

Straight from the "Hart"

October 8, 2023

Showers of Blessing: Compelled



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

Offering/Opening Prayer

Great and holy God, we sing, we pray; we stand in awe of your creation and we are humbled by your love. You have given to us even when we did not ask. In this moment, we only ask that you accept our appreciation for all your mercies. We offer our resources. We offer ourselves. We pray that both these gifts and our lives will honor you in the name of Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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Call to Worship

Come before the Lord with jubilant joy. Sing praises to our God who rides upon the clouds. He shakes the earth and the heavens pour down badly needed showers of abundantly refreshing rain. Come and be refreshed by the God who restores as a father and protector and presence of those who seek his goodness.

Inspired by Psalm 68:3-10

Affirmation of God's Holiness

(P – Pastor, C – Reader with Congregation)

P: The prayer is that we will open the eyes of our heart, the very center and core of our being, that we may be enlightened by the Holy Spirit --

C: that we may know the rich and glorious future hope to which God calls his holy people,

P: That we may *believe* in one God, who is Creator, maker of all we see and all we don't see;

C: He is the Ruler of the universe, the Source of all creation!

P: That we may believe in one God, who is Jesus Christ, God from God, true God and true human.

C: He is one with the Creator; the Word made flesh, our Messiah, the Savior of all creation!

P: That we may believe in one God, who is Holy Spirit, the Breath of God moving among us.

C: He is one with the Creator; one with the Christ; our Comforter and our Guide, the Mentor of all creation!

P: That we may see the Lord sitting on a high, lofty throne, the hem of his robe filling the temple. And heavenly creatures standing around him crying in voices that shook the foundations of the Temple doors:

C: “More holy than the holiest holiness is the All-Powerful Lord! The whole earth is filled with his glory!” Inspired by Ephesians 1:8; ad, from Affirmation of Faith: Creator God © Lisa Frenz, on Lisa’s Liturgies; inspired by Isaiah 6:1-4 (CJB and others)

MUSIC Let’s move into our worship by singing Open the Eyes of My Heart

Open the Eyes of My Heart

Words: Paul Baloche, Music: arr by David Shipps
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Open the eyes of my heart, Lord. Open the eyes of my heart;
I want to see you, I want to see you.
(Repeat)

To see you high and lifted up, shining in the light of your glory.
Pour out your power and love, as we sing, “Holy, holy, holy”
Open the eyes of my heart, Lord. Open the eyes of my heart;
I want to see you, I want to see you.
(Repeat)

To see you high and lifted up, shining in the light of your glory.
Pour out your power and love, as we sing, “Holy, holy, holy”
Holy, holy, holy - (3x)
I want to see you.
Repeat

Music And beginning to get a glimpse of him, the Psalmist now invites us to affectionately and gratefully praise the Lord, for our Great God is clothed with honor and majesty. Like a robe, he wraps himself in light, the clouds are his chariot and he rides on the wings of the wind... his glory endures forever and he rejoices in his works. He looks at the earth and it trembles, he touches the mountains and they smoke. We will sing to him as long as we live, and may our musings be pleasing as we rejoice in him. (See Psalm 104:1-4, 31-34)

How Great Is Our God

Words: Ed Cash, Chris Tomlin, Jesse Reeves
Music: Arr. by Jeff Anderson © 2004 Alletrop Music

The splendor of the King, clothed in majesty;
 let all the earth rejoice, let all the earth rejoice.
 He wraps himself in light, and darkness tries to hide;
 it trembles at his voice, it trembles at his voice.

Chorus

How great is our God! Sing with me, "How great is our God!"
 And all will see how great, how great is our God!

Age to age he stands, and time is in his hands;
 Beginning and the End, Beginning and the End.
 The Godhead, three in one, Father, Spirit, Son,
 the Lion and the Lamb, the Lion and the Lamb.

Chorus

Name above all names, worthy of all praise;
 my heart will sing, "How great is our God!"

