

*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



Opening Meditation

Stiff-necked is one of those descriptions that we don't use nearly enough. Our focus this week might seem harsh. It might also lead us to point fingers at those out there or over there who are stiff-necked. Rarely do we realize that we are the ones in need of a neck massage.

To be honest we are some of those who make light of the invitation at times; we are those who attend but don't bring our wedding garment, don't enter into the spirit of the call to discipleship. We are often halfhearted at best. So, today let our worship be our opportunity to reengage, to recommit to the journey of discipleship.

In our gospel reading today Jesus describes kingdom living as a wedding feast, a party of commitment and promise and enduring joy. Yes, the parable speaks of the seriousness of this invitation and about the punishment meted out for missing out or for making light of the call. But we are not the ones who determine punishment. We are not the ones who cast out those who won't fit in. That's not our job. Our task is one of invitation and celebration, of grace and openness, even as we live out a life bounded by the law of God.

Our job is to invite the world to the banquet table. We must show by our hospitality and our grace that we understand the depth of the call to be people of the law of love. The long haul makes it hard to sustain the party atmosphere, which is why we need the whole community to come alongside. We are to boost one another up when needed. We are to take turns at stepping up, and we must find ways to work side by side, showing the neighborhood that we are producers of the fruit of the kingdom.

May our worship today be reorienting; as we find our way back, again and again; and let us always remember to come back so that we can continue on for the long haul.

A Call to Worship

Come! Now is the time to worship!

We come to worship God who invites us.

When the Israelites worshiped the golden calf, God listened to Moses and chose to correct instead of destroy.

God persistently invites us to return to God.

Jesus tells a story of a wedding banquet where the guests dismissed the invitation and harmed the messengers, so the king invited people off the streets and welcomed all who received the invitation in earnest.

God persistently invites us to return to God.

Too often we turn from God's ways, choosing our stiff-necked insistence that we know what is best instead of trusting God's provision, love, and guidance.

When we turn away and our love fails, God continues to offer us opportunities to return to God and join in the celebration of God's abundant love and life.

Come! Now is the time to worship!

We come to worship God who keeps inviting us for the long haul.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

Leader: Creator God, the world continues to chide, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" (Psalm 137:3)

People: But like our ancestors in the faith, we continue to ask, "How can we sing the LORD'S song in a foreign land?" (Psalm 137:4)

Leader: Remind us, O God, that wherever we live, it is no longer foreign, but it is your land. Help us to honor this land as sacred.

People: Remind us that Zion's songs are to be sung everywhere and all the time in our global community.

Leader: Gracious God, we do not truly honor and respect your creation as good stewards. Our failure to see that every human being is created in your own image...

People: Our refusal to celebrate the earth you have given us with sanctity and decorum...

Leader: Our inability to sing the songs of Zion, through our lips, hearts, minds, and actions,

People: Have caused pain, anger, suffering, racial injustice, poverty, war, and conflict in our communities, nation, and world.

Leader: Merciful God, hear our humble confession that we have sinned against you by refusing to sing these songs of Zion.

People: We confess that our silence-when colleagues and friends with different skin colors, accents, or cultures have been unfairly treated — has made the oppressor stronger and has harmed the oppressed. We take that responsibility for our weakness and failure.

Leader: Powerful God, grant us the grace, courage, and wisdom to be dynamic disciples of Jesus Christ, filled with the mighty power of the Holy Spirit...

People: So that we may sing with gusto the songs of Zion wherever we are. So that we live the words of our song through our acts of holy boldness. So that we might keep marching to Zion. So that we, as baptized Christians, fight against all kinds of racism, inequality, and injustice.

Leader: Make us new. And help us to remember and renew our baptismal covenant,

People: So we might become your beloved community, and the world may know. That we are committed to dismantling all kinds of -isms and oppressions that tear

the fabric of humanity. We commit ourselves to singing a new song, to sing the songs of Zion always and everywhere in our land. Amen.

