

# *Straight from the "Hart"*

March 3, 2024

 HARTLAND

Sharing the journey  
to know, love, and serve

## **Making a Fresh Start (4): Grace Waiting**

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

### **Apostle's Creed** (P – Pastor, C – Congregation)

P: Do you believe in God the Father?

**C: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**

P: Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

**C: I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

P: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

**C: I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy universal church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

### **Opening Prayer**

Gracious God, in faithfully giving of ourselves... we are declaring our belief that all good things have come from your hand, and we are gratefully giving back to honor you and spread your goodness and love. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Very loosely adapted from Kwasi I. Kena © 2007  
Discipleship Resources in Worship & Song, Leader's Edition.



Donna Allmond (piano, not pictured) Kathy Novak and Randy Bell play the day's music.

## Call to Worship

People of God, we have gathered to lead a life worthy of the calling we have received, learning to be humble, gentle, and patient; showing acceptance and tolerance for one another in love, striving together to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; for we have been called to one glorious hope for the future. Let's worship by turning our minds' and hearts' focus to the one God and Father of all who is over all, through all, and in all.

Inspired by Ephesians 4:1-6



## Music

Let's sing, to the tune of Angels from the Realms of Glory, Christ is Made the Sure Foundation.

### **Christ is Made the Sure Foundation to tune of Angels From the Realms of Glory**

Words: 7th cent. Latin; trans. by John Mason Neale, 1851

Music: Henry T Smart, 1867

1. Christ is made the sure foundation, Christ the head and cornerstone;  
chosen of the Lord and precious, binding all the church in one;  
holy Zion's help forever, and her confidence alone.
2. To this temple, where we call thee, come, O Lord of Hosts, today!  
With thy faithful loving-kindness hear thy people as they pray,  
and thy fullest benediction shed within its walls always.
4. Laud and honor to the Father, laud and honor to the Son,  
laud and honor to the Spirit, ever three and ever one;  
one in might and one in glory, while unending ages run.

## Lenten Cross Candles

- \* We extinguished the "**Ashen Return**" Candle, recognizing how challenging it is to heed God's call to return to him daily in order to stay on his spiritual course for us. (put out bottom candle).
- \* We extinguished the "**Resist**" Candle, recognizing how challenging it is to resist the temptations of life. (put out the next candle).
- \* We extinguished the "**Resolve**" Candle, recognizing how challenging it is to persist when life offers resistance and discouraging setbacks. (put out next candle).

\* This week's candle is labeled "**Repent**".

Once upon a time, there was a boy who was so badly behaved that the Chief Fairy of the land came to punish him. His actions were monstrous, so the fairy turned him into a physical monster. He told the boy could only change back if he managed to seriously frighten someone. The boy thought this would be easy, but he soon found that the children in his area were very difficult to scare.

A long time passed. In his frustration he decided he would have to get better tactics. First, he would look for some easy prey. He found a boy who was well known as a hyper-sensitive softie. Second strategy: rather than an immediate attempt, he decided to follow and study him so he could create just the right scare. As he followed him, he couldn't help but see him give to charity, play with children at the hospital, and help old people in the neighborhood and visit those in the nursing homes. And he also learned he was doing it out of the goodness of his heart, there was no payment or other tangible reward for his good deeds.

The boy-monster carefully prepared the best fright ever. A fright he felt would free him from monster-hood forever, and leave the unsuspecting boy scared stiff. But as he set up his trap, all he could think about were all those people the boy was helping. If he damaged that boy, what would happen with all those he helped? So even though it meant he would be stuck as a monster, he decided to leave the boy alone lest he become responsible for the loss of good works of this innocent boy.

At that exact moment the Chief Fairy appeared and rewarded the monster's newfound compassionate attitude by turning him back into a boy. And that boy, who had been so badly behaved, became a very kind worker of good deeds himself, and a good friend of the boy he had planned to frighten to death.