Repeat

Chorus

Theme

We start a new mini-series today called **Showers of Blessings**. In our culture and often in our music, we associate blessing and happiness with sunshine and calm waters, and we associate rain and storms with dark and difficult challenges. Even Gene Kelly's song about "Singin' in the Rain", do you remember that one? [Yes]. Of course you do, It is a song about dancing in the rain and being gloriously happy -- but it is because he was laughing at the clouds because they couldn't damper the sunshine that was in the heart, so even then it wasn't because of the rain and he's ready for love." So his smiling, singing, dancing is not because of the weather, in was in spite of the weather that he was happy.

But in an agriculturally based nation that relied on the success of each year's crops to survive, and where the bulk of the land was more barren wilderness than easily plowed fertile growing soil – you can read in the Bible very often where the sun's withering dry heat was the enemy and the rainy storm clouds pouring down water was the real blessing. So we will use that biblical image of rain in this series– as a symbol of true blessing and refreshment of life that God so lavishly pours upon us when we meet him.



And yes, God knows how to adjust to our mindset change in different cultures in different ways. I think of Jesus by the lake, the professional fishers had been out all night catching nothing. Then Jesus borrows one of their boats, and they go out on the water so he could talk to the crowds (the water is a natural amplification system). When he was done teaching, he told those professional fishermen to go out deeper and let down the nets. Long story short, Jesus granted them an abundant catch, and they realized he was blessing them in the same way a farmer in a drought is blessed with heavy rains... and they knew they were in the presence of someone special. It terrified them, but Jesus told them to not be afraid, that he would teach them...

Intro to and Responsive Bible Reading 1

(R: Reader, **C: Pastor with Congregation**)

R: This attitude of God's joyous desire to bless and the people's terrified response was nothing new. God spoke to the people through Isaiah assuring them that their descendant would flourish in the same ways showers would bring abundant growth.



R: The Lord who forms, chooses and helps you says, "Do not be afraid, My people. For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.

C: They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams."

R: God's blessings will be such that people will want to belong to the Lord and call themselves by his name. God asks, "I am your Redeemer, the first and the last, there is no other God. Who then, is like me?"

P: We are witnesses and proclaim that there is no other Rock but our God.
(Summarized from Isaiah 44:1-8)

Music So let's sing a praise version of the hymn, My Hope is Built on Nothing Less

The Solid Rock

Words: William B. Bradbury Music: Arr. by Dave Cleveland
© 2008 McKinney Music, Inc.

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name.

Chorus

On Christ the solid Rock I stand; All other ground is sinking sand.
All other ground is sinking sand.

When darkness seems to hide his face, I rest on his unchanging grace;
In ev'ry high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil.

Chorus

His oath, his covenant, his blood support me in the whelming flood.
When all around my soul gives way, he then is all my hope and stay.

Chorus

When he shall come with trumpet sound, Oh, may I then in him be found;
dressed in his righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.

Chorus 2x

Music So as we prepare our hearts for prayer, we recognize that if it hadn't been for Jesus and his work on the cross, we couldn't stand before the throne of our great God. Yet God in Jesus loved so deeply he did not even wait for us to seek him out, he pursues and calls to us until we finally realize how much he wants to bless us if we will only turn to him. I think this is a new song for us, sing along the best you can...



Flute: Kathy Novak Voices: Pastor Chuck, MaryJo Bell, Charles Kirkpatrick, Keyboard: Jewell Helquist, Bass Guitar: Randy Bell, Percussion: Mary Jo Malott

Jesus (He) Loves Me

Words and Music: Reuben Morgan, Chris Tomlin, Ben Glover

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I was lost, I was in chains, the world had a hold of me.
My heart was a stone, I was covered in shame when he came for me.

Chorus

I couldn't run, couldn't run from his presence.

I couldn't run, couldn't run from his arms.

