope we must carry, shining and certain
through all our turmoil, terror and loss,
bonding us gladly one to the other,
till our world changes, facing the Cross.

(* this phrase was from verse 3) (Refrain was not sung, so not printed here)

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**