

Straight from the "Hart"

March 17, 2024

 HARTLAND

Sharing the journey
to know, love, and serve

Making a Fresh Start (6): Remember to Forget

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 – Congregation)

Do you believe in God the Father?

I believe in the living God, the joy of the universe.

He is the pulse and purpose of all things seen and unseen.

He calls living beings to be children of eternity,

He tirelessly seeks to bring victory out of defeat, and life out of decay.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

I believe in Jesus the Christ, God's true Son.

He is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.

He took upon himself the healing of the human race.

He was betrayed, crucified on a cross, died, and buried in a tomb.

He bore the burden of our sins.

On the third day was found to be gloriously alive.

He met, and meets, with those who trust and serve him.

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

I believe in the Holy Spirit of God.

He is within and among all who cherish Christ and his way.

He brings hope out of despair, love out of apathy, and joy out of sorrow.

Do you believe in the church?

I believe the church is the body of the risen Christ.

It is always reforming and regenerating to be faithfully present in today's world, loving others through prayer, word, and deed.

I am caught up in this reviving life of Christ Jesus.

Nothing in life or death can separate me from his love and joy.

adapted from "I Believe" by Bruce Prewer, bruceprewer.com

Opening Prayer

Lord, we give of our resources and of ourselves because you have chosen us to be your witnesses," -- to demonstrate that there is no other God than you, and you can be known and trusted, and that is why we have gathered in the name of Jesus today, Amen.

Inspired by Isaiah 43:10

Call to Worship

Come and worship the God who has created and formed you. Learn to be confident in the Lord, for he has redeemed us for his own and called us by name. Passing through times of struggle need not overwhelm nor burn us, for he is with us, for our Savior values and honors us in his love. (Inspired by Isaiah 43:1-4a)

Music

Therefore, let's turn our attention to Jesus who in his love continues to fill us with hope and love that is beyond description. Let's sing together

Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee

Words: attr. to Bernard of Clairvaux, 12th c.; trans. by Edward Caswall, 1849

Music: John B. Dykes, 1866

1. Jesus, the very thought of thee with sweetness fills the breast;
but sweeter far thy face to see, and in thy presence rest.
2. O hope of every contrite heart, O joy of all the meek,
to those who fall, how kind thou art! How good to those who seek!
3. But what to those who find? Ah, this nor tongue nor pen can show;
the love of Jesus, what it is, none but his loved ones know.
4. Jesus, our only joy be thou, as thou our prize wilt be;
Jesus, be thou our glory now, and through eternity.

Lenten Cross Candles (✦ candle is extinguished)

- * 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. ✦
- * We extinguished the "**Resist**" Candle, recognizing how challenging it is to resist the temptations of life. ✦
- * We extinguished the "**Resolve**" Candle, recognizing how challenging it is to persist when life offers resistance and discouraging setbacks. ✦

- * We extinguished the “**Repent**” Candle, recognizing how challenging it is to turn away from negative patterns that hinder us from positive habits. ✦
- * We extinguished the (Laetare) “**Reconcile**” candle, recognizing how challenging it is desire, seek, and find wholeness in strained, even dysfunctional, relationships. ✦
- * This week’s candle is labeled “**Renew**”.

Jesus says he gives us true freedom (Luke 4:18, John 8:36). and he provides water that refreshes and renews our lives (John 7:37-38, Revelation 7:17) (those things are very closely related, especially to people surrounded by desert). The Bible is full of examples of finding freedom and renewal, a new lease on life through water.

Noah (you know that story), Escaping Egypt, Entering the Promised Land – Jonah and the great fish, people found freedom through the water. Unfortunately, they often used their fresh lease on life not to start fresh but to continue less than admirable behaviors.

It reminds me of a modern parable. People on vacation are taking a nature hike. They are enjoying the beauty all around them. The trail leads them next to a shallow stream where they see an abundance of fish. They become sad that the fish, imprisoned by the limitations of the water, can’t see the glory of nature like they can see all around them. The trees, sun. the clouds in the sky, and the birds and animals. They take off their shoes and wade into the stream and begin scooping as many fish as they can up onto the shore, joyfully telling them to enjoy their newfound freedom and to enjoy nature’s bounty. And at first it seemed the fish were leaping for joy! But then they weren’t.

Freedom is only renewing if it helps us become what we are designed and called to be. Fish are designed to thrive in water. We are designed to thrive in relationship with God and following his will.

