

^p *Straight from the "Hart"*

November 26, 2023 *Reign of Christ the King*

Finding Your Place Under Christ's Rule



Welcome to Hartland UMC's "Straight from the "Hart"". We are glad you are here and participating in worship through this service script.

Affirmation (P: Pastor, C: Reader with Congregation)

In honor of the day, "The Reign of Christ the King" and the end of the Christian year, (with Advent begins the new Christian year), we begin with an affirmation that highlights the nature of Christ's kingdom.

P: We believe in God, **C: creator of the world and of all people;**

P: and in Jesus Christ, **C: incarnate among us, who died and rose again;**

P: and in the Holy Spirit,

C: present with us to guide, strengthen, and comfort...

P: We rejoice in every sign of God's Kingdom;

C: in the upholding of human dignity and community;

P: in every expression of love, justice and reconciliation; in each act of self-giving on behalf of others; in the abundance of God's gifts entrusted to us that all may have enough; in all responsible use of the earth's resources...

P: We confess our sin, individual and collective, by silence or action:

C: through the violation of human dignity

P: based on race, class, age, [gender], nation, or faith; through the exploitation of people because of greed and indifference, through the misuse of [any] power in personal, communal, national, and international life... which endangers the earth and all life upon it.

P: We commit ourselves individually and as a community to the way of Christ:

C: to take up the cross; to seek abundant life for all humanity;

P: to struggle for peace with justice and freedom; to risk ourselves in faith, hope, and love,

C: praying that God's kingdom may come...on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

abr. and ad. from The World Methodist Social Affirmation in UM Hymnal, 886

Opening Prayer

Blessed God, you have called us to contribute to the needs of the saints and to extend hospitality to strangers. Receive us as an expression of the values we claim to champion. Hallow us that we may be a blessing to many in your name. **Amen.**

ad. from two prayers by Herb Mather © 2002 General Board of Discipleship,
In UM Worship and Song, Leader's Edition.

Responsive Call to Worship

R: Christ Jesus, friend of the poor, the meek and the merciful, has been enthroned above all authority and power in this world and in the world that is to come.

C: We will make a joyful noise to the Lord. We will serve the Lord with gladness. We will come into his presence with singing.

R: God has placed everything under Christ's wounded feet. He has appointed the One who wore a crown of thorns as the supreme head of the church, his body.

C: We will enter his gates with thanksgiving. We will come into his courts with praise. We will give thanks and praise his loving name!

ad. from "Call to Worship (based on Psalm 100)"
by Bruce Prewer on Bruce Prewer's Homepage.

Music Let's sing that same sentiment...

He Has Made Me Glad

Words & Music: Leona Von Brethorst
© 1976 Maranatha Praise, Inc. adm. by the Copyright Co.

I will enter his gates with thanksgiving in my heart,
I will enter his courts with praise.
I will say, "This is the day that the Lord has made."
I will rejoice, for he has made me glad.
He has made me glad, he has made me glad.
I will rejoice, for he has made me glad.
He has made me glad, he has made me glad.
I will rejoice, for he has made me glad.

Intro to and Bible Reading 1

Daniel envisions a great and joyful day that emanates from the courts of heaven. He sees conflicts among the earthly empires. One especially powerful and widespread empire will oppress God's people. The Son of Man (the Messiah) will approach the heavenly throne and the heavenly court will determine to break the empire's power forever and give authority over all the world to Christ and his kingdom. This



is the first time that the son of man is used to describe the Messiah, and it is one of Jesus' preferred self-descriptions.

We pick up Daniel's vision as the Christ enters the heavenly court and approaches the throne, and then we switch to an angel within the vision who explains to Daniel the meaning of what he is seeing. Listen primarily for the supremacy of Christ's eventual and ultimate reign. (See Daniel 7:1-27)

^{9a} "As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. ^{13b} and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. ^{24b} [The explaining angel says] ...another king will arise, ²⁵ He will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people... they will be delivered into his hands for a time... ²⁶ But the [heavenly] court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. ²⁷ Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.