Praise Hymn UMH #352 "It's Me, It's Me, O Lord"

Arranger: William Farley Smith (1986)

Refrain:

**It's me, it's me, O Lord,
standing in the need of prayer.
It's me, it's me, O Lord,
standing in the need of prayer.**

**1 Not my brother, not my sister, but it's me, O Lord,
standing in the need of prayer.
Not my brother, not my sister, but it's me, O Lord,
standing in the need of prayer. [Refrain]**

**2 Not the preacher, not the deacon, but it's me, O Lord,
standing in the need of prayer.
Not the preacher, not the deacon, but it's me, O Lord,
standing in the need of prayer. [Refrain]**

**3 Not my father, not my mother, but it's me, O Lord,
standing in the need of prayer.
Not my father, not my mother, but it's me, O Lord,
standing in the need of prayer. [Refrain]**

Gospel Reading..... Matthew 22:1-14 (NRSV)

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

22 Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: 2 "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. 4 Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.' 5 But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, 6 while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. 7 The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. 8 Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' 10 Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad, so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, 12 and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 For many are called, but few are chosen."

This is the Word of God, for the people of God, **Thanks be to God!**

Children's Sermon

Faith Hymn UMH#348 "Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling"

Author and Composer: Will L. Thompson (1880)

**1 Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,
calling for you and for me;
see, on the portals he's waiting and watching,
watching for you and for me.**

Refrain:

**Come home, come home;
you who are weary come home;
earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,
calling, O sinner, come home!**

**2 Why should we tarry when Jesus is pleading,
pleading for you and for me?
Why should we linger and heed not his mercies,
mercies for you and for me? [Refrain]**

**3 Time is now fleeting, the moments are passing,
passing from you and from me;
shadows are gathering, deathbeds are coming,
coming for you and for me. [Refrain]**

**4 O for the wonderful love he has promised,
promised for you and for me!
Though we have sinned, he has mercy and pardon,
pardon for you and for me. [Refrain]**

Message

Pastoral Prayer

Father, we are your people, chosen by you. As we meet together in this place, help us to listen, to understand and to remember. Make us aware that we are meeting not simply with one another, but with you. Let your presence be real to each of us. As we pray, may it be just like speaking with you. As we listen, help us so concentrate, so that we really hear your word, and help us to take in and retain all that we hear here, see and experience this morning.

Hear our confessions of those things we have done (A silence is kept.).

Hear our confessions of those things which we ought not to have done. (A silence is kept.)

Now hear our confessions of what we could or should have done in a different way to better reflect who you are in us. (A silence is kept.)

Lord we raise to you this day our neighbors in this community you have created

(Name those who have been brought forward during joys and concerns, if any)

Hear now our praise and thanksgivings for your blessings and unearned grace give to us. (A silence is kept.) It is in the name of Jesus, your beloved son, that we unite in prayer this day, Our Father....

Offertory/Doxology/ Offertory Prayer

Mighty and righteous God, as we bring our offerings to your altar, we confess we see ourselves in the stiff-necked Israelites in the wilderness. We are quick to lose sight of you, especially when our focus is turned in the direction of gold. Your anger and disappointment are so justified, and as Moses intervened for the Israelites, Jesus has advocated for us with his very life. Help us to keep our focus as you light the pathway you would have us walk. We pray this with gratitude for your love and in the name of your son, our savior. Amen. (Exodus 32:1-14)

Departing Hymn UMH # 526 "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

Author: Joseph M. Scriven (ca. 1855)

Composer: Charles C. Converse (1868)

**1. What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer.**

**2. Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
take it to the Lord in prayer.**

**3. Are we weak and heavy laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge;
take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield thee;
thou wilt find a solace there.**

SENDING FORTH

May you go knowing that God invites you today and every day to partake in the abundant life and love God has for you. So may we receive, honor, and celebrate the grace that softens our stubbornness and opens our hearts to share God's love with one another. Amen.

Postlude