This week, we extinguish the “**Renew**” candle, recognizing how challenging it is to keep putting fresh energy into something that we are not designed nor called to become. ✦

Case in point. From the very beginning, the Lord had called his people to become a nation through which all the nations of the



world would come to understand who is the one and true God. But they had other things in mind and as a result of their sins, they hills became barren, vegetation withered, rivers receded becoming islands, and lakes became dry; (See Isaiah 42:15) (literal or metaphor I am not sure which Isiaah is saying at this point, but it paints a bleak picture of the dryness of their lives) and they became (literally) powerless exiles in Babylon. Through Isaiah, God laments that they have not been the witnesses they have called to be because they've seen God work, but they didn't see it, they didn't pay attention to it, and they heard God's instructions, but didn't listen to it. Isiah climaxes this part of the lament by saying, "Who is as blind and deaf as the people God has rewarded to be his own people?" (See Isaiah 42:18-20) But at the same time, God tells the people that despite their obstinance, God has not changed his commitment to his people, and in his unending loving grace, he will soon be leading them home, and he pleads for them to hear and see this time. They will have a fresh start to be his people and his witnesses once again.

Responsive Reading 1 (R – Reader **C** – Congregation)

R: From all over the earth, God will gather those who bear his name, those he created and formed for his glory, and he will bring them home.

C: God is with us. We will not be afraid.

R: God has chosen us so that we can know and trust and understand that our God is the only true God.

C: God has called us to be his witnesses that he alone is the One who saves and delivers.

R: The Lord does not surrender his glory and praise to anyone. Look back. No other nations' idols have predicted events.

C: Only God's promises have come true.

R: Now he is making promises for new things before they even begin to be seen as possible. Sing to him a new song until he is praised from the remotest parts of the earth.

C: We will shout for joy proclaiming his praises and giving glory to God.

Based on Isaiah 43:5-12; 42:8-12

Music And as his witnesses, we communicate through words and actions what Jesus has done, does, and will do for us. Let sing this (perhaps lesser known) Lent song –

Ask Ye What Great Thing I Know

Words: Johann C. Schwedler, 1741; trans. by Benjamin H. Kennedy, 1863

Music: H.A. Cesar Malan, 1827; harm. by Lowell Mason, 1841

1. Ask ye what great thing I know, that delights and stirs me so?
What the high reward I win? Whose the name I glory in?
Jesus Christ, the crucified.
2. Who defeats my fiercest foes? Who consoles my saddest woes?
Who revives my fainting heart, healing all its hidden smart?
Jesus Christ, the crucified.
3. Who is life in life to me? Who the death of death will be?
Who will place me on his right, with the countless hosts of light?
Jesus Christ, the crucified.
4. This is that great thing I know; this delights and stirs me so:
faith in him who died to save, him who triumphed o'er the grave:
Jesus Christ, the crucified.

God Moments (Congregation's Testimonies were not transcribed)

Music I had hinted earlier that God had said through Isaiah that his own people were the most unseeing, unhearing people who had eyes to see and ears to hear. Lest he consider us in the same boat, let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing

Open Our Eyes

Words and Music: Bob Cull © 1976 Maranatha! Music,
adm. by the Copyright Co.

Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus,
to reach out and touch him, and say that we love him.

Open our ears, Lord, and help us to listen.

Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus.

(Repeat all)

Prayers God of wonders, you are always doing new things. You create dry land in seas of chaos and send forth gushing rivers in deserted wilderness. You breathe life into places and into people. You conquer those whose strength becomes dangerous and find giants of faith in people we consider too small to notice. For you are a transforming God, as you have done in the past, do something new again in the lives of your people,

Petitions Today especially, we pray for the family and friends of Jan Martin which

includes almost all of us, who passed Thursday morning. * We continue to pray for others that are on our hearts and minds but have not named them out loud. In this moment of silence, listen to the voices of our hearts and we lift them to you. (Pause for Silence) Lord we pray that in our lives, and in the lives of our friends, of our community, in the nations and in the world, your will will be done for your name's sake. We eagerly await your promised newness, celebrating the Spirit of innovation you give to us in your Son, who taught us to pray, **Lord's Prayer**

Intro to and Bible Reading 2

Nearly on the heels of the literal or metaphorical image of things getting old and drying up because of sin and being exiled to Babylon is now getting reversed. God will grant to Cyrus the Great, king of Persia, other nations to expand his Empire, and in the process, God's people would be freed to go home. God would create a way and water for the difficult journey home, and as assurance that this seemingly impossible prediction for the exiles will come true, he told them to remember how their ancestors were delivered from Egyptian slavery. He speaks through his prophet Isaiah:



I am *THE LORD*, your Holy One, the Creator of Isra'el, your King.” Here is what *THE LORD* says, who made a way in the sea, a path through the raging waves; who led out chariot and horse, the army in its strength — they lay down, never to rise again, snuffed out and quenched like a wick: “Stop dwelling on past events and brooding over times gone by; I am doing something new; it's springing up — can't you see it? I am making a road in the desert, rivers in the wasteland. The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; because I put water in the desert, rivers in the wasteland, for my chosen people to drink, the people I formed for myself, so that they would proclaim my praise.