Key verses from Daniel 7:9-27 (NIV)

Theme

In the midst of all that glorious victory, the phrase is snuck in that they will have to go through a tough time while. They will have to wait for all of this to take place. Daniel does the same thing we will hear John do later – they both are reminding troubled people of the power and rule of our Lord in hopes that they can hang on until that day when his rule will come to complete fruition. Aesop reminds us in a story -- that most of us have probably heard a version of – he reminds us that we must continue to act wisely and not give up until we reach that victory....

The Crow and the Pitcher

By Aesop

Once [upon a time] there was a thirsty crow. She had flown a long way looking for water to drink. Suddenly she saw a pitcher. She flew down and saw it held a little water, but it was so low in the pitcher that she could not reach it. "But I must have that water," she cried. "I am too weary to fly farther. What shall I do? I know! I'll tip the pitcher over." She beat it with her wings, but it was

too heavy. She could not move it. Then she thought a while. "I know now! I will break it! Then I will drink the water as it pours out. How good it will taste!" With beak and claws and wings she threw herself against the pitcher. But it was too strong. The poor crow stopped to rest. "What shall I do now? I cannot die of thirst with water close by. There must be a way, if I only had wit enough to find it out." After a while after a while the crow had a bright idea. There are many small stones lying about. She picked them up one by one and dropped them into the pitcher. Slowly the water rose, till at last she could drink it. How good it tasted! "There is always a way out of hard places," said the crow, "if you only have the wit to find it."

At the turn of the 20th century, young Americans also learned from their McGuffey's readers that stick-to-it-iveness has a lot to do with getting the right answers when they memorized this poem.

Persevere

The fisher who draws in his net too soon,
 won't have any fish to sell;
 The child who shuts up his book too soon,
 won't learn any lessons well.
 If you would have your learning stay,
 be patient --- don't learn too fast;
 the man who travels a mile each day,
 may get round the world at last.

Special Music

As the Seasonal Singers come, if we can hang on, if we continue to follow wisdom, says McGuffey, and Aesop, and Daniel, and John – we will see the victory we are looking for – we will see Christ exalted to the highest place. Why is he put there? Paul tells that despite being in the very nature God, he chose to leave all that glory and die at the hands of humanity so that humanity could be saved from its self-destructive sin. It is for this self-sacrificial love that God exalts Christ to highest place. The song we are going to sing celebrates Jesus as he joins with us on earth to deliver us from the sorrows of sin and of life.

Jesus! What a Friend of Sinners

Words: J Wilbur Chapman, 1910 Rowland Prichard, 1844

1. Jesus! what a Friend for sinners! Jesus! Lover of my soul;
 friends may fail me, foes assail me; He, my Savior, makes me whole.

Chorus

Hallelujah! what a Savior! Hallelujah! What a Friend!
Saving, helping, keeping, loving, He is with me to the end.

women only 2. Jesus! what a Strength in weakness! Let me hide myself in Him.

Tempted, tried, and sometimes failing, He, my Strength, my vict'ry wins.

men only 3. Jesus! what a Help in sorrow! While the billows o'er me roll,
even when my heart is breaking, He, my Comfort, helps my soul.

4. Jesus! what a Guide and Keeper! While the tempest still is high,
storms about me, night overtakes me, He, my Pilot, hears my cry.

Chorus

5. Jesus! I do now receive Him, more than all in Him I find.
He hath granted me forgiveness: I am His, and He is mine!

Chorus



Music It is because we are his, and he is our God that we recognize his rule in our life and come to him in prayer. Let's prepare our hearts by singing...

