

Straight from the "Hart"

June 9, 2024

Enemies of Abundant Living (14)



HARTLAND

Sharing the journey
to know, love, and serve

Sow His Reign or Reap the Whirlwind

Welcome to the Hartland UMC worship service script. We are glad you are participating in today's time of worship through this printed version.

Affirmation (P – Pastor Chuck, C – Reader with Congregation)

P: Do you believe in God the Father?

C: We believe in God the Father, infinite in wisdom, power and love, whose mercy is over all his works, and whose will is ever directed to his children's good.

P: Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

C: We believe in Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of man, the gift of the Father's unfailing grace, the ground of our hope, and the promise of our deliverance from sin and death.

P: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

C: We believe in the Holy Spirit as the divine presence in our lives, whereby we are kept in perpetual remembrance of the truth of Christ, and find strength and help in time of need. We believe that this faith should manifest itself in the service of love as set forth in the example of our blessed Lord, to the end that the kingdom of God may come upon the earth. Amen.

A Modern Affirmation UM Hymnal # 885, adapted to be responsive
(note: it was written in 1932)

Opening Prayer

Holy and loving God, bring calm to our lives. At times, we look at the problems of the world and universal church and feel that there is little difference we can make. What can our offerings in this congregation do in light of the turmoil, the hunger, the disease, and the pain that we see in our world? As we generously give these gifts as a sign also of our giving ourselves to you, help us live in the tension between thinking we can do everything and fearing that we can do nothing. We give in faith in the name of Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

adapted from Herb Mather © 2002 General Board of Discipleship
in Worship & Song, Leader's Edition

Call to Worship

Days pass and the years vanish, and so many walk sightless among miracles. We have gathered to fill our eyes with seeing and our minds with knowing --- to let the presence of Jesus light our way in the dark times through which we walk, so that, having been touched by God, will be filled with awe before him and not afflicted by negative forces.

adapted from ©1975 Central Conference of American Rabbis in
Worship & Song, Leader's Edition



Music Our prayer is that the light of Jesus will shine through us to bring hope to our community. Let's sing Shine, Jesus, Shine.

Shine, Jesus, Shine

Words and Music: Graham Kendrick

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Refrain

Shine, Jesus, shine, fill this land with the Father's glory,
Blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire;
flow, river, flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy,
send forth your word, Lord, and let there be light.

1. Lord, the light of your love is shining in the midst of the darkness shining;
Jesus, Light of the World, shine upon us
set us free by the truth you now bring us.
Shine on me, shine on me.

Refrain

2. Lord, I come to your awesome presence from the shadows into your radiance;
by the blood I may enter your brightness,
search me, try me, consume all my darkness.
Shine on me, shine on me.

Refrain

3. As we gaze on your kingly brightness, so our faces display your likeness;
ever changing from glory to glory,
mirrored here may our lives tell your story.
Shine on me, shine on me.

Refrain

Theme

Some people choose to diligently move from glory to glory, and some don't, and for some, it takes time, and maybe even crisis, to want to move toward personal growth, and our job is to love all, helping those who will receive it, and to be examples to those who won't... as this story illustrates.

Once upon a time, August Heat was a little city mouse who lived peacefully in a big house that had all the comforts a mouse could want. Warm water, hot food, plenty of clothes. Another mouse lived with August — his name was Percy Veering. Despite all these comforts, he would still regularly give something up. One day he'd wash in cold water, another he would eat less tasty food, and only pretend they were nice hunks of cheese.

Percy tried to convince August that it would be good to discipline himself once in a while, but he had no luck, August thought it was silly and Percy was harsh and foolish for taking on needless efforts.

One winter day they had a huge winter snowstorm, and they lost power and were trapped away from most of their food supply. They were going to have to dig their way out through a lot of snow. They thought they could wait it out but after the last of the food they realized it was dig or nothing. Percy Veering was fairing a lot better than August. August couldn't even touch the cold snow, it was unbearable to him, even though he knew it was dig or die. Percy dug and dug. It was a really hard job. August had curled up to stay as warm as possible, and he drifted off to sleep, thought it was really too cold to sleep. He drifted off. When he woke, he found himself warm and comfortable, he started to look around and saw what he thought was an angel. But it was a nurse. She told August that his friend had gotten through the snow and come back to pull him out and he had been sleeping for two days at the Vet Clinic.

