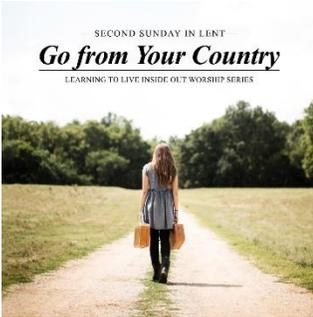


*As we unite in worship today, we extend a warm welcome to each one present.
May we together experience the presence of God*

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We Gather to Prepare Our Hearts to Meet Our Lord



Prelude

Welcome

Announcements/Joys & Concerns

“How do you know?” That’s the question we ask so many times. “How do you know it is God and not the secret desires of your own heart?” We want to know; we want to be certain. They always sound so certain in the Bible. Or do they?

Listen to the words of God to Abram: Genesis 12:1-4

The Call of Abram

12 Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”[a]

4 So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Does that sound like certainty? Oh, sure the narration says “Now the Lord said to Abram...” But what is said? Go! And there is more about what is being left behind than there is about the destination. “To a land that I will show you.” “Will show you” not that “I am showing you,” not that “I’ve written out here in these directions.” There is no printout map with a line drawn from where you are to where you’ll end up.

God doesn’t seem to ask for certainty. We don’t have Abram’s inner dialog in this story; we don’t have the questions he must have asked, at least in his own head and heart. All we have is his action – “So Abram went...” That’s it. He went, and he believed. He went as the Lord had told him. And his uncertainty got him into trouble in just a few verses. He took wrong steps at least as much as he took the right ones. But he went. And that is what God wanted, apparently.

God doesn’t want us to wait until we are certain. God doesn’t want us to figure it all out first, to download the maps and chart our course; he wants us to move. “Move where?” we ask. Anywhere. Somewhere. As the Lord has told us. We don’t know everything, but we

know some things. We know God asks us to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly. We know that Jesus said blessed are the peacemakers and that when you do it to the least of these, you do it to him. Maybe that isn't enough to build a life on, but it is a start.

And along the way is a blessing. Not just at the end. There is blessing in the going, blessing in the following, blessing in the unseen destination. But it is time to move. With those thoughts in mind let us come together this day in praise and thanksgiving of Him who gives us the call to go and discover what is and what will be...

CALL TO WORSHIP

Welcome pilgrims on the way to the cross.

We are learning to follow Jesus.

When God says, "Go!" without telling us the destination,

Show us, Christ, how to go forward in faith.

When re-birth is the impossible way forward,

Christ, be our midwife as we accept God's call to be reborn.

When we find ourselves in the in-between of where we've been and where we're going,

Christ, meet us on the way and bless us in the going.

Pilgrims on the way, come let us worship God!

We come to worship God as we learn to live inside out!

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Holy God, Creator of all that is, Donor of Grace, and Giver of Life:

Hear our prayer.

There are chasms in our lives, deep valleys that separate us

From one another and from You.

We confess that we have allowed those rifts to grow,

For fear of admitting our part in the separation,

For fear of being rejected when we reach out.

You call us to a reconciled life, to healed relationships,

To a wholeness with each other and with You.

Mend us, we pray, and make us new creations

Through the power and love of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

***HYMN OF PRAISE FWS #2196 "We Walk By Faith" (verses 1, 3, 4)**

Author: Henry Alford (alt.)

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**1 We walk by faith, and not by sight;
with gracious words we hear
of him who spoke as none e'er spoke,
but we believe him near.**

**3 Help then, O Lord, our unbelief,
and may our faith abound;
to call on you when you are near,
and seek where you are found:**

**4 That when our life of faith is done
in realms of clearer light
may we behold you as you are,
in full and endless sight.**

We Hear God's Word

**Gospel Reading.....John 3:1-17
New Revised Standard Version**

Nicodemus Visits Jesus

3 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2 He came to Jesus[a] by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with that person." 3 Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." [b] 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?"

5 Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You[c] must be born from above.' [d] 8 The wind[e] blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." 9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

11 "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen, yet you[f] do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.[g] 14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.[h]

16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

17 "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.