Isaiah 43:15-21 (CJB, with “the LORD” substituted for “ADONAI”)

Music We may not understand the how and why of everything our God does for his people, but we know enough from history to be confident that he keeps his promises and he will sustain us in this life and the next. Let's sing

I Know Whom I Have Believed

Words: Daniel W. Whittle, 1883 Music: James McGranahan, 1883

1. I know not why God's wondrous grace to me he hath made known,
nor why, unworthy, Christ in love redeemed me for his own.

Refrain

But I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able
to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day.

2. I know not how this saving faith to me he did impart,
nor how believing in his word wrought peace within my heart.

Refrain

3. I know not how the Spirit moves, convincing us of sin,
revealing Jesus through the word, creating faith in him.

Refrain

Sermon Remember to Forget

One of my first and favorite classic video games was called Bezerk. A human is dropped into maze on the screen where robots then chase him saying things in the tone of *Battlestar Galatica's* 'silons', "Intruder Alert, Intruder Alert" I can't do that voice. It was actually the first time a computer used a simulated voice – it was pretty clever in its day. It also said that "The intruder must not escape".



The goal is to move through the maze without touching a wall or a robot or being shot by one. You can shoot the robots (as long as you had firing energy) as you move through the maze to an exit on the other edge of the screen which rewards you with a more difficult maze with even more robots saying the same thing.

Sometimes as we move through life we realize the only move we have made is from the rock to the hard place, or from the fire to the frying pan, or from the frying pan to the boiling pot, or from the boiling pot to the oven and from the oven to the microwave – of as one parishioner from my ministry long ago liked to say – "If it is not one thing, it's seven." We move out of one challenge only to be faced by another.

All through Bible history, the Jews were surrounded by superior military power. Sometimes they were amazingly delivered and protected, sometimes not so much, but usually with good reason according to the prophets.

As naval power became a military factor, world powers like Persia and Athens fought for control of the seas. Meanwhile, God's people were helpless exiles in

Babylon and wondered what would happen to them next as powerful players shook the world stage all around them.

Remember the Past

That makes it even more important when Isaiah reminds them that it is not empires, not the military, but God who controls the waters as well as the land, and how in the past he made a way for them through the sea – out of Egypt, through wilderness and then through the sea again into the promised land; and how he has the power to raise up or snuff out enemies like the wick of a submerged candle.

It is critical to note that this is more than only a reminder of the past. Isaiah does not say our God is the one who *made* a way through the sea for our ancestors – he is the one who *makes* a way. It is what God did for their ancestors. He did it in the Exodus, he did it in Joshua, in Judges, he did it in King David, he did it with Governor Nehemiah with Priest Ezra, and he does it -- *in our own personal salvation histories as well*. Isaiah is saying: you never thought you'd get out of Egypt -- but God made a way, and he is making a way for them now, and he will always make a way.

It speaks to the present

If we leap ahead into Isaiah's future, we find that God granted Persia victory over Babylon and the exiles are free to return home because of that. God always makes good on his promises because he isn't just the one who *saved*, he is the one who *saves*... then -- and now -- and beyond -- and that stretches all the way up to us, and even beyond us to those kids and grandkids we are so proud of... and beyond that too. God can do anything he desires in all his creation.

Isaiah is attempting to build confidence and hope in a very discouraged people, and he bases this confident hope on God's faithful work throughout the ages – a faithfulness that has not changed and never will change.

to build confidence

Jewish worship has daily routines and feast and fast days, some in public gatherings, but much of it takes place in the family home. Through their practices, they re-live what God did for their ancestors. But the idea, at least in theory, was that it was not simply a re-enactment, a dramatization, a remembrance, or even an active teaching tool – they intent was to be so connected with their history that what God did for their ancestors, he is doing for them. So when the people in exile in Isaiah's day observed Passover and the seder meal, they didn't just re-enact and re-tell the original event, it was as if God were leading them out of Egypt in that day.

By extension, the idea of the Christian year is to help us relive Christ's redemption and deliverance on the cross -- it didn't only happen about 2,000 years ago for our Christians ancestors back then, but it is for us in our present day too --- because Christ didn't just save then – he saves now -- and we experience it again – not as a memory, but as a present day promise to each of us.