Percy had hurt himself losing a couple fingers and an ear to frost bite, but he was happy enough, for he was alive. August felt guilty because he lost nothing, leaving Percy to do all the hard work; to which Percy just said — if it hadn't been for those fingers and ear, I wouldn't be here. They continued to be great friends, but August no longer thought of Percy as harsh or foolish, and he began to work to discipline his own body so he could be a healthier and wiser mouse, ready for any emergency.

adapted from "August Heat" by Pedro Pablo Sacristán, freestoriesforkids.com

Today's first reading begins with a warning for those who should know better but are not disciplined and diligent about living faithfully. Join me on the yellow font.

Responsive Reading 1 (R: Reader, C: Pastor with Congregation)

R: The LORD has a charge against you: There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

C: Because of this, the land dries up and animals waste away.

R: The people stumble day and night, destroyed from a lack of knowledge. They exchanged their glorious God, feeding on the sins of people and relishing in their wickedness.

C: They will be repaid for their deeds. From Hosea 4:1-9 (NIV)

R: Misery will come to those who are arrogant, greedy, and never satisfied; conquering nations, gathering captives and resources, making themselves wealthy by theft and extortion.

C: The ones you plundered will plunder you.

R: Misery will come to those who build their [domain] on the ruin of others, who from their unjust gain build their perch above the throes of suffering below.

C: Their walls cry out against them and the rafters echo the cry.

R: Misery will come to those who build their cities by injustice and murder. All they have established will go up in flames.

C: They exhaust themselves by building their empire for nothing.

R: For the earth will be as filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as waters [fill] the sea. slightly paraphrased from Habakkuk 2:5-14 (NIV) The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his [Christ];

C: and he will reign for ever and ever. Revelation 11:15 (NIV)

Music Let's sing in response,

Jesus Shall Reign

Words: Isaac Watts, 1719 Music: John Hatton, 1793

1. Jesus shall reign where'er the sun does its successive journeys run;
his kingdom spread from shore to shore, till moons shall wax and wane no more.
2. To Jesus endless prayer be made, and endless praises crown his head;
his name like sweet perfume shall rise with every morning sacrifice.

5. Let every creature rise and bring honors peculiar to our King;
angels descend with songs again, and earth repeat the loud amen!

God Moments (congregation's testimonies were not transcribed)

Music Now let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing

Out of the Depths

Words: Ruth Duck © 1988 Music: Robert J Batastini © 1994 GIA Publications

1 Out of the depths, O God, we call to you.

Wounds of the past remain, affecting all we do.

Facing our lives, we need your love so much.

Here in this community, heal us by your touch.

3. God of the loving heart, we praise your name.

Dance through our lives and loves; anoint with Spirit flame.

Your light illumines each familiar face.

Here in this community, meet us with your grace.

Prayers Life-giving God, we thank you for all the wonderful deeds you have done generation after generation, calling us together to receive your great works of love and healing, joining us on our journey and hearing what you are doing in the lives of your people. You invite us to reflect on what you have done and increase our faith in you. May we always welcome and be aware of your presence in us and among us. You don't ask for mere motions of words and rituals, but to express and experience them in a way that transforms our lives and builds our trust and faith in your power and mercy, your grace and your love.

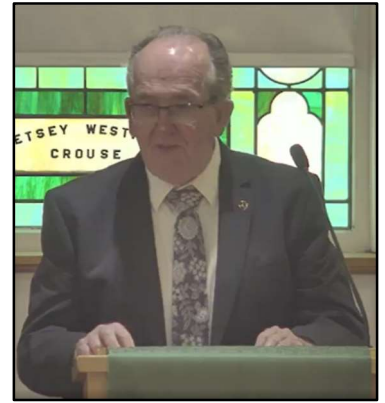
Petitions You hear our prayers, and so we offer to you the requests of our hearts on behalf of ourselves our neighbors, and the world -- that all may discover your peace, comfort, and courage. * Ann Martin, * Bill Wycoff, * Karen Nowak's sister, * Jim Malott, * Stephen Brittain, who has had a setback, * for Fran Warthman, for countries and families and individuals who are facing challenges, and for those we have not named out loud but we know in our minds and hearts, hear us as we take a moment to silently list these to you as well... **Silence**

We pray this in the name of Jesus, who sustains all of us with grateful hearts, restoring and renewing and illuminating us so that we can live as you taught us to pray. **Lord's Prayer**

Intro to and Bible Reading 2

Paul writes to Timothy warning him to be clear-headed and self-controlled, enduring hardship as he fulfills the duties of his ministry, for a time is coming (and was probably already present in his day) when people would gather around them unsound teachers who would tell them what they wanted to hear.

