

# *Straight from the "Hart"*

August 24, 2023

## **Prepare – for the Critical Hour**



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

### **Affirmation of God's Covenant Through Jesus**

(P – Pastor, C – Reader with Congregation)

P: God's covenant is placed in our minds and written on our hearts.

**C: He will be our God, and we will be his people.**

P: From the least to the greatest, everyone will know God, for he forgives wickedness and remembers sins no more.

**C: Have mercy on us, O God, according to your unfailing love. Cleanse us from sin.**

P: During Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death. He was heard because of his reverent submission.

**C: He was God's Son, but He learned trusting and obedience by what he suffered, just as we do.**

P: Then, having arrived at perfect maturity,

**C: He became the Source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.**

Inspired by Jeremiah 31:31-34, Psalm 51:1-2, 7-12, Hebrews 5:7-9

### **Opening Prayer**

Loving God, you are ever faithful and gracious. You love us and believe in us more than we do ourselves. You call us to walk with Christ and become more than we ever thought possible. Receive these gifts. In them, hear our gratitude. Accept our praise offered in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

ad from © 2004 Brian Wren, in *Worship & Song, Leadership Edition*

### **Call to Worship**

Together, we have come to seek our God, to seek direction, to turn our hearts and faces toward our heavenly home, to hold tight to our God, and to always remember that we are bound to him in an everlasting covenant. So let's open our hearts to the Trinity, the God of peace, and again receive his forgiving grace, equipping us to do his will through Jesus Christ to whom belongs all the glory.

Inspired by Jeremiah 50:4b-5 (NIV, MSG, CEV), v3 of "Come, Let Us Use the Grace Divine" (which is in part based on Hebrews 13:20-21)

## Come, Let Us Use the Grace Divine

Words: Charles Wesley, 1762

Music: English melody; arr. by Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1906

1. Come, let us use the grace divine, and all with one accord,  
in a perpetual covenant join ourselves to Christ the Lord;  
give up ourselves, thru Jesus' power, his name to glorify;  
and promise, in this sacred hour, for God to live and die.
2. The covenant we this moment make be ever kept in mind;  
we will no more our God forsake, or cast these words behind.  
We never will throw off the fear of God who hears our vow;  
and if thou art well pleased to hear, come down and meet us now.

### Theme

The island of two faces got its name because one face, one side of the island was watered by rivers and was filled with trees, flowers, birds and easy and abundant food, while on the other face, the other side, there were hardly any resources at all. Fresh water was scarce, plants were rare, and the wild beasts crowded together, desperate for survival often forcing them into vicious attacks of each other and the people who lived there. Isolated from the world, these people labored endlessly in permanent terror of the beasts and in the always dim hope that they could survive through another growing season.

They felt forced to do this because between the two faces of the island was a great cliff. Legend told that some of their ancestors will able to cross with just the help of a small pole carved from a tree, but for these many years of bad weather, not a single tree had grown strong enough to make such a pole, so most of the people believed the legend to be a fairy tale dreamed up many generations ago by a fantasizer...

But nature being what it was, precisely along the edge of the cliff separating the two sides of the island, a skinny but strong tree grew, from which they could carve two poles. The feeling of anticipation was enormous and no doubt the political and religious leader of the community would be chosen to use the poles, for with their leadership and the resources from the other side, they would surely figure out a way to bring prosperity back to the community or bring the community to that prosperous side.

But the two leaders secretly felt afraid that the pole would break, or wouldn't be long enough, or something else would go wrong during the jump, and even more, that even if they were successful, they wouldn't be able to bridge the resources

from the other side -- back to their people. But they also didn't want to be ridiculed for being afraid. So they invented and leaked many stories and legends about failed jumps to the other side. The propaganda worked and every member of the community thought it would be reckless and foolish for anyone to even try to jump. And the poles laid by the cliff, available, but untouched. In fact, over time, it was not written, but it became a forbidden act to even touch the poles – for to touch them would be to intimate that you wanted to escape the community's endurance under suffering which, in their own eyes, since there were no others to see, had become its most noble and honorable trait.