Adapted from "Forever a Monster"

by Pedro Pablo Sacristán [freestoriesforkids.com](http://freestoriesforkids.com)

I should also add that what probably felt like a punishment at the hands of a wrath-filled Fairy was in truth a constructive discipline that redeemed the boy who was living badly. For it led to his repentance, his turning his life around. Of course, fairy tales tend to sum up lives in simplistic terms – people live "happily ever after" and/or lives are effortlessly transformed. But reality tells us that even with dramatic intervention, changing from one entrenched pattern of living to another may or may not be simple in concept; but it is rarely easy to consistently put into practice.

This week, we extinguish the **Repent** candle, (put out candle) recognizing how challenging it is to turn our lives away from negative patterns to new, positive habits.

In fact, some people prefer to be monsters, to live the old, negative (evil) life, and justify it by saying, "It has always been this way. Nothing changes, God doesn't intervene -- so what benefit is it to repent, to turn from the old life to live something new and different?" They ignore the immediate benefits we and our world receive from the practice of goodness (such as our fictional monster observed). Our responsive reading is inspired by the answer Peter gives to these skeptics.



### **Responsive Reading 1 (R - Reader, C - Congregation)**

R: Scoffers, living out their cravings, will say "Where is his promised coming? Nothing has changed since the beginning of creation." They deliberately ignore that it is by God's Word that the world was created. By that same word the world perished in the days of Noah, and by that same word our present world is reserved for fire.

**C: The world is being kept until the day of judgment and destruction.**

R: God is not bound by time as we are. He is not slow about his promise, even though sometimes it seems that way. Rather he is patiently waiting with good reason:

**C: He wants none to perish, but all to come repentance, to turn away from sin.**

R: The day of the Lord will come like a thief. Everything will suddenly be dissolved and disclosed. If so, then what kind of people ought we to be?

**C: We ought to live holy and godly lives.**

R: We are waiting for a new heaven and a new earth where there will be only goodness. So make every effort to be found pure and faultless and at peace with God.

**C: We will remember that God's patience gives an opportunity for salvation.**

R: Since you are warned, be on guard so that you aren't led off course into sin and lose your own safe position.

**C: We will grow in the grace and knowledge of our Savior Jesus Christ. His is the glory -- now, and forever.**

(Inspired from 2 Peter 3)

**Music** We heard it last week, Peter reminds us again this week -- that God is patiently waiting for his grace to fill the world, and we are not to give up because it has been so long or things have gotten so bad – but to continue to serve our world by living holy lives. Let's sing

### **All Who Love and Serve Your City**

Words: Erik Routley, 1966 © 1969 Galliard, Ltd.

Music: USA melody; harm. and arr. by Carlton R. Young, 1964  
harm © 1965 Abingdon Press



1 All who love and serve your city, all who bear its daily stress,  
all who cry for peace and justice, all who curse and all who bless:

2 In your day of loss and sorrow, in your day of helpless strife,  
honor, peace, and love retreating, seek the Lord, who is your life.

3 In your day of wealth and plenty, wasted work and wasted play,  
call to mind the word of Jesus, "Work ye yet while it is day."

4 For all days are days of judgment, and the Lord is waiting still,  
drawing near to all who spurn him, offering peace from Calvary's hill.

5 Risen Lord, shall yet the city be the city of despair?  
Come today, our Judge, our Glory, be its name "The Lord is there!"

**Music** Holiness is about living rightly and offering healing and in a broken world, but it also means to come apart to be with God alone, which empowers us to live in a way that people will see our deeds and words and get a glimmer of Christ in us. Let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing

### **Take Time to be Holy**

Words: William D. Longstaff, ca. 1882

Music: George C. Stebbins, 1890

1. Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;  
abide in him always, and feed on his word.

Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak,  
forgetting in nothing his blessing to seek.

2. Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;  
spend much time in secret with Jesus alone.

By looking to Jesus, like him thou shalt be;  
thy friends in thy conduct his likeness shall see.