Majesty, Worship His Majesty

Words & Music: Jack Hayford, 1981 arr. by Eugene Thomas, 1981

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Majesty, worship his majesty; unto Jesus be all glory, honor, and praise.
 Majesty, kingdom authority, flow from his throne unto his own; His anthem raise.
 So exalt, lift up on high the name of Jesus.
 Magnify, come glorify Christ Jesus, the King.
 Majesty, worship his majesty, Jesus who died, now glorified, King of all kings.

Prayers

Almighty and everlasting God, it is your will to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

We praise your holy name, Lord, for it is your love that is revealed in the life and death of Jesus, it is your power that is seen in his resurrection, and it is your majesty that is made known by his ascension into heaven to be at your side. Help us, O God, to always keep your power, authority, love and majesty in our minds and to never neglect the doing of your will. Help us to be obedient to the word you place in our hearts and our minds... May Christ, who is the supreme rule of how we relate to friends, neighbors, strangers, and who we perceive as enemies--guide us in how we live each and every day, in how make decisions about how we spend our time and money, in the tasks we do and the places we go, how we think and speak and rest and work and recreate.

O God, in his time with us, Christ has shown his authority over wind and wave - we pray that he may bring peace and calm to those who lives are troubled.... **Petitions** * so today we pray for a request by Pat Coleman to pray for Tom Spencer who was in an accident (hit a deer) and has several back fractures and a long recovery ahead, * Kathy Novak requests prayers for her mother Carol Werner who was hospitalized but is now back in her assisted living home but also in hospice. * **We continue to pray for** Mr. Bransner with cardiac problems, * for the family and friends of Renee Jones who recently died suddenly. * for Scarlett & Skylar Morehouse, * for Jan Martin, * for Joyce Vahala, * for peace in the world and in our lives, and for anyone who is suffering in the midst of violence or turmoil, * and finally for those we have not named out loud but are still on our hearts and minds, we pause to lift these as well... (Pause)

Lord, you ask us -- to invite you -- to reign in our lives, that we may live as you taught us to pray the **Lord's Prayer**

Intro to and Bible Reading 2 Many scholars see Daniel's especially powerful empire, the king that rose up and oppressed God's people as the Roman Empire. Around the year 100, Christ's return hadn't come as they expected, and now Rome was setting its sights on the church, who they perceived as a threat to their way of life. John tries to envision for these stressed, depressed, hurting people a hope that goes beyond their topsy-turvy world. John writes "Grace and peace to you" which was a Christianized version of a typical 1st century greeting. Yet it was much more than a formal greeting. It reminded the early Christians that God's undeserved favor was shown to them, and the result was a spiritual wholeness and well-being. John reinforces this greeting by saying it doesn't come from him but



Background of Daniel, Revelation; Revelation 1:4a

...from the God who is, who was, and who is to come, from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen

Revelation 1:4b-6 (NIV)

Then, having reminded them of who is bringing their salvation and making them a people, he reinforces that their faith is in an eternal God who is supreme over all things, and who will make everything in this world just as he wants it to be when his timing is right...

"Look, he is coming with the clouds," and "every eye will see him, even those who mocked and killed him"; and all peoples from all nations and all times on earth "will lament because of him." So shall it be! Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is about to arrive. I am the Almighty."

Revelation 1:7-8 (NIV & MSG)

Music The Son of Man comes to our world from the throne of heaven, does his saving work for us and plants the seeds of his kingdom for us to enter and grow.

He returns to the throne and we will join him there some day, rejoicing in song around that throne. Let's sing....

Come, Christians, Join to Sing

Words: Christian Henry Bateman, 1843

Music: Trad. Melody; arr. by Benjamin Carr, 1824; harm. by Austin C. Lovelace, 1963

1 Come, Christians, join to sing: Alleluia, Amen!
 Loud praise to Christ our King: Alleluia, Amen!
 Let all, with heart and voice, before His throne rejoice;
 praise is His gracious choice, Alleluia, Amen!

2 Come, lift your hearts on high: Alleluia, Amen!
 Let praises fill the sky: Alleluia, Amen!
 He is our guide and friend; to us he'll condescend;
 his love shall never end, Alleluia, Amen!