Born into the community were a boy and girl, young hearts who wanted a better future. Encouraged by the strength of their love, they decided to take up the poles. Nobody physically stopped them, but they did try to discourage them the best they could by naming the dangers, the legends, the explanations of why they couldn't and shouldn't try.

The young girl couldn't help but wonder "What if what they say is true?"

The boy replied "They talk like experts about a leap they've never made. I am scared too, but it doesn't look too difficult. Don't worry." he tried to reassure her, ever determined for a better life.

"It'll be bad if it goes wrong." she hesitated.

"Yes, But staying here to be eaten by animals or starving from famine isn't exactly a dream life either" he said, "It is just a slower. More miserable way to the same end."

So they agreed. The time was set. The next day would be the day – they would jump before they became too old or weak to try... the pair took up the poles, backed up, and took their run. The fear hardly allowed them to breathe. As they launched from the pole and flew through the air, helpless and without support -- they felt that something surely must have gone wrong and certain death awaited them. But then they landed on the other side of the island safely and happily hugged each other. They thought the jump wasn't really that hard at all. As they walked further on to discover their new life, they could hear the old community calling like a choir behind them. "It was just luck. Well... maybe tomorrow. What terrible form! Had it not been for the pole ..."

And the young couple began to understand why no one had dared take up to pole -- because on the bad side of the island, all you ever hear are the resigned voices of people without dreams, filled with fear and despair, who had no vision to leap

when the opportunity presented itself...

ad. from "The Island of Two Sides" by Pedro Pablo Sacristán on freestoriesforkids.com  
 [Move to wilderness display, pick up hourglass] This story, and the Bible teach us about our attitude toward and the use of our time. It may seem like at least some major events and decisions may lie in front of us without a specific deadline. But that doesn't mean we can wait till tomorrow, for tomorrow --- never --- comes. And even if it does, if we aren't working toward it now, we will not be prepared for it when it arrives. The result is that we may miss good opportunities, or we may overly struggle and stumble when a temptation or an unwelcome situation is thrust upon us. So whether life is currently just a routine passing of the hours, or



something is happening that is turning life upside down [flip the hourglass] It is important that we take hold of the grace and gifts God has given us and are always moving forward, growing our heart and spirit and developing our character to handle whatever may come our way, and to be able to seize every opportunity to make a better world. [Put the hour-glass back in wilderness] We'll hear from Paul in a minute, but Peter writes this.

His divine power has given us everything we need for a life of pleasing God ... For this very reason, *don't lose a minute* in building on what you've been given. *make every effort* to add to your faith ... these [Christian character] qualities in increasing measure. With these active and growing in your lives, *no day will pass* without its reward as you mature. They will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive ... Therefore, *make every effort* to confirm your calling and his choice of you. For if you do these things, you'll have your life on a firm footing, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 1:3a,5a, 8b,10-11 (*emphasis added*) (NIV, MSG)

And then when God sees a need in his world, you will be ready to answer when he calls you to do that work for him.

**Special Music** Mike Kenel

### **Here I am, Lord**

Words and Music: Dan Schutte, 1981 ad. by Carlton R Young, 1988

© 1981,1983,1989 Daniel L Schutte and NALR

(Words below were adapted to the soloist's version)

1. He who made the sea and sky,  
he who heard his people cry.

All who dwell in dark and sin his hand will save.

He has made the stars of night,  
he will make their darkness bright.

Who will bear his light to them? Whom shall he send?

Refrain

Here I am, Lord. It is I, Lord.

I have heard you calling in the night.

I will go, Lord, if you lead me.

I will hold your people in my heart.

Lord, here I am.



## Intro to and Bible Reading 1



In the critical moments, God calls his people to fulfill his mission in the world – to live for him and invite others to do the same by the faithful way we speak and live, so that when others experience critical moments in their lives, we will already be prepared to be a positive, appealing and inviting light of Christ for them. Paul puts it this way in some of his letters...