**Prayers** Holy God, center us on the journey toward the Cross. As we relive Christ's



journey toward Jerusalem, may we remember that we, too, must find our way to our cross for the sake of love for others. Lead us not into the temptation of excuses that keep us distant from your purpose. May we come to know that quiet joy of love, burning deep within us, that calls forth a desire to give ourselves for your world, just as Christ did. Lord, as you have intervened for us, help us to know how to best intervene (or refrain from doing so) for others, as you see fit. Being accepted, help us to accept. Being forgiven, help us to forgive. Having been so diligently tended and cared for, help us to care for each other. This is at least a part of the fruit for which you crave, and seek, and want to ripen in our lives. You have thrown your life into our salvation and given us the Holy Spirit for growth and production. We are both humbled and grateful as together, as a body, we serve you in your world.

**Requests** We remember those who are traveling with us on our spiritual journeys. Today, we name \* the Melvilles' request for us to pray for a quick recovery for Tom Runyan who has a brain bleed and difficulty breathing \* We continue to pray for \* The LaRoy's daughter requested prayers for those suffering with nerve pain, \* the Gordoniers' request prayers for their friend Al who got his artificial leg last week. \* We continue to pray for \* for Don Wilkinson \* for Stephen Brittain, \* for Lisa \* for Jan Martin, \* and certainly there are people and places and nations we have not named, but you know who they are and what are their needs, and we pray that your will will be done for your name's sake.

Now Lord, forgive our distractions, heal our wounds, give us courage for this journey, not only to the Cross, but also beyond - to finding and offer your new creation and new way of life so that all people will come to see the wisdom of living as you taught us to pray, and we will sing it today... **Lord's Prayer (Sung)**

## Intro to and Bible Reading 2

After a negative event is over, it is easy to think that if they -- (or we) -- had only done this or that; then this thing would not have happened. We play the woulda', shoulda', coulda' game. This is the attitude of some in the crowd as they listen to Jesus, who was talking to them about settling with your opponent before you go to court, lest you get thrown into jail. (See Luke 12:57-59) Instead of hearing the practical implications and applications of living in a culture where



accusers and court systems are compassionless, oppressive, and not always just -- some of them assume guilt and expect judgment: “if they are being taken to court, then they MUST have brought in on themselves. They are getting what they deserve.”

“Suffering is *always* the fault of the suffering one” was popular theology in Jesus’ day. It was less theology and more platitude, an excuse that helps people make sense out of suffering in the world. They didn’t want to argue directly with Jesus, so they tried to make their point by reporting to Jesus a tragic regional news story. Jesus’ reply demonstrates that he immediately saw what they were thinking.

... there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. And Jesus responded and said to them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans just because they have suffered this fate? No, I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you think that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse offenders than all the other people who live in Jerusalem? No, I tell you, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

And He began telling this parable: “A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. And he said to the vineyard-keeper, ‘Look! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?’ But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, leave it alone for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.’”

Luke 13:1b-9 (NASB)

**Music** People seem to enjoy creating fear and excitement by putting to every bad event the wrath of God, and gossiping about the people’s alleged errant ways. But God has consistently made it clear since Christ that God is not about inflicting painful punishment on whoever steps out of line but desires to bring healing to a hurting world, and often, he does it through his people. Let’s sing

### **Healer of Our Every Ill**

Words & Music: Marty Haugen, © 1987 GIA Publications, Inc.

#### Refrain

Healer of our every ill, light of each tomorrow,  
give us peace beyond our fear, and hope beyond our sorrow.

1 You who know our fears and sadness, grace us with your peace and gladness;  
Spirit of all comfort, fill our hearts.

Refrain

2 In the pain and joy beholding how your grace is still unfolding,  
give us all your vision, God of love.

Refrain

3 Give us strength to love each other, every sister, every brother;  
Spirit of all kindness, be our guide.

Refrain

4 You who know each thought and feeling, teach us all your way of healing;  
Spirit of compassion, fill each heart.

Refrain

### **Sermon Grace Waiting**

Someone wrote – Many believers seemed to have an almost uncontrollable need to bandage people up with quick [cliches] and bible verses. There is a time for solid, practical advice...many times, however, counsel, exhortation, or [rational] answers are not what people [need]... When I had a personal crisis. I needed more than answers and advice. I needed compassion, understanding, and the freedom to flounder without being judged. I found myself looking for people who offered a heart of acceptance instead of simplistic solutions. What people need is someone to offer them a shoulder to cry on and arms to embrace.” I discovered these people are quite rare.