Isaiah reminds them of all God has done for their ancestors and by extension – for them – but then having said all that, Isaiah goes right on to say, “Now forget it all!” If that is what he wanted, why would he bring it up in the first place? “Remember to forget what I just told you.” I wouldn't start a conversation by reminding people of something I want them to forget. So why does Isaiah say to “forget the former days”?

Stuck in the Past

The reason is he does not want them to *dwell* on a glorious past and compare it to their miserable present, and become more miserable. The danger is that as they relive the first Exodus, as we relive the cross – we get stuck back in that era, in that emotionally *moving past*, that inspiring past, those romanticized and dramatic and honorable events, and instead of building a foundation for the present and future, we stay in our “reenactment” mode and we never get out of the glorious old days. There are several reasons why we may get stuck in the past.

We get stuck in the excitement of the glorious past because the present is hard to face. Like the exiles, it is a lot easier and more inspiring to believe in God's predicted outcome when we are looking back and all the promises have been completed – much more exciting to do that then to turn to our future and patiently wait for the promises yet to be fulfilled in our own lives.

The Present is Hard to Face

We know God is always good, but our lives don't always *feel* that way. So we bury ourselves in a past time when we did feel better – maybe it is a religious event: Christmas or Easter or the stories of the saints that inspire us such as St. Patrick and all that he endured and accomplished in his day) or maybe it is our own personal salvation event (conversion baptism, camp meeting), or some other spiritual highlight of our life and we prefer to focus on a time when it is easy to *feel* and *know* that God was good to us.

We also get stuck because the past is golden. What is the old comedian routine about how we tell our children how we walked 6 miles to school uphill in 40 below zero weather in 6 feet of snow uphill

The Past is Golden

-- both ways. We tell our children and grandchildren how “rough” it was as if it were a badge of honor, but that wasn’t how we felt about as we were actually doing it, was it?

The people who escaped Egypt through the sea spent a miserable 40 years in the dangerous wilderness. I wonder what the survivors told their children and grandchildren. If they are like most of us, they probably never stopped talking about what they and their parents and grandparents did and the challenges they so nobly had to endure – learning tough lessons and discipline under God’s gracious hand.

Yet in the present tense of that wilderness experience, we read that the ones nobly enduring those challenges experienced a time of on perpetual complaining, and sinning, and idolatry, and grumbling about a God they couldn’t see and doubted, along with his selected leaders; so much so that -- as one person put it – they were exchanging the slavery of Egypt for the slavery of their own self-serving desires. Yet *after* the fact, it is memorialized in a much different, golden way: *Look at the great lessons we learned – of what God did for us when we were in the wilderness so we could get to the promised land!* And add to that, we read it in a handful of chapters, they experienced it – over generations!

After the fact it is much easier. Going through it is a different story, isn’t it?

We also get stuck in the past because it relieves us of any demands for the present actions that help us participate in God’s future for us.

The Future has no demands

Back when electricity was first being introduced in a little Scottish village, almost everybody in a particular church switched from their propane lanterns to electricity. The oldest couple in the congregation lived way out on the edge of the area so they had to wait longer because poles hadn’t yet been placed in the direction of their home yet. But eventually the day finally arrived, and electricity came to their home. Everyone came for the festive event. They waited till it was really dark, then man told his wife to go turn on the switch, and the room lit up with electric lights and everyone rejoiced and had a good time. Ten seconds later the man, grinning from ear to ear, picked up his propane lamp and said, “This will sure make lighting my lamps easier.” He lit a lamp and signaled his wife to tun the lights back off.

If all we do is remember Christ’s cross of 33ish AD, or some other experience from our personal salvation history, then we don’t have to worry about taking up our cross in 2024 for the years ahead, that we need to do -- for our sake, the sake of our heirs, the sake of the world, the sake of God’s mission carrying on through

us and beyond us. Clinging to past triumphs and past glories is at best a first step of confidence building to prepare for the new work the Lord is about to do. But taking one step on a ladder doesn't move us very far up or forward, does it?

Moving Past Stuckness

Are we stuck in the past for any of these or other reasons when we should be living in the present and moving into the future? What can we do to move beyond it? How do we get our start *moving past* our emotionally *moving past*?

The Bible encourages us to remember the marvelous works of God. But Isaiah is trying to shock the exiles out of the memories of how great it used to be because it seemed all they could do was compare that golden past to their current awful present was filling them with a doubt-driven complacency.