We were sent to speak for Christ and God is making his appeal through us, begging you to listen to our message. Make peace with God. How? In Christ. God put the sin on him who never sinned! So that in him we might become right and acceptable to God... God reminds us in Scriptures that when the time came, I listened to you, and when you needed help, I came to save you. Don't put it off. Don't frustrate God's work. The time has come. I tell you that now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

2 Corinthians 5:20-21,6:2 (NIV, MSG, CEV)

That is why it is said in Scripture: "Wake up, sleeper, and rise from the death [of the sinful life], and Christ will shine on you." Be very careful how you live – not as unwise but with good sense. These are evil times, so make every minute count. Make the most of every chance you get. Don't live carelessly, unthinkingly. Make sure you understand what the Lord's will is.

Ephesians 5:14b-17 (NIV, MSG, CEV)

<sup>5</sup> Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders (toward unbelievers); make good use of the time and make the most of every opportunity. <sup>6</sup> Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, Be ready to know how to give answers to anyone who asks questions so that you may bring out the best in others and not put them down or cut them out.

Colossians 4:5-6 (NIV, MSG, CEV)

### **Special Music** Seasonal Singers

As the Seasonal Singers come, the hymnwriter makes his appeal to us through music, first to experience the full and abundant life of Jesus, and then to share that life with everyone we meet. Join us on the refrain as we sing Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus, prepare our hearts for prayer.



### **Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus**

Words & Music: Helen Howarth Lemmel, 1922

O soul, are you weary and troubled? No light in the darkness you see?  
There's light for a look at the Savior, a life more abundant and free!

## Refrain

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face,  
and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

Through death into life everlasting he passed, and we follow him there;  
Over us sin no more hath dominion - for more than conquerors we are!

## Refrain

His word shall not fail you - he promised; believe him, and all will be well;  
then go to a world that is dying, his perfect salvation to tell!

## Refrain

**Prayers**

Almighty and merciful God, your unfailing Word calls us to abide in you so that we may be fruitful and experience a free and full life. Dwell in us so that it is no longer we who live, but your Spirit living in and through us. Then, we are empowered by a holy love that reminds us to repent when needed, enables us to seek forgiveness and to forgive others when perceived failures and faults rise to the surface, encourages us to faithfulness and obedience, invites us to joyous worship, and beckons us to intimacy with you our Creator and care for our creation. We bless you and praise you for loving us with an everlasting, limitless love and for entrusting to us the responsibility and joy of participating in your reign.

**Petitions** Be with those who celebrate today for a variety of reasons. Be with those who are facing challenges that worry our days and haunt our nights. Specifically, we pray for \* Bert Honour's request for the family and friends of Bob Wachol, who suddenly passed away last Friday \* for the Gordinier's friends Kay and Al, has had a setback while recovering from a car accident, \* for Mike Kenel's close cousin, Pastor Mark Williams, who had heart surgery postponed. We continue to pray for \* The Campbell's daughter Sara recovering from oral surgery; \* for Brian Slutter, recovering from a heart attack \* Jan Martin's friend Darlene Tidmore with several health issues.\* Jan Martin's brother Reese and his son Calvin and their legal issues. \* David Babcock – searching for a better job. \* Jim Malott \* and we continue to pray for those unnamed except in our hearts and minds, and we take just a moment to lift them up to you from our hearts to your heart in this moment of silence. [Pause] Now remind us of all of your caring goodness that moves us toward each next of our journey in life and toward you. We give you thanks for all the fullness of life we have experienced in you, and we give that thanks in the name of Jesus Christ who taught us to pray... **Lord's Prayer**

## Intro to and Bible Reading 2:

People went out to greet Jesus because he raised Lazarus from the grave as a sign of his power over life and death. The Pharisees saw this and complained to each other that their efforts to squelch Jesus were futile. Their plans had not accomplished anything, for whole world was going after him. And to prove the point, the author of the story then tells of some Greeks who came to Philip wanting to meet Jesus. Philip told Andrew, and together they went to Jesus. Jesus saw this request as a fulfillment of the Psalmist's promise that when the



Messiah rules, all the nations would come to worship and serve God. So instead of what you would expect – Jesus meeting with the Greeks, or politely declining the request made through the two disciples, instead

See John 12:17-22

Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. "Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it is destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal. "If any of you wants to serve me, then follow me. Then you'll be where I am, ready to serve at a moment's notice. The Father will honor and reward anyone who serves me.