Jesus, he loves me, he loves me, he is for me!

Jesus, how can it be? He loves me, he is for me!

It was a fire deep in my soul. I'll never be the same.

I stepped out of the dark and into the light when he called my name.

Chorus

He holds the stars, and he holds my heart
with healing hands that bear the scars.

The rugged cross where he died for me,
my only hope, my everything!

Jesus, he loves me, he loves me, he is for me!

Jesus, how can it be? He loves me, he is for me!

He is for me. Jesus loves me.

Prayers Lord, today we are called to celebrate you and your goodness -- the Psalmist captured the tone when he called us to praise you in your sanctuary, in your mighty heavens. We praise you for your powerful actions, for your all-surpassing greatness. We praise you with a variety of instruments. Everything that has breath is called on to praise you. (See Psalm 150)

Therefore, it is good, Lord, to praise you and bask in your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night. Your deeds make us glad. What you have done with your hands makes us sing for joy, for there is no fickleness nor wickedness in you. You are our rock of rightness. You created the Universe in beauty, and you restore all things through the victory of Jesus Christ, who taught us to love all people as our neighbors. **Praises and Petitions** And so we lift up our recent requests: * The Gordoniers as the we continue to pray for friend Al, still in the hospital, * and the Bells request prayers for our custodian Tina, who had 4 surgeries in 24 hours to fix a blocked artery in her foot and will be in the hospital and rehab for a few weeks. * for Laura Walker, who is beginning a long recovery from a mastectomy and double reconstruction surgery. * for Joyce Vahala, who burned her arm badly and had surgery yesterday, and will probably have several more ... * we also continue to pray for * Jan Martin's friend Darlene Tidmore, with health problems * for Jan's brother Reese still looking for a lawyer for situation with Calvin, * for Jan's son Brian who hurt his arm, * for the family and friends of Jerry Weaver's friend Jim Drennan (59) who died recently, * for Becki Wren fell (recovering) in Care Tel; * for

(friend of pastor) Sally Santeford's friend Wes Wilcox (cancer), and *for Mary Jo Bell's friend Michael Brilinski (cancer) * and we know there are others among us who have issues, situational or circumstantial, physical, economical, and wide variety of thins, so in this next moment of silence, we add those we have not named out loud, but who are suffering from some challenge in their life, or from consequences from the fallenness of our world, and from the consequences that that disorder and chaos attempts to create within us. We've seen you answer time and again, and we know you will always be with us, even if the answer is different than we expect. So now hear our hearts and minds in this moment of quietness... [Pause] Now Lord, keep our hope in you strong for all our needs and the needs of others, keep our hearts receptive to see and experience the comfort, the acts of love, the positive joy you are working out in our lives, knowing that we are redeemed and forever freed to be your people, restored to the fullness of life, and enabled to live as you taught us to pray **LORD's PRAYER**

Intro to and Bible Reading 2

Against a backdrop of a nation where leaders exploited people for their own profit, the Lord speaks through Ezekiel, using the metaphor of the shepherding industry. He describes how bad the shepherds have been – eating choice meat, clothing themselves in fine wool, slaughtering the best of the herd; but not feeding the sheep, or strengthening the weak, healing the sick, bandaging the broken, bringing back the outcasts or seeking the lost. Instead, they tyrannized them with crushing force. And not just the shepherds, the misbehaving sheep were acting just as badly... So the flock was scattered, without a real shepherd, and became victims of every wild animal... God declares he is taking over and will look after them himself. He will save his sheep. And then as we pick up Ezekiel's prophecy, God, describes how he will do it: (See Ezekiel 34:3-5, 11, 17ff)

“I will raise up one shepherd from the family of my servant King David to be in charge of all of them, both weak and strong. He will take good care of them and be their shepherd. He will be prince, the leader among them, and I the Lord will be their God. I will make a covenant of peace with them. I will rid the land of wild animals. They will live securely in the desert and sleep in the forests without fear. I will make them and the places around my holy hill a blessing by causing rain to fall when it should — there will be showers of blessing. The trees in the



field will bear their fruit and the soil its produce. They will be safe and secure in their land. They will know that I am the Lord when I set them free from the power of those who turned them into slaves... I will make the productivity of their crops famous, and they will no longer be consumed by hunger, or bear the shaming laughter of [others] anymore. Then everyone will know that I protect my people, that I am with them, and they are my people. They are my sheep. I am their God, and I take care of them.”