This is why Isaiah wants them to remember how good God is and what he can do, but then to “remember to forget” about that past in that sense -- to not get stuck in their memories. Instead, they were to use their past, positive past experiences to build confidence for what is about to take place. God is already laying the groundwork, it is springing up even now, can't you see it is coming? It will be so great the past will be a shadow by comparison.

Forget the Past

Instead of the waters parting to get them safely out of Egypt and into the promised land, they are to look for this new thing as the exit Babylon -- the waters will flood the wilderness to bring food and nourishment for them as they travel back home to the promised land. And if you read beyond our text, you will see that Isaiah is also talking about deliverance from slavery to sin and its consequences. (Isaiah 44:21ff)

See the new thing

And on that note, we can add Jesus on the cross bringing us yet another exodus. (Luke 9:31) – Jesus went up into a mountain with his inner circle of disciples, and before them appeared Moses and Elijah and Jesus was transfigured, and the three talked about Jesus' -- “departure” is the word in many English translations, but word literally is “exodus”) -- it was God's deliverance [by Jesus work on the cross] that they were talking about on that mountain -- not from Rome, but from sin and evil. This is clearly a better, renewed and improved deliverance.

He makes a way

It is like going to an active spring. You see the water bubble up in fascinating types of patterns. You see how beautiful it is, maybe even take a short video to put on your social media page, and then you go away, thinking it is seen and will be a great memory – but you haven't seen it all. Fresh water continues to come up in its unique patterns, there are new

experiences, everything is always new, always bubbling up. God is always doing something new -- it never ends. Actively anticipate and participate in the new thing that God is bringing. Isaiah said, what God did long ago is astounding; but what God is about to do is even more astounding. *God makes a way. He will guide us along not-yet-seen paths – and as long as we are following him, the best is yet to come!*

Are we stuck in the past? What can we do to start *moving past* that emotionally *moving past*?

The “way” God is making is not only the physical path through the desert to their Jerusalem home, or our way to heaven. The “way” is also the new, renewed way of life that God offers his people to walk out of sin and leave it behind. This is yet another reason to forget the old and anticipate the new. Past deliverances, as glorious as they were, did not accomplish its purpose. God’s people continued to struggle to be the people that they were called to be. The reason, according to Isaiah -- the new hasn’t come in its fullness because God’s people, who he formed to proclaim his praise, refuse to listen to God’s plan. Refuse to call on him, refuse to worship him (Isaiah 43:21ff) They were blind to God’s way.

Will We Follow the Way?

And yet blind as they were, and as we are, and as obstinate as they and we can be, God is still and will always be committed to leading his people. (See 42:16-24) That is really good news, because when we aren’t sure where God wants us to go or how to get there, God will lead us along and make a way for us.

God Still Leads

He’s done it all throughout history and continues to do so. God is always working and looking for those who will look and see and listen and be shaped by his instruction --- instruction that is for our own good; that forms us into a people -- who by the way they live – by the way we live -- will declare God’s praise as a community of true worship.

Prayer

Let’s pray. Lord, too often we think we can blaze our own trail and go it alone, "doing our own thing" and we have gotten stuck in the wilderness. The way before us is unclear. We are parched. We have closed our eyes and ears to your instruction. So, now turn us, Lord, and open our hearts to receive what you have for us as we ready ourselves again to walk in your *new way*. Renew us by your

grace and we open our eyes to your deliverance through the life and death and life again of Jesus Christ. And it is in his name that we pray. Amen.

Music Isaiah called them, and perhaps us, that it is time to remember the great things God has done, but then on that foundation, forget what lays behind and press forward to what great things God is about to do with his people in these modern days. Let's sing

This is a Day of New Beginnings

Words: Brian Wren, 1978; alt. 1987

Music: Carlton R. Young, 1984

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1 This is a day of new beginnings, time to remember and move on,
time to believe what love is bringing, laying to rest the pain that's gone.

2 For by the life and death of Jesus, God's mighty Spirit, now as then,
can make for us a world of difference, as faith and hope are born again

3 Then let us, with the Spirit's daring, step from the past and leave behind
our disappointment, guilt, and grieving, seeking new paths, and sure to find.

4 Christ is alive, and goes before us to show and share what love can do.

This is a day of new beginnings; our God is making all things new,

Blessing

Now the God who created and formed you says "Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed and called you by name and you are mine – and come water or fire, you will not be over-whelmed for I will be with you, and I am your God and I value and honor you because I love you." As we go, may we be listening for him and seeing his way that we may participate in his mission to his world. Amen.

(Inspired by Isaiah 43:1-4, 42:18)

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