"Right now, my soul is shaken. And what am I going to say? 'Father, get me out of this, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason that I came to this hour in the first place. I'll say, 'Father, glorify your name!' " ... At this moment the world is in crisis. Now Satan, the prince of this world, will be driven out. And I, as I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself and gather them around me."

John 12:23-28,31-32 (MSG, NIV)

**Music:** ... Jesus seized the day, made the most of his time on this earth to do what was right according to his calling, and brought glory to the heavenly Father by making a way for us to be at peace with God through him. If comfortable standing, let's stand before the sermon and sing



## To God Be the Glory

Words: Fanny J. Crosby, 1875 Music: William H. Doane, 1875

1. To God be the glory, great things he hath done!  
So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,  
who yielded his life an atonement for sin,  
and opened the lifegate that all may go in.

### Refrain

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,  
let the earth hear his voice!

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,  
let the people rejoice!

O come to the Father thru Jesus the Son,  
and give him the glory, great things he hath done!

2. O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,  
to every believer the promise of God;  
the vilest offender who truly believes,  
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

### Refrain

3. Great things he hath taught us, great things he hath done,  
and great our rejoicing thru Jesus the Son;  
but purer, and higher, and greater will be  
our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see.

### Refrain



## Sermon Prepare – For the Critical Hour

I am a believer, but maybe you are with me in having a hard time believing -- that we are almost three months away from a new year. Time flies. It seems like one day blends into the next and one week is like the next and it seems we just don't notice how fast it goes by. But then there are those times that we recognize certain life changing moments. They stick out like a big neon bookmark in our journal of our life. Some markers are of great joy like graduations and marriages and new jobs and new homes and new babies or grand babies or great grand babies. Others are -- not so pleasant. Sometimes we can see them coming for a long time -- other times we find ourselves suddenly stumbling into them completely unaware.

The question is, when those hours come, what will we do with them? Especially the ones that we don't necessarily look forward to... Will we try to sidestep or

back step to escape those moments, or will we plunge in and make the most of them?

Last week we looked at a liturgy in the Psalms that included a hope that the whole world would be welcomed to God and his sanctuary. When Jesus heard that Greeks (“people from the world”) were seeking him – Jesus tapped a big neon bookmark of his life’s mission -- a new and different time had arrived. “It’s time,” he said, “the hour has come”. It’s why he came in the first place, but he also confesses that if it were possible, he’d prefer to escape it. Now, in this critical hour, Jesus has a decision to make. And between recognizing that the hour was critical, and the choice he chose; he tells a quick farming story to illustrate why he chooses what he chose.

I think it was Ray Stedman who drew the story out something like this: Imagine a grain of wheat looking at itself, admiring itself. So round, so brown, so fully packed, [so full of itself] and thinking, "Philosophy asks me to fall into the dark, cold ground and lose myself. I don't want to do that. I like myself the way I am, I don't want to change. If others don't like it, that's their problem, not mine. I want to hang on to myself, I want to be me." And if the grain chooses to remain the same, it has that right, and it will never change.