From Ezekiel 34:23-27,29-31 (CJB, CEV –
and grammar slightly adapted for an oral presentation)

Music Given the state of the nation, part in ruins, part in exile, entrenched in behaviors that the prophets named as the cause for their temporary demise, it is a wonder that God would choose to not give up but come to his people once again, this time in Jesus, and break evil’s grip on our world and set us free! Let’s stand if comfortable and sing with us the song we learned last month...

This is Amazing Grace

Words and Music: Jeremy Riddle, Josh Farro, Phil Wickham

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Seems Like Music / Sing My Songs / all adm by Music Services/ Warner Chappell Music

Who breaks the power of sin and darkness?
Whose love is mighty and so much stronger?
The King of Glory; The King of above all kings.
Who shakes the whole earth with holy thunder?
Who leaves us breathless in awe and wonder?
The King of Glory; The King above all kings.

Chorus

This is amazing grace, this is unfailing love;
that you would take my place, that you would bear my cross.
You would lay down your life that I would be set free --.
Jesus, I sing for all that you've done for me.

Who brings our chaos back into order?
Who makes the orphan a son and daughter?
The King of Glory; The King above all kings.
Who rules the nations with truth and justice;
Shines like the sun in all of its brilliance?
The King of Glory; the King above all kings.

Chorus

Worthy is the lamb who was slain.
 Worthy is the king who conquered the grave.
 (Three Times)

Worthy is the lamb who was slain; worthy, worthy, worthy!
 Chorus

Sermon Showers of Blessing -- Compelled

Jeremiah remained with the bedraggled remnant of people in the decimated city of Jerusalem, while Ezekiel ministered among the exiles in Babylon. Our reader summarized Ezekiel's theological reasoning for the nation's setback. Shepherds, the spiritual and political leaders of the nation were corrupt, and there were members among the flock who were strong, self-centered, and greedy -- pushing past others to get the prime feeding ground first; and in the process they trampled the rest of the grazing grass and polluted the drinking water with their dirty feet, leaving nothing nourishing for the rest of the sheep. Of course, Ezekiel is not talking about literal sheep and shepherds, but about how people treated each other.

Into this situation, Ezekiel promises that a Messiah would come and set up a new covenant of peace. Peace is more than the absence of conflict -- but the positive satisfaction that comes when people seek to fulfill their covenant with God and with each other, and all are involved in fulfilling their part of the whole, whether it be a couple, a family, a group, a church, or a nation.

God always fulfills his side of the covenant. History teaches that his people -- not so much. When sin gets us off track, we still need to get back on it or we will be [gestures out of control swerving back and forth] like a train trying to go down the road without rails. That is kind of what the nation was experiencing when Jeremiah and Ezekiel were talking to them. We can't seem to adequately live our side of the covenant with God and others. Because of that, God sent Christ to take our place to break the power of what pushes us to break that covenant -- in the hopes that we can be empowered to get back on track and be blessed again.



Ezekiel describes this gracious blessing in the agricultural terms upon which their society was built. So I am going to stick with his way of doing it, and we will just have to translate that into our modern culture which doesn't necessarily seem to care as much about agriculture.

When the one in the line of David rules, God's blessing would flow in several ways.