3 Praise yet the Lord again: Alleluia, Amen!
 Life shall not end the strain: Alleluia, Amen!
 On heaven's blissful shore his goodness we'll adore,
 singing forevermore: "Alleluia, Amen!"

Sermon Finding Our Place Under Christ's Rule

Our life depends upon it. Many people fear it and work to avoid it. Others embrace and love it (maybe more than they should). Politicians are elected by promising it. Bookstores are crammed full of guides on how to create it personally and manage it professionally. Sometimes it is the only constant in our life, which makes it difficult to deal with; but others desperately want it but can't seem to muster it. It is called *change*, and I'm not talking about what you drop in the offering plate.

On the other hand, consider the "Family Circus". The family is vacationing at the beach. The little kids are out there digging in the sand with working model steam shovels, dump trucks, and other toy construction equipment while they listen to music in their headphones. A sign propped up beside them reads, "Digging to Australia." Father, mother and grandmother are sitting in beach chairs watching them as they play. The father says to his wife. "We used to do the same thing with only a pail and shovel." then the grandmother says, "I used to do the same thing with a seashell."

The Bible says, "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9), or as Irene Peter put it, "Just because everything is different doesn't mean anything has changed." That doesn't mean we should try to live in the past or re-create the past, or even stop

the future. We can't go back, nor can we keep the future from coming. All we can do is embrace and shape the future the best we can as it comes to us.

We may work with sand, but we must dig deep – in other words --- methods, styles, resources

Work with sand, but dig deep

and situations may vary widely, and quickly like sand dunes in a windstorm -- but underneath, we are all still “digging for the outback” – we are digging down within ourselves to satisfy instincts and drives and passions and goals that run deep within us and it is those aspirations that have remained essentially the same through the ages, -- drives like finding our rightful place in this world, before God, and among God's people. A place where we can find purpose and happiness and to make a meaningful difference.

It is easy to try and fulfill deep needs with temporary and ultimately unfulfilling things, and when we build our lives on those things, and then those things change, where does that leave us? We've seen (or learned) that our world moved from walking to horses to wagons to cars to jets; or we see our world moving from telegraph to landline to cell phone, from books to radio to 8-tracks (remember those?) to cassettes to discs to TV and computers -- and now things change faster than we can turn around, which is why when I will review the recording of this service later I still think and even say in my head, and if someone is near me and I am talking about it, I will say “I am going to be “checking the tape”” when no taped is involved at all. And if we have built the foundation of our lives on these temporary, constantly changing things, it can leave us feeling left behind, or empty, or insecure, or jumbled because there is no enduring stability.

John wrote to people who felt the only change they were experiencing was from the oven to the frying pan, or from the rock on the one side to the hard place on the other. Life was challenging enough, and while they had found hope by faith in Christ, the delayed fulfillment of the full fruition of his kingdom, and the still powerful Roman Empire seeing them as dangerous -- left them uncertain and unsettled.

We heard John remind these people who Christ is. We need a glimpse of that too, some days. After a golf outing a few years ago, Ben, I and a another person in the church went. We had planned to take a quick trip up a nearby mountain to get a lookout spot over Copper Harbor (which is basically at the peak of the “little thumb” of the upper peninsula) to see the great majestic beauty of God's world. The only problem was that as we began driving that ascent, even at the lower levels,

it was so foggy we couldn't hardly see out of our windshield. We didn't even bother going higher or getting out of the car to look.