But supposing the grain of wheat said, "I'm told there is more to come, a lot more to life than I am experiencing now, and the only way I can reach it is to fall into the dark ground and die. I don't want to, but when the time comes, I'll do it." And it does. It falls to the ground and is covered up. It's dark and it is unpleasant. The grain thinks, "Why did I ever listen to that idea? I don't like this at all." Then it begins to feel a tickle on its back. It turns around and sees a white sprout coming out. It panics, "What's happening to me? I didn't anticipate this! I've got to get control of this situation!" But it discovers there is a hidden lordship which took over the moment it fell into the ground. That lordship directs the process so that a certain part goes down, while another part goes up and soon breaks through into the sunlight. Eventually, the grain is no longer a grain and says, "This really is much better. I'm enjoying this. This is a lot better than when I was in the ground, and even better than before I was in the ground." The sprout comes, then the blade, then the stalk, and finally the head. The grain of wheat says, "I feel fulfilled." Then those grains in the head fall into the ground and they go through the same process again and again until at last a great, shimmering field of wheat is growing, beautiful, rippling

in golden in the sun. The grain of wheat concludes, "Ah, this is life as it was intended to be." Fruitful.

The beginning of the gospel is that the grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die. But it is not the end. The end is, "If it dies, it bears much fruit." That is where real life, full life begins. Of course, the grain really has no control or choice – a farmer throws it into the ground and nature takes over. But as a metaphor for us higher beings, we do have a choice – not just when those critical neon bookmarks pop up in our life – who will I marry, what career will I strive for, which home and where and for how long, what kind of parent / grandparent will I be? And all the rest of those major questions. And those are just the (normally) positive bookmarks -- but it is a choice we must make, not only in those significant times, even in the dull, routine day as well -- to try and save our seediness (and lose everything), or to lose ourselves in something – or Someone -- greater than ourselves and find life as it is meant to be.

Jesus had the choice to try and save himself, or in obedience, choose to move beyond his suffering, beyond his terror, beyond life itself – knowing in faith -- that with time -- he would see the sun again in ways he could never have seen it before. That faith-led choice allowed him to plunge ahead so that God could fulfill his purposes through him and would glorify his name. Jesus chose to be planted in the earth so that God could bring his plan of salvation to fruition.

And because of Jesus' choice, we too have an opportunity to find and be a part of something greater than ourselves – and have access to his power to do something about the habits that destroy us, about those actions or inactions that hurt ourselves and/or others, about those evil forces that seek to sabotage our plans and wreck our highest hopes and dreams – and we listen and are afraid to “pick up to pole” (from the Theme) In the cross, the power of the devil and his worldly philosophies are broken, and the deliverance of individuals and communities is made possible.

Life and fruitfulness comes through death, through self-giving - to God, to people, to the task. There is a principle that declares that, generally speaking, that what you persist in doing is what you will become. And what you do not persist in doing, you will eventually not be able to do it anymore (usually summed up as “use it or lose it”, right?). As a highschooler, I dislocated my shoulder. Eventually, I dislocated it so many times it required surgery, after which I had to wear a sling (yet again) immobilizing my arm for 6 weeks. When the repaired shoulder came

out of the sling, I found that that was just the beginning of the healing. Normal function in the shoulder and arm had to be relearned, especially to regain strength – and some of it never came back. What is true in the physical world is also true in the spiritual world. If we don't exercise faith when we have the opportunity, we will gradually lose the ability to do so.

In a previous home in which I lived, there was an electrical problem. A circuit breaker kept cutting off electricity from several important appliances. At first, we thought this was due to an overload, so we began turning off certain appliances while we monitored the circuit. That didn't help. It got worse, so that even one operating appliance tripped the circuit every few minutes. I thought the circuit breaker itself might be faulty. On careful inspection I discovered it was not the breaker, but that one wire leading into that circuit breaker was touching another wire that was going to something else. Although the wires were insulated, when I pulled them apart, I found that the insulation had worn away or burned away, so that a current could cross over and, when it crossed over it would pop the circuit.

As I repaired the wires, I thought of the operation of faith. We all have a capacity for faith -- but frequently some misuse leaks the faith away. We compromise, we deny something is wrong, we choose not to invest ourselves; and faith drains away till the circuit breaker of natural law pops and turns off the flow of God's power, lest it destroy us, because that is what happens if it keeps on going... It is an act of protective mercy...