See 2 Timothy 4:5,3-4



You must understand this, that in the last days distressing times will come. For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable [that is, stubbornly unsatisfied], slanderers, profligates [that is, utterly and shamelessly immoral], brutes, haters of good, treacherous [that is, dangerously unreliable], reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid them! For among them are those who make their way into households and captivate [spiritually] immature women, overwhelmed by their sins and swayed by all kinds of desires, who are always studying yet never able to recognize truth... so these [intruding false teachers], of corrupt mind and counterfeit faith...oppose the truth. But they will not make much progress, because... their folly will become plain to everyone.

2 Timothy 3:1-9 (NRSVUE)

Music Let's sing before the sermon

Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service

Words: Albert F. Bayly, 1961

Music: Attr. to B.F. White, 1844; harm. by Ronald A. Nelson, 1978

© 1961 Oxford University Press, harm © 1978 Lutheran Book of Worship

1. Lord, whose love through humble service bore the weight of human need,
who upon the cross, forsaken, worked your mercy's perfect deed:
we, your servants, bring the worship not of voice alone, but heart,
consecrating to your purpose every gift that you impart.

3. As we worship, grant us vision, till your love's revealing light
in its height and depth and greatness dawns upon our quickened sight,
making known the needs and burdens your compassion bids us bear,
stirring us to tireless striving your abundant life to share.

Sermon Sow His Reign or Reap the Whirlwind

We seek to experience and share Christ's offer of abundant life, yet society bombards people with its knowledge, its philosophy, its morality, and all its variations. Much of it is clearly good. Some of it is clearly bad. And some of it clearly puts us on a fence between opposite opinions as to its value. Someone expressed it in Jones' book this way: "Some machines lift us up and help us to make the most of ourselves [and pothers]. Some tear us apart, grind us [and others] down..." Society is a machine that can enhance your best self or something that will rip you apart. Society is one of the most powerful influences in an individual's life, and when certain parts of it move in opposition to God and his will, it can become a powerful enemy to abundant living.

The reason we are so easily influenced by the negative sides of our culture, laments E S Jones as he wrote in the 40s, is a lack of personal discipline. He likens it to a dyer who doesn't discipline himself to wear protective gloves. His hands become the color of his work, so does the Christian who lacks discipline becomes colored by the culture in which he or she lives. To be fair, a lack of discipline is a common lament of pastors in every generation, going as far back as the prophets and priests and wisdom writers of the Old Testament and New Testament, sometimes implied by the narrative and sometimes in the words of people who lived those days. We talked about Paul's concern about it (with the body) just recently.

The good news is that while genetics and environment can both have impact on our life, the kind of person we will become is ultimately determined by our choice. Others, even powerful people, can do whatever they want, it doesn't mean we have to follow their path.

Today's readings describe and/or predict a day when the faithful were overly influenced by self-centered sin. The first reading was a warning to Judah to not follow the ways of Israel who had already deserted God in favor of idols, and the leaders, instead of getting them back to justice, were doing the opposite because they craved that sinful behavior that enriched themselves by oppressing others. Then the reading turned to the consequences that a foreign Empire would experience because they enriched themselves at the expense of the nations they conquered. In short, people are held accountable for how they treat others – and nations will be held accountable for how they treat other nations and peoples.

The text explains how the rich built (on the backs of the poor) elaborate homes for themselves – fortresses that basically isolated themselves from the tragedies and miseries of the common people. They were out of touch and untouched by the struggles of others. They had deliberately put blinders on.

The conclusion is that they would reap the whirlwind, (our theme picture on the bulletin). In the Bible, these kinds of powerful natural events, while sometimes literal, were often metaphors, poetic or artistic expressions of God's majestic power. (Therefore (side note) It is a dangerous speculation to take a tragic weather pattern as a judgment by God on the people living in that area – don't do that).

In the earlier days of my ministry, people used to ask me if I thought the influence of the church was increasing or decreasing compared to the influence of our culture. The reason they were asking is that they were fascinated with the end times. In my humble opinion, probably *overly*-fascinated. One prominent theory of the end predicts that the church would get stronger and stronger and stronger until finally Christ is ushered into his throne and all would kneel at his feet. Another popular theory is that society is going to get worse and worse and worse until finally Christ intervenes, coming to take his throne over all. Both theories look at the comparative strength between church and world in an attempt to measure the progression toward the end. They asked what I thought so they could determine if we were close to the end days, or more accurately, I think – to see if I agreed with them about what they thought about the end times.