Worse is the boy who went up on Outlook Mountain, where he had a beautiful panoramic view of seven states lit up in all of its glorious fall colors. Imagine that. Can you just imagine? They asked the boy what he saw, and he said, "I saw a buzzard flying." When the changes, the setbacks, the disappointments, the frustrations of this life fly our way and cloud our view, making our life foggy -- John wants us to trust in what we cannot yet see or feel -- to trust in the overwhelming majesty of God and to sense his comfort and love and strength over those deep things of life. Jesus says don't be afraid of people (or things) that want to take away your sense of security and control. *"There's nothing they can do to your soul, your core being. Save your fear for God, who holds your entire life—body and soul—in his hands."* (Matthew 10:28) (MSG)

A simple way of looking at it is the father who took her 3-year-old to an amusement park. She **His power and love never fail** wanted to go on this ride which was the scariest ride they had for toddlers. She got on the ride with her Dad and it started – and you know what they are like – they take you up and down and spin you around and you're your around so it feels like you are being thrown every direction at once in her secure seat, but it didn't feel secure to her. She was terrified. The father was sitting next to her, trying to catch her attention. trying to call to her over the noise of the ride's music and the loud bustle of busy park in general. Finally, she looked and their eyes locked. When she saw that the father was not terrified by being thrown around – that he was enjoying it and laughing and trying to encourage her and when she saw how confident he was that the ride was not going to hurt her, she relaxed and then she began to enjoy the movement of the ride.

Sometimes we find ourselves on scary rides in our life, and sometimes those parts of the ride seem to be a lot longer than we ever expect or want them to be. And while we may never find those parts of our life "fun", if we can catch a new glimpse of God's 'strong, steady, sure, constant, confident, presence, we can relax in his control and we can trust him, and maybe even become stronger on the other side of this part of our journey of life. An uncertain future seeks a God who guides the course of history, not through coercion, not in powerful detachment, but through the spreading of his love.

He may express that love in many different ways, but his love and power are constants that we can always rely on as the anchor even in a chaotic life -- in fact, sometimes the more chaotic, the more deeply we may be able to sense his steadying hand.

Even when we do fail

A psychiatrist asked a mother which of her 3 children she loved the most. What's the proper answer to that one? I love them all ---? [the same, or equally]. Yes, which is what she answered, but she answered too quickly and easily; and the psychiatrist wanted to test her and push her, so he asked again with this qualification. "Psychologically, it is impossible to love everybody equally, so come on, really, who do you love the best?"

She finally relented to his pressure and said, "All right, I don't love them the same - when one of them is sick, I love that one more. When one of them is in pain, I love that one more. When one is confused, I love that one more. And when one of them is bad - and I don't mean just naughty, I mean really, really bad - I love that child more - except for those exceptions, I love all of them the same."

God knows and loves us; and his compassion flows all the more when we are sick or hurting or lost or confused or in pain or wandering off course. That doesn't mean we should run out and be bad or confused or sick or in pain so we get more love... (that is the wrong kind of attention seeking). But it does mean, that if do happen to experience those things, we can count on him - he hasn't deserted us, his love hasn't faded, his power hasn't grown weak. His power and love never failed in the past; has not grown weak now, nor will it ever in the future. John and Daniel were trying to keep us from focusing on the power of our problems and focus on the purpose, power, and undying love of our Lord and King -- Jesus Christ (in John's case), because he is a King who has walked in our shoes, knows our pain, and shows us how to really love others even when they threw its worst at him, to be able to forgive even while he was being tormented on a cross -- and he invites us to be part of those kingdom values even when it's really hard and unpopular -- in the sure hope that someday that king who always was, and is, and always will be -- will come in way that we can more fully experience his "grace (his undeserved mercy) and peace (his wholeness and completeness)" in our spirits.

Despite what the precarious situation was telling John's readers, and perhaps, what some of our situations are telling us; Jesus loves us, and frees us, and makes us his special people who are called to serve him according to how he has blessed and gifted us.