1) His blessings bring **showers in their season** – the October to November rains broke the summer drought, and it was upon these seasonal rains which the next crop depended. Generally speaking, if the crop failed, they couldn't walk (much less drive) to a nearby grocery store and get something that was shipped from somewhere else in the world and manage. Their food market and their very life depended upon the (reasonably) local rains and harvest.

Showers in their Season

And not just light rain drops. When it rained, it needed to pour regularly and often to saturate that very dry, cracking ground. When God blesses us, we don't need a drop of grace here and a drop of grace there, we need to be saturated with his grace – so filled that we aren't capable of holding it all. More on that later.

We don't always realize how much we need his blessings – we don't live in a world where local crops are critical to our existence anymore. So people may think, "Well, some things may cost us more (isn't that the truth?), but we still get by on our own, we are a rich country, our household can pay the bills, or at least carry the debt for now, and our survival, physical or otherwise, is no longer dependent upon what God does with the weather or anything else."

J Stalker believes many people don't seem to think they are blessed -- or need to be blessed. He explains with a simple example from nature. Admire the beauty of a sunrise or sunset and I'll add, the night sky when we can get away from light pollution. With its wide variety of paint strokes of colors and shades across the sky, or the pin lights twinkling and swirling fog of the milky way against that velvety black background. How peaceful. How majestic. Some make a point to watch it as often as they can. {I'm sure that is why y'all go on those trips up north all the time 😊} Yet there are many who go through life without ever really seeing it, even when it is right in front of them... and sometimes, if we have to drive into it, for example, we may even complain about it... And so even when the blessings are all around us, we don't ask, we don't expect, and we don't receive; or if we do receive, we don't recognize that that is what it is -- his blessing.

Showers in their season. His blessings also bring 2) **fertility to the land** --- an abundance of crops -- the need for survival in which they can take confidence -- because of the promise that the showers would come. Fear will be a thing of the past. Being the object of another's plunder will be a thing of the past. Hunger will be a forgotten memory. Insults

fertility to the land

received because they were in a lowly, insecure position in the world -- when everyone was robbing them and taking advantage of them and shoving them around and mocking them -- “They have a terrible God, he doesn’t help them at all. They are easy pickin’s.” All of that -- will go away. The needed rain will come freely from the God who rides clouds... The specifics may be different for us who don’t live in an agricultural economy, but if you can grasp the deeper meaning -- God’s grace flows freely to all who look to receive him.

3) His blessings grant us **security** --- the ability to sleep in the wild or in the woods -- both were dangerous places because of all the animals **security** then and there, including people, and even the powerful and mean sheep in the same flock, sometimes. These problems will be banished as well. The oppressors, the bullies, the wasters of everyone else’s resources, these “sheep” that in their personal greed and superiority, deny everyone else blessings intended for them – these brutes were hogging everything to themselves. Wrong animal – these people that were “sheeping” everything to themselves. That was a bad joke. Their power will be broken, all this would be no more.

4) His blessings **make us the envy of others**, in the best sense of that phrase. Isaiah told us in the **make us the envy of others** pre-sermon reading that God’s people would become so blessed that everyone around would look to them and see how good it is to be his people -- and they would crave to belong to their God and call themselves by his name. They wanted in on the action. Does that sound like what people outside the faith think about our faith today? [No.] That makes you think, doesn’t it? What is going on?

Perhaps it is because they, or perhaps we too, have sought happiness not from his true blessings, but from things that quickly fade, or even worse, have negative consequences. But to be blessed comes from a pure well, an inexhaustible well (Jesus called it an eternal spring of living water bubbling up within us) – remember that old camp song, “I’ve got a well – bubbling up” (Well I’m not going to get into that). A river of life flowing out of us, bubbling up... which gives us true and lasting peace, and life, and joy. Yet even this is not the best result of the blessings of God -- that we can recognize and call ourselves blessed. Sometimes we like to stop there, but we shouldn’t. We need to go on. Ezekiel says that --