I remember when I was just getting ready to go off to college, some of the people who are now my age – then – used to get all excited because in a couple years all the planets were going to line up and that was a sure sign of the end, and my thought was “But I haven't even got to college yet!” And obviously it wasn't, and I think it is dangerous to speculate too much. I think the Bible is clear that what we need is to be ready every day, whatever happens.

I tend to believe that the strength of church and the strength of society are not necessarily correlated, (if one goes up the other has to go down or vice versa). I suspect the church will get stronger and stronger in some places, and anti-faith sentiment will also get stronger and stronger in places, until at some point these kingdoms will have no choice but to collide with each other; just as they collide now in the hearts of every person every day. It is fairly easy to see examples of the church becoming strong and making a positive difference in the world – look at our Memorial Day Sale and Thanksgiving Dinner and Drama Dinner – by which

we are making a positive difference in our community. We can also see examples of sin saturating society and think the world is spiraling downward. People who want to see the worst find it, and those who want to see the best find it. What you look for is what you will find. E Stanley Jones who said it all depends upon where you set your focus and how you choose to respond to these influences as to how society will shape you or not. You can shape yourself by all the bad stuff that is going on, or you can be shaped by all the good stuff going on. God has given us the wonderful gift of being able to choose what we want to do -- and choose what he would want us to do.

But that leads us back to the theme story and this discipline that is required if we want to thrive. Remember Percy Verance and August Heat? Paul encourages Timothy in our other reading to discipline himself to stay strong and not be overcome by negative influences, where people break all the norms in the name of living to themselves, taking advantage of others who don't know enough to resist, who oppose the truth by seeking alternate explanations (we skipped over a couple verses in that reading, but Paul talked about Jannes and Jambres. Their names are not in the Bible outside of here, but Jewish tradition tells us that they were the advising magicians to Pharaoh during the time of Moses. They were the ones who duplicated most of what God had done through Moses, giving alternate explanations for the miracles. "God didn't do it, it was just this..." and then they repeated whatever it was. Today, there is much the same -- if we can explain it, then God isn't in it. We can explain the birth of a baby, does that mean God is not in it? No, just because we can explain how something happens does not mean God is not in it and that it is not miraculous. Anyone who has had a baby in their household knows that, (or should).

Many today claim they can rule the world by their deceptive words and practices, but Jesus said it is the meek, literally the trained (the disciplined) that shall inherit the earth. We fall victim to false thinkers when we fail in disciplining our lives to God, who gives full meaning for life, and through that discipline comes freedom. Freedom and Discipline may sound like they are counterpoints, like they are opposing each other. I've explained it this way before – if you don't have the discipline to sit at the piano to practice, you don't have the freedom to play it – you can bang around on it, but you can't play it if you don't discipline yourself to practice it. Likewise, if we discipline our spiritual growth, we can't as easily be led astray. The thisway Jones' says it is: We are free from the police if we are disciplined

enough to follow the laws they represent. They are not going to bother you if you are not doing anything illegal (that is, at least, if they are policing justly and properly).

The caveat here is that is disciplining our lives *to God and his ways*. Let's illustrate that by going back to the whirlwind as an image of power. If you are disciplined, but only to yourself and your own desires, "I'm going to discipline myself to do only what I want, and whatever I want is what I am going to chase!" I didn't quite get the selfish snobbish tone in there, but you know what I mean: "I will do only what I want and what I think is good just for me, and get everything for myself, and that is where all of my loyalty and allegiances lie; and that is what I am going to work after – that kind of discipline will wrap in on itself smaller and smaller – you know how a tornado gets smaller down at the end, and as our lives wrap around and downward and in on itself, that is where all the destructive force is – people who live only in regard to themselves, in time will reap chaotic destruction upon themselves and all around them, and eventually those around them will seek to contain your destructive force in self-defense. You heard it in the reading, those who you oppress and who you plunder will plunder you, they will revolt against those oppressive practices.



But if you go the other way, if you are disciplined to kingdom values, if you sow God and his loving ways you will spiral out of yourself and get wider and wider. And because your loyalties and allegiances that are not just wound around yourself, you will rise higher and wider to greater positive impact, and eventually people will respond to that as well, and seek to support and expand your constructive force in corporate actions as we work together. And when this ascending spiral is finely honed, it will broaden our life to the purposes of the kingdom of God where you will be totally free to live abundantly, and to build a society the way it should be built.