We even do it to ourselves. A person once told me that if something bad happened to her, such as accidentally spilling hot coffee on her hand, then that meant God was punishing her for something she had done wrong in her life. The challenging side of this kind of thinking is that since there is no clear cause and effect, she had to stop and figure out what she did morally wrong and try to correct it. The false comfort side of this errant thinking is the hope that if we are always good, nothing bad will ever happen to us -- we feel we are in control of our own destiny.

The other false positive from this thinking, as we heard in the introduction to the reading, is that it brings a sense of understanding and control to our world. You do bad, you get bad, you do good, you get good. It makes a lot of common (“mathematical”) sense, doesn’t it? The even worse problem is the vice versa, if you get bad, you must’ve done something wrong, and if you get good, it can only



be because you are being blessed for doing something right. Is that reality? They can't hear you nod at home – [No!]

The people in the crowd asked Jesus if he heard about the Galileans (whose zealots were notorious for their turbulent nature) and had probably exerted some sort of law breaking (or from their point of view, civil disobedience). So while they were making sacrifices in the Temple, Herod (who was known for his ruthlessly cruel massacres) sent in soldiers (possibly undercover) and had the rebels (or at least he would have perceived them that way) slain, so that their blood flowed with the flowing blood of their sacrifices.

**BAD THINGS HAPPEN**  
**-- DELIBERATE VIOLENCE**  
**-- ACCIDENTAL TRAGEDY**

Then Jesus adds another news story: Eighteen people were killed when the ancient defense tower of Siloam in the southeast corner of Jerusalem collapsed. We only know of this tragedy because Jesus mentions it. It is presumed to be an accident and not an incident because didn't capture the interest of the ancient historians.

Jesus refutes the common thinking that went back as far as Job, (and if the Bible were organized chrono-

**BAD THINGS HAPPEN ≠ SIMPLE PLATITUDES AS "VICTIMS DESERVE IT"**

logically, Job would be placed right after the creation story), that only good things happen to good people and only bad things happen to bad people. Jesus tells these people: No, these victims in both stories were not being divinely judged because they were monstrously (theme time) worse than you are, he says to them. Sometimes life just happens; as he adds elsewhere: "the sun shines and the rains water the land of both the just and the unjust, therefore love and pray for the best for your enemies, for that is what will set you apart from the rest of humanity. (Matthew 5:43-48)

If we desire those who we believe are evil (like the Galileans seemed to think of Herod, for example) if we want them to suffer punishment, then we may well get caught up in their suffering and we will suffer too. (If God sends a drought sent to punish corrupt farmers so they don't get a harvest, so will the faithful then also have to suffer from lack of food, or at least pay much higher prices for that food. Therefore, hope it goes well for everybody so it will go well with us as well. Despite this thinking, it seems to me (maybe I just look at the wrong things, but it seems to me) like more and more people are so interested in crushing their economic or political or other versions of opponents that they have become completely unaware

or stopped worrying about – what happens to all the innocent bystanders caught up in their personal battles. For the good of their group, or even only themselves, that takes precedent over the good of all. And that is a shame.

Yes, sometimes cause and effect plays out in reality -- sometimes there are direct negative consequences for poor decisions or accidental actions. Spilled hot coffee does result in burnt skin. Bad construction (intentional or deliberate to save costs) can lead to tragedy, catching up innocents in its wake. But it is not always true, and it certainly does not mean that if someone has negative circumstances, that they have done something wrong to deserve it. Job's friends were wrong. Those in the crowd in Jesus' day were wrong. Judging others and/or feeling superior when others happen to experience calamity is not Christian teaching. Right? [Right]

I understand the idea that we may feel better about our negative circumstances because our circumstances could be worse. But when people try to put feet to the idea that we should feel less bad about our situation because *certain other people are experiencing worse things that we are* – that has never made sense to me. If we take seriously Paul's admonition to rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn (Romans 12:15) then how would that make me feel better that someone else is doing worse? That should just make us feel worse yet because someone else is not doing well. Even harder to understand is why we would feel worse because someone else is doing better than we are. I believe that is called envy and jealousy and covetousness... but it shouldn't be that way.