Find your place under Christ's rule

When I was young, I considered a lot of options. I went through a wide variety of jobs as I attended Jr high, High School, College and Seminary. I was the kind of person that was interested in and loved to do everything. I was sufficient at a lot of things, but not great at anything – a jack of all trades – you know that expression. As a matter of fact, in a high school creative writing class, we were told to cut out pictures and paste them on the outside of the shoebox -- pictures that made a collage that would indicate “something about who we are or what we were about” -- and then we wrote what the pictures were indicating, what we were trying to say about ourselves on the inside the box. The teacher took the completed shoeboxes and because it was from somewhat of a distance for at least some of the class, he described the pictures on the box and then the class would try to guess what that person was saying about themselves. I pasted all kinds of different pictures on the box. The teacher named many of them and decided I must have misunderstood the assignment. When he opened it up, he saw the phrase “do it all”, he understood. Because I just loved to do everything! When I weighed my options about what to do with my life, when people said things like “Follow your passions” and “Do what you love to do” that didn’t help at all. I enjoyed meeting and serving people by waiting tables. I loved my various car repair and janitor and custodian and maintenance and construction jobs. I tried a couple of sales things. But I didn’t really believe in what I was selling – especially for the price I was supposed to selling it at. So that didn’t last long.

Like all of you have also experienced, people at various times and places have disappointed me, let me down, even betrayed me. But Albert Einstein wrote “that we cannot despair of humanity since we ourselves are human beings.” In other words, I shouldn’t complain, for I have done my share of disappointing others and all that other stuff as well. I’ve failed many times. But since at a very young age, I chose that I wanted Christ and good to win in my heart; I have never experienced God letting me down. His rightness still stands. In every struggle, in every disappointment, in every pain and angry situation, even when I didn’t sense him, I am convinced that he has been there, from beginning to end, doing what he has promised to do. Not magically helping me to fix everything but always offering to help me to grow through everything, sometimes successfully, sometimes I refused to grow. His unflinching consistency and my belief that the spiritual journey is the only journey worth taking -- a journey in which *everyone* can find great value that

remains steady and true throughout the constantly changing times -- this is what led this introvert to force himself to get up in front of people each week and say, "we have a God that won't let us down." -- and not to point out anyone's failings or differences, but to help and encourage and help all of us move one step further along in our relationship with this amazing God that we have.

And I hope that in your families, and jobs, and schools, and recreation, and volunteerism, in your dedicated time or free time, you can find your place among God's people, and before God, and among greater humanity, and under Christ's rule in his kingdom, belonging to him, helping people find him, interceding on their behalf to him -- the one person whose rule and agenda and gracious love will never, ever fail us.

Prayer

Let's pray. Lord, may it be that while everything quickly changes around us, you may enable us to faithfully love and serve others as your loyal representatives and finding that special place you have designed for us where we can find purpose and happiness -- and to make a meaningful difference in ourselves and in those around us -- that we can bring you the honor you deserve as our king. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Music His kingdom reigns over all and over all time. Let's praise him and honor our king for the salvation he brings to his people.

Ye Servants of God

Words: Charles Wesley, 1744 Music: Attr. to William Croft, 1708

1. Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim,
and publish abroad his wonderful name;
the name all-victorious of Jesus extol,
his kingdom is glorious and rules over all.
2. God ruleth on high, almighty to save,
and still he is nigh, his presence we have;
the great congregation his triumph shall sing,
ascribing salvation to Jesus, our King.
3. "Salvation to God, who sits on the throne!"
Let all cry aloud and honor the Son;
the praises of Jesus the angels proclaim,
fall down on their faces and worship the Lamb.

4. Then let us adore and give him his right,
all glory and power, all wisdom and might;
all honor and blessing with angels above,
and thanks never ceasing and infinite love.

Blessing

Now to the Almighty God, who gave his Son Jesus Christ a realm where all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; who makes it possible for us to be loyal followers of our living Lord, whose Spirit empowers us -- that we may always hear his word, follow his teachings, and live in his Spirit; and hasten the day when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord; to his eternal glory. Amen.

slightly ad. by A. Campbell Frazier, England 20th cent. alt. in UM Book of Worship

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