5) God will not just give them blessings, but his blessings will **make us a blessing for others**. It **make us a blessing for others** is great that we can be filled with the peace, and joy, and life and power of God,

and we should strive for that with all our might, but if it ends there, then our goal of being blessed and the goal of God blessing us isn't quite the same. He wants us to be so full of Him that it spills over to everyone around. Back to our point of the saturation of the ground. A seminary professor once taught that – sometimes we use the idea of channeling God's love to another kind of like an irrigation ditch, the water comes down, goes through, and comes out. The problem with that imagery is if you get just a little off the water doesn't flow and all of a sudden you very quickly dry. He said a better image is to be a reservoir of God's life in us, where he fills it up, and overflows, floods and pours out. In this image, we are always saturated, if we have a bit of a dry spell, we still got plenty -- full of God's Spirit -- always overflowing -- it can't help but spill out onto others.

God is not just giving them a blessing, he is making them a blessing -- by helping them to help others, and everyone around -- by making them so full that it just has to go somewhere, to everywhere, to anywhere.

Jesus tells the parable in which the heavenly kingdom starts out as a tiny grain of a mustard seed, but expands and increases until it becomes a great, gigantic tree so that the birds settle and make its nests in its limbs. A beautiful picture of the spreading of God's kingdom, of his love through our world.

Charles Spurgeon, before our time, became known as the "golden-tongued preacher". He said that at [an early point in his life], the Sunday School superintendent begged him to teach a Church School class. He thought he couldn't do it, but he was compelled to go because there was no one else to do it, and so Spurgeon stood and stumbled out a few words in front of those children. The story was the same when he preached for the first time. He had no wish to do it -- but there was no one else – "How could I allow," he said, "how could I allow people to come and then not hear God's Word?" He felt he was compelled to do it. He said this was true all of his life. Everything he began to do was because he felt this irresistible impulse, and God placed him in such a position where it was him or no one! And because he followed his Spirit led compulsions, (this compelling) God *made* him a blessing for others, a golden-tongued preacher.

Paul put it this way -- "Christ's love compels me to be and to do -- because Christ died so [that] we might live -- not for ourselves, but for Him who died and rose again for us. (2 Cor 5:14-15) In light of all that Christ has done for us, how can we not be compelled to respond to that in whatever way he might be calling us to live?"

Prayer Let's pray. Lord, we seek your love like a dehydrated desert deer panting for water. We long for it. We long for you. Cause your showers of grace to fall when the time is right that your blessings may come. We know that you love to give us gifts, overflowing and abundant, but we do need to seek, we do need to obey, to risk going out in the deep and putting our nets down, filling our open hearts with your life, your joy, and your power, equipping us with your gifts that we may be made a blessing for others. And it is in Christ's name that we pray this. Amen.

Music The blessing of a full life comes when the author of life, the Father of the heavenly lights, who offers every good and perfect gift from above (James 1:17) offers us new life by Jesus' blood, by his death on the cross and resurrection from the tomb. Every blessing, every gift, every breath is granted by the creator and ruler of this Universe. Let's join the praise band in singing

All Because of Jesus

Words: Steve Fee Music: arr. by Scott Harris
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Giver of ev'ry breath I breathe, author of all eternity,
giver of ev'ry perfect thing, to you be the glory.
Maker of heaven and of earth, no one can comprehend your worth;
King over all the universe, to you be the glory.
And I am alive because I'm alive in you.

Chorus

And it's all because of Jesus I'm alive. It's all because the blood of Jesus Christ,
that covers me and raised this dead man's life.
It's all because of Jesus [I'm alive*] * first time only
(Repeat from beginning)

Every sunrise sings your praise, the universe cries out your praise.
I'm singing freedom all my days, now that I'm alive.

Chorus 2x

[I'm alive*] * second time only

Series Blessing Now having been blessed by grace, move into your world with confidence in God, for you are beloved by God – formed, chosen, blessed, and given life to live as his holy children. Amen.