Jesus makes it clear that the one who tries to keep -- loses, and the one who loses themselves in the right things finds fulfillment. But understand that it is not a matter of simply keeping or losing. The question isn't: do we keep ourselves or lose ourselves, but rather – in what or who are we going to lose ourselves? We are going to “lose ourselves” into something – what is it going to be? What are we going to invest our lives in? Do we lose ourselves in self-preservation – to the point of denying everything else, or in doing what leads to fully bloomed life? Is something draining our faith away? Are our attempts at self-preservation, of holding on to things we shouldn't be holding on to – consuming our time and energy and causing us to lose out on the fullness of life? Or, are we giving ourselves wholeheartedly to faith in Christ and to his will and to our created purpose and by which we will gain the full (and eternal) life?

Whether expected or sudden, whether positive or negative, we cannot sidestep those neon marker moments of life – or at least we cannot do it in a way that we

won't lose out – but what will we lose, and what will we gain? The choice is ours. Christ chose what he chose, and we now know the glory he received for it, and what we, what the world, gained for his choice.

Our challenge is that we want to get from the seed to the glorious amber waves of grain without going through the scary dark place, without sacrificial effort. We want Christmas without the spiritual preparations of Advent, we want Easter but the running joke is that we've given up Lent for Lent, we want to skip that part, especially the messiness of Ash Wednesday and holy week, especially the Thursday servitude and betrayals and desertions and Good Friday, not to mention the terror of the days that followed – when Jesus' disciples were cowering away in secret rooms, being hunted to be killed liked their master...

Pastor William Willimon wrote this: I started another ruckus at church. I asked an amateur woodcarver in the congregation to use his talents to carve a processional cross for our church. I had in mind something simple, modern and clean, something light enough for a white-robed adolescent to carry on Sundays. On the first Sunday of Lent, what we found was a dramatic cross, heavy, complete with a realistic, hanging, crucified Christ, blood and everything. Some managed to like it because a nice person had made it. Some liked it because they appreciated the intricate carving. But many were upset because it was "more Catholic than Methodist," "gory and depressing," or didn't "go with the liturgical colors." Willimon asks, what is a modern... well-budgeted Methodist church to do with a bloody cross these days?

A few years prior, Willimon's Episcopal pastor friend put up three crosses draped in black on the front lawn of his church and received a dozen calls complaining that the crosses made the neighborhood look bad. Christ's, or humanity's cruelty and suffering, it seems, is something unpleasant that happens to other people, more annoying than ennobling, something to be eradicated by the latest wonder drug or meditative technique. Or to put it in today's context – we don't like to be reminded that real life is found in the discipline of self-denial and real sacrifice.

[We want to sit on the thrones around thee Throne, not take the towel, kneel down, and wash the feet and serve -- even the feet of our friends. We want the power of the Lord -- to lord it over others, not to follow the Lord who gathered his disciples to say, this is my command -- Love as I love, this is my body, broken for you. This cup is my blood spilled out for you – given to forgive – forgive as I have forgiven.

We can't really blame Peter when he takes Jesus aside and said that is not the kind of master we signed up for? We live by the pleasure and comfort principle. We want nothing more than a "nice day". What are we to do with the reality of a twisted body hanging from a cross? We are quick to strip the body off the cross, remove the splinters, cover it in stain, or silver or gold, and make it clean and triumphant, reminding ourselves that he is no longer dead but risen from the death machine. (And that is a good truth to remind ourselves of as well). But we also have to pause to consider how it got to be that way. Going back to Willimon, he concludes: Down the carpeted aisle of our modern sanctuary, where the gospel is made intellectually digestible in once-a-week [palatable] doses, a cross is brought in by a *groaning* youth. It is a crucifix, a visible believable body on a cross, the work of a layman's hands, a layman who, despite what I have told him, sheds a tear and continues to be stupefied that God's love should be made so explicit, and continues to be drawn to the simple truth that "Jesus did it all for you and for me."