The challenge is to humbly feel blessed and to praise God rather than proud and privileged because we have for the moment escaped trials and tribulations. The challenge (as our bulletin cover declares) is to feel blessed and praise God even when trials and tribulations do humble us.

But it is not the right and wrong causes for tragedies in the world, but Jesus' next line to these smug non-victims that we want to pay attention to this Lenten season: "If you don't repent, you will perish too". By this, he does **not** mean if you don't repent, God will punish you like he did them. He just got done saying that is not how God works.

**- ALL OF HUMANITY IS IN SIN  
- LIFE IS UNPREDICTABLE**

What he is saying is that all of humanity is in the same boat in relationship to sin and its deadly consequences, and all of humanity lives in an unpredictable world where anything can happen at any time.

**= BE READY BY MAKING A FRESH  
START WITH GOD EACH DAY**

Given those two premises, it makes sense that we all need to be ready and -- to put it in our Lenten theme -- Be ready by always making a fresh start with God.

Our candles remind us that a fresh start means **returning** to God each day, **resisting** temptations that would drag us away from his will, **resolving** to commit our time and service to God, and **repenting** when we do sin – so far, this is how far we've gotten [on the candles].

One of the most vivid images for “sin”, for me, is its archery term. I mentioned recently that the first line of defense against an attacking enemy was to barrage them with arrows from a long distance. Therefore, they practiced shooting at long range targets. It was so far that they were not able to see whether or not they hit the target. And so what they would do is that they would send these “callers” out near the target (I like to think in a safe place) and the archers shoot. If they missed the target these callers would yell out “Sin! Sin!” which means “Miss! Miss!”

To sin literally mean “to miss the mark” --- of what is God's goal for us in life. Each day there lies before us a wide path to destruction and narrow path to life (Matthew 7:13-14). It is a life direction choice, but it is also a daily choice. As a life choice, (Romans 3:9-23) Paul says everyone has sinned, everyone has “missed” and fallen short of the target – of God's glory.

One day I was driving to the hospital to visit someone. I was lost in thought and missed the turn to the hospital. What do we do when we realize we miss our road? We may stop and back up or loop around or do something to get back on track, but however we do it, the essence is that we turn around and get back to the intended route. Repent means to stop going one direction with our life, to turn around and go in the opposite direction. The Holy Spirit is like the GPS that beeps at you and gives you directions to turn around, because you have missed where you are supposed to go. If we are on a journey away from God, we turn around and come back to him. It implies a change of mind and heart, a metamorphosis, a renewal, a regeneration -- putting off the old lifestyle and putting on a new way of living. (See Romans 12:1-2, Colossians 3, Galatians 4:16ff) – which God grants and empowers us to do if we are engaged in a step-by-step journey of worship and service with him.

I believe that most of us are here or are tuning in at home (or reading this) because we are desiring to be on the narrow path – we realize we need a Savior and have chosen to follow him the best we can. At the same time, even as we travel down the main artery that main path of Christ's, none of us are perfect and

there are capillaries that strive to bump us off the artery and slip us into a series of deterrents and detours and blocked lanes and dead ends that slow us from getting to the heart of the matter.

Therefore, Jesus tells a parable about a fig tree in a garden to move us to the heart of this issue. In ancient times, the fig tree was a critical staple both nutritionally and economically. Healthy trees produce two crops of figs each year -- the first is eaten fresh and the last is dried for winter consumption.