It begins by how we live our own lives. Someone posted a video on Facebook of an actor (sorry, I no longer know who it was – that isn't important to the story, it is the content anyway...) At the time, he was a heart throb for young people. He accepted a teen choice award. He took advantage of his acceptance speech to tell them something close to this: Luck and opportunity looks a lot like hard work. He named job after job he had since the age of 13, and how no job was beneath him,

and how working hard at each job helped him do better with the next job. And then he said that nothing compares to being smart and thoughtful and generous. He said that the society in which we live was built by people who are no smarter than we are; but then we are told to live within that particular framework of what they have built. But we need to do more than just live life as it is given to us and stay within those confines; we must build our life (our society). Not just live life but build it.

There has been a lot of talk on social media about WNBA rookie Katelyn Clark lately, which circles around why is she so popular, (she has doubled the attendance (or more) wherever she goes) is she really that good? Are the other players jealous? (I don't know how you read someone's heart, but people make assumptions based on surface-y observations)? Are they really targeting her (as some have assumed)? One post suggested that she was so overwhelmingly successful because she had disciplined herself to focus and work on the game itself and not get distracted by detractors or other things in life, she let her life speak on the court... while others did not and just want that same kind of recognition and popularity handed to them. Well, if they are in the WNBA, I imagine they have been working pretty hard as well... so don't quite thank that is quite right, but she does, for now, exemplify someone who has put in the work in ways that many others do not.

We build life living it and modeling it consistently day in and day out. This is why Paul told Timothy to keep clear headed, (to be alert in every circumstance), to endure hardship, to offer the gospel of Jesus, and fulfill what God called him to do. Up in the Upper Peninsula is a place called Camp Michigamme, which is a little bit outside of Marquette. The last church I was at had high involvement with the camp which is related to our Methodist Conference. They have something called Summer Games Camp where for one week we tried to create a society that lived differently than most of the kids were able to experience in school and perhaps even home life. Some of the values the camp tried to instill were: We do not try to build ourselves up by knocking others down, but we build others up that all may thrive; when we make mistakes, we confess it and try to correct it. We focus on the positive, and on our corporate-ness (our groupness, and only on *healthy* competition; and we serve each other as Christ serves us. It was by far the most popular camp of the summer – and many who got too old to participate returned as counselors so they could still be a part of it. And some did even bring that new

attitude back into the rest of the weeks of the year as well.

Whatever we perceive about this society in which we live, the real question is how are we going to live in it? What personal disciplines toward God do we have, or can we develop, so that we might make our society better? Can we change the world? At Conference all the retirees were required (asked) to make a 3-minute video to share their parting thoughts. It was really long and boring. But in the midst of that, one of them caught my attention that I thought was right on because I think it relates to a lot of us who go into ministry, and probably a lot of us as we move into adulthood. He said, When I entered ministry, I thought I was going to change the world... It didn't take long before I realized that wasn't going to happen. But then I did realize that I / we can indeed make a meaningful difference in our little corner of the world. [and who knows how far it may expand from there]... May it be so for you people of Hartland UMC... Let's pray:

Prayer Jesus, you showed us what your kingdom is like. Where you do not show favoritism, where everyone is loved and accepted and appreciated and valued. Everyone is encouraged to do their very best and not discouraged or beaten down. You taught us a prayer that was to guide our actions of daily living where we are being transformed into your likeness. Open our hearts to receive the discipline we need to begin following your will, not just within the church or just within a short camp, but within the wider world, or if it is not meant to be, at least in our small part of it.

Christ, when you came to earth in human form, you sacrificed yourself for all -- that through your Holy Spirit, may be saved and be made whole. Teach us, lead us day by day in every decision we make so that we may impact your world, moving it more toward what you would want it to be. Amen.

Music Let's stand as comfortable and sing the rest of the verses of Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service.

Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service

Words: Albert F. Bayly, 1961

Music: Attr. to B.F. White, 1844; harm. by Ronald A. Nelson, 1978

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2. Still your children wander homeless; still the hungry cry for bread;
still the captives long for freedom; still in grief we mourn our dead.
As O, Lord, your deep compassion healed the sick and freed the soul,

use the love your Spirit kindles still to save and make us whole.

4. Called from worship to your service, forth in your dear name we go
to the child, the youth, the aged, love in living deeds to show;
hope and health, good will and comfort, counsel, aid, and peace we give,
that your servants, Lord, in freedom may your mercy know, and live.

Blessing Now as we go, we honor the Holy Spirit who enlightens us and empowers us with the freedom to serve his kingdom by serving the needs of those around us, bringing glory to God in the name of Jesus before whom every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord and his reign is forever and ever. Amen.