The Word of God for the People of God, **Thanks be to God!**

FAITH HYMN FWS #2051 "I Was There to Hear Your Borne Cry"

Author: John Ylvisaker

Publication Date: 2001

Copyright: © 1985 John C. Ylvisaker

**I was there to hear your borne cry,
I'll be there when you are old.
I rejoiced the day you were baptized,
to see your life unfold.
I was there when you were but a child,**

**with a faith to suit you well;
In a blaze of light you wandered off
to find where demons dwell.**

**When you heard the wonder of the Word
I was there to cheer you on;
You were raised to praise the living Lord,
to whom you now belong.
If you find someone to share your time
and you join your hearts as one,
I'll be there to make your verses rhyme
from dusk 'till rising sun.**

**In the middle ages of your life,
not too old, no longer young,
I'll be there to guide you through the night,
complete what I've begun.
When the evening gently closes in,
and you shut your weary eyes,
I'll be there as I have always been
with just one more surprise.**

**" was there to hear your borning cry,
I'll be there when you are old.
I rejoiced the day you were baptized,
to see your life unfold.**

“Message”

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Gracious God. God of Love. God of Comfort.

You are indeed our Everything – you're a shelter in times of storm,

You are the Alpha and Omega,

You are the God of the angel armies.

Thank you for your pure goodness toward us.

Thank you that you did not just arrive to meet us on this Sunday, but you have been with us all week long.

O Lord, we have failed to bring you the first of all our blessings. We have been slow to come to the place you have chosen as a dwelling for your name. We have been intoxicated by a hunger for power, possessions, and protection. We have been dehydrated by injustice. We are misguided and deluded. As former aliens in this land of milk and honey, we have continued the cycle of discrimination and the exploitation of new aliens and strangers. Forgive us, we pray. Refresh us for justice and compassion. Make us sober for sacrificial service. Guide us again through your Word and your will and your way.

In your mercy O Lord, Hear our prayers.

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING FOR EARLY IN LENT

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.
You brought all things into being and called them good.
From the dust of the earth, you formed us into your image
and breathed into us the breath of life.
When we turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast.
When rain fell upon the earth for forty days and forty nights,
you bore up the ark on the waters, saved Noah and his family,
and made covenant with every living creature on earth.
When you led your people to Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights,
you gave us your commandments and made us your covenant people.
When your people forsook your covenant,
your prophet Elijah fasted for forty days and forty nights;
and on your holy mountain, he heard your still small voice.

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.
When you gave him to save us from our sin,
your Spirit led him into the wilderness,
where he fasted forty days and forty nights to prepare for his ministry.
When he suffered and died on a cross for our sin, you raised him to life,
presented him alive to the apostles during forty days,
and exalted him at your right hand.
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.
Now, when we your people prepare for the yearly feast of Easter,
you lead us to repentance for sin and the cleansing of our hearts,
that during these forty days of Lent we may be gifted and graced
to reaffirm the covenant you made with us through Christ.

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."

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."

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.

WILDERNESS – A PRAYER FOR LENT

Forty days alone,
a wilderness of thoughts,
tempting and inviting thoughts,
which could so easily have distracted you
from your task, your mission,
your vision.

Yet you emerged, stronger and more attuned
to all that had to be done,
despite a time constraint
that to our eyes would have seemed hopeless.

We too live in stressful times.
Demands are made of our time,
that leave so little
for the important things of life.
We are easily distracted

in the wilderness of our lives,
by every call to go this way or that,
to turn stone to bread
leap from mountains,
and do all that would keep us from the truth.

We listen to the voices of this world,
and ignore the one who endured all this
and so much more,
and emerged triumphant,
that we might not have to suffer so.

Forgive us, Father,
when we get distracted from our task.
Forgive us those times when we try
to be all things to all men,
and fail to be anything to anyone
In the name of the one who gave his life,
so that we might know God, abundance, and life eternal we come to you in prayer...

Offertory (UM Hymnal 95) Doxology

(Wykoff only)

Offertory Prayer

God of unwavering love, we dedicate our offerings to you, lead us away from our tendency to hold back and worry that there will not be enough. Help us to live as the people of love and abundance you have called us to be. In Christ we pray. Amen. (John 3:1-17)

Departing Hymn UMH #98 "To God be the Glory"

Author: Fanny J. Crosby (1875)

Publication Date: 1989

Composer: William H. Doane (1875)

**1. To God be the glory, great things he hath done!
So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,
who yielded his life an atonement for sin,
and opened the life-gate that all may go in.**

Refrain:

**Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
let the earth hear his voice!**

**Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
let the people rejoice!**

**O come to the Father thru Jesus the Son,
and give him the glory, great things he hath done!**

**2. O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
to every believer the promise of God;
the vilest offender who truly believes,
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives. Refrain)**

**3. Great things he hath taught us, great things he hath done,
and great our rejoicing thru Jesus the Son;
but purer, and higher, and greater will be
our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see. (Refrain)**

Benediction

We came to worship
We go now to serve.

We have been given the light.
We go now to let it shine.

We have been blessed by God's love.
We go now to share it.

We are Christ's disciples.
We go now to witness to all. Amen.

***POSTLUDE**