Leviticus 19:23 forbids collecting fruit from newly planted trees for the first three years. By that point the fruit and tree has become more mature, the 4<sup>th</sup> year, the fruit is given as a thank offering to God, and the 5<sup>th</sup> year it became a source of food for people. If it fails to bear fruit by this point, the pattern is set, and it probably won't bear any fruit and it is cut out to give room for something else.

The owner sees a three-year-old fruitless fig tree wasting good soil. He tells the gardener to dig it up and make room for something else that will provide the needed fruit and income to the owner. But the gardener respectfully intervenes asking for more time for the tree to become fruitful.

Unlike the people in the crowd who see someone's destruction (be it accidental or violent) as God giving up and dishing out quick punishment; Jesus says he is intervening, and God is graciously patient -- waiting for us to be saved and to mature into full bloom and fruitfulness -- living holy and godly lives. He has no desire to uproot us for the fire to make room for others. He yearns for us to become fruitfully productive. But he is also saying that the longer we fail to be productive, the harder it will be to change our patterns and time will eventually run out -- thus the warning -- if you don't repent, you will perish too, so don't get lazy like some of Peter's readers (in the responsive reading) who thought they would never be uprooted because it hasn't happened yet. They all -- we all -- need to grow toward maturity -- and that growth to maturity never ends. You don't get to 65 and retire and say, "Okay, I'm mature, No, you've got to keep on going."

As we consider our lives this Lenten season, then, if we need to think about a whole life transformation -- then we need

**HOW DO WE OPEN OURSELVES UP TO BECOMING MORE FRUITFUL?**

to do that. Please do. But I suspect that for most of us, Christ has already done that for us. Our concern will be more along the lines of tweaking our lives -- allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal our blind spots, those areas of our life that tend to hinder us and trip us up -- (Hebrews 12:1-2) Are there any activities or attitudes that need

weeding out? Any acts of compassion that need to be grafted into our day? Any devotion to the Son to which we need to open our lives? Any study to which we need to soak up helpful, healthy nourishment? Let God speak to us about finding those small capillaries that pull us off the main path – and avoiding them and closing them off; let him talk to us about discovering those areas of our lives that need to be planted within us or rooted out of us -- or pruned back – so that we may grow even more in the grace and knowledge of our Savior and become even more fruitful than we already are.

The parable stops before it ends. We don't know what the tree did in that last year of opportunity. The question is left hanging for the tree, for the original hearers of Jesus' words, and for us: When the owner comes back the next cycle, what will he find in us, on us? What will become of us? God and Jesus wait and long for productivity to show itself. It is *Grace Waiting*.

The key for the tree (for us) is staying close to and cooperating with the gardener, who in the

**GRACE WAITING – ACTIVELY**

story does not only plead for more time for the tree to get its act together, but in that year, he *actively waits*, Bible “waiting” is never passive, it is always doing something, and waiting, here, means promising that he would do *everything* in his power to offer the tree its best chance to be nourished to fruitfulness.

Some English versions say something like, “I’ll dig around it and [I will] fertilize it”. While probably not the original intent of Jesus, it inspired one writer to offer this metaphor: In hopes that we will receive this new source of life, find abundant life, become fruitful, and be saved; the gardener offers his own body as our new source of fertilizer, in the form of a crucified body on the cross; laying himself down -- deep down -- into our root system, -- digging deep, weeding, watering, sunning, cultivating. He has laid it *all* on the line for us. He has laid it *all* on the cross for us. How will we respond – as his fruitful tree – or collectively, as his forest seeking to be productive in this community?

## **Communion**

**Invitation** Christ patiently extends mercy upon mercy and grace after grace. He intervened to make possible our repentance, our turning toward becoming a new and productive creation. We strive to follow Christ's example, for which we need him with us, and we participate in Communion as a means of receiving his presence

and grace into our hearts again today. Therefore, let's turn our attention to what Jesus has done for us.