### **Invitation to the Water** [move to wilderness display]

Jesus tells us to remember what he did in one of his critical hours, so that we may continue to be his and follow his example. And now we grasp that paper and hold it in our hand, [pick up the hourglass] we consider the sand of our wilderness, now pouring through the hourglass, time marching forward, not pausing, not waiting for us to get on board with the full, sacrificial life. Today may be the marker of a daily choice, or it we choose, it could be a neon marker for us – a turning point that will move us to a resolution that from this day forward.... like when Jesus resolutely set his face toward Jerusalem, knowing what it would bring... but also what it would ultimately bring -- healing and hope when we experience those darker neon markers of our life's journal and journey. Consider this to scribble on your paper or imagine scribbling it on your paper: **Is there an area of my life about which I need to make a decision in this "hour"** (Repeat)



Let's pray while we consider what we may write or imagine writing on our paper... or maybe there is something else going on in your life write now, you can write that down instead or as well... Let's pray while we consider -- this is our last opportunity to bring our paper prayers to the living water, [pour water here] so let's make it a good one. Let's pray.

## **with prayer and meditation**

Lord, you remind us that the world is in crisis, a cosmic battle is taking place – and while it is clear you won the victory, we also realize that our world is still in crisis, battling like the outcome is still in doubt. Remind us again of the depths to which you have gone to offer us full life – and the depths to which we need to venture to experience it.

We confess that we are too easily satisfied with the status quo, too willing to let the sands of time trickle away, failing to act on your purposes for us. We expect service from others / but pass by our own opportunities to serve. We expect to be accepted and loved as we are / but we are too quick to demand others to change to fit our expectations of what we think they should be.

We crave being mature in faith and a powerful Christian, yet sometimes for all the wrong reasons, such as gaining things for ourselves instead of for you and your kingdom. But even when it is with the best of motivations, we still seek to skip to the victorious end of the gospel -- to life in Christ – without first going to the ground, without going to (much less picking up) our cross, refusing to crucify our sinful natures.

We want to find love, but we are impatiently filled with jealousy and arrogance. In our quest to be honored, we fail to honor others. In seeking for ourselves, we don't offer ourselves, we are easily angered, and we keep score of each wound. We don't rejoice with other's joys, we protect only ourselves, trust only ourselves, and hope only in ourselves, and then we wonder why our love fails.

And yet, Jesus, you didn't give yourself over to the cross so that everyone would boast about what happens next. You did it because you were *not* thinking of yourself, but only of your great love for us. Your love never fails, and because of that we cling to every word, we seek out your wisdom, forgive us for our greed for glory and power and status.

Remind us that we are all deeply, deeply, accepted and loved as we are, so much so that while we were yet sinners, you came and sought us out, and died for us, and that by accepting your lordship and direction; we too can take up our cross and enter the ground knowing there is a rich and full life awaiting to burst us out into the dawn of a new creation.

With that hope; while the music plays, we use our papers to consider what decision must be made in what area of our lives, or write something that is even more pressing for you to deal with at this time...

## Instrumental Music [people meditate, write on paper, then bring them forward]



**Music:** Whether we feel like it is a critical time in our life or not, the best way to prepare for our future and whatever future events may come our way is to focus on Christ and his wisdom for us. If you are comfortable to stand, let's do so for the final hymn and blessing...

### Be Thou My Vision

Words: Ancient Irish; trans. by Mary E. Byrne, 1905; versed by Eleanor H. Hull, 1912, alt.

Music: Trad. Irish melody; harm. by Carlton R. Young, 1963

Alt. © 1989 The United Methodist Publishing House,  
harm. © 1964 Abingdon House

1. Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;  
naught be all else to me, save that thou art.  
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,  
Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.
2. Be thou my Wisdom, and thou my true word;  
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;  
Thou and thou only, first in my heart,  
great God of heaven, my treasure thou art.
3. Great God of heaven, my victory won,  
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's Sun!  
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

**Series Blessing:** Now with our hearts and minds set on Jesus and not letting time march on without us, 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.

Pstr: Amen. **C: Amen**

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