**Music** He threw his life – and death -- into our salvation, our shalom, and a spirit of unity among humanity. Let's prepare our hearts for Communion by singing

### **I Come with Joy**

Words: Brian Wren, 1968 © 1971 Hope Publishing Co

Music: The Southern Harmony, 1835; harm. by Charles H. Webb, 1987

harm: © 1989 The United Methodist Publishing House

1 I come with joy, to meet my Lord, forgiven, loved and free,  
in awe and wonder to recall, his life laid down for me, his life laid down for me,

2 I come with Christians far and near to find, as all are fed,  
the new community of love in Christ's communion bread,  
in Christ's communion bread.

3 As Christ breaks bread, and bids us share, each proud division ends.  
The love that made us, makes us one, and strangers now are friends,  
and strangers now are friends.

4 And thus with joy we meet our Lord, His presence, always near,  
is in such friendship better known, we see and praise him here,  
we see and praise him here.

**Confession** Lord, we so want to live productive lives in you. But in your gracious patience that waits for us, we find it too easy to procrastinate, too easy to get selfish, too easy to be overcome by evil. too easy to fail to bloom and be fruitful. We find ourselves in need of repenting, of turning to you again for a fresh start, or for fine tuning and pruning to become even more productive servants. Forgive our failures. Help us seek the good of others as Christ sought our good, not just once, but again and again.

**Assurance** It is because of what you did on the cross that we are confident that we are freed from the power of sin, enabled to overcome evil with good. We are granted peace with you and others as we draw near to you and you to us. As we prepare to again receive your presence through these elements:

We raise our song and chase away all grieving [over our failures]; we sing our joy, and [you make us] strong, [for it is] our Lord's life [we are] receiving; Nature's gifts of wheat and vine are now before us. As we receive the bread and cup, Christ comes to forgive and restore us. With that assurance,

Assurance (and Communion Blessing later) is adapted from words of "Christian People, Raise Your Song" by Colin P Thompson, 1975 (UM Hymnal # 636)



## Great Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them up to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

### **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. In love you made us for yourself; and when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, your love remained steadfast. You bid your faithful people cleanse their hearts and prepare with joy for the Easter feast, that, renewed by your Word and Sacraments and fervent in prayer and works of justice and mercy, we may come to the fullness of grace that you have prepared for those who love you.

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ, whom you sent in the fullness of time to redeem the world. He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in our likeness. He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. He took upon himself our sin and death and offered himself, a perfect sacrifice for the sin of the whole world. By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection you gave birth to your Church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

**Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.**

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood. By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes

in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet. Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church, all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and forever. Amen.

### The Bread and Cup

On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." [Take and eat].



When the supper was over he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." [Take and drink].

**Communion Blessing** And so we give thanks for this holy mystery in which Christ has given himself to us

and we receive him as God's great revelation, and the pioneer in the way of the new creation, by which we go into the world in the strength of the Spirit to give ourselves to others in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

**Music** God has been patient with us to turn to come to him, to cooperate with him in fine tuning out spiritual journey, pruning our lives into growth and fruitfulness. and knowing that every move forward we make is because he has graces us with his resurrection power to do so. As we prepare to serve our world as Christ served, let's remind ourselves that everything we accomplish for him is won by his grace. Let's sing

### Grace Alone

Words and Music: Scott Wesley Brown and Jeff Nelson  
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1. Every promise we can make, every prayer and step of faith,  
every difference we will make is only by his grace.  
Every mountain we will climb, every ray of hope we shine,  
Every blessing left behind is only by his grace.

Chorus

Grace alone, which God supplies, strength unknown he will provide;  
Christ in us, our Cornerstone; we will go forth in grace alone.

2. Every soul we long to reach, every heart we hope to teach,  
everywhere we share his peace is only by his grace.  
Every loving word we say, every tear we wipe away,  
every sorrow turned to praise is only by his grace.

Chorus

**Blessing**

...Spread the fragrance [of Jesus] everywhere you go. May God flood your souls with his spirit and life. May he penetrate and possess your whole being so utterly that your lives may only shine with his radiance. Praise God by shining his love to those around you. Teach by example, by the sympathetic influence of what you do, by the evident fullness of the love your hearts hold for God. Amen.

Based on the writings of Mother Teresa of Calcutta