

*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**

**Opening Meditation**

Ask someone on the street to quote a Bible verse, any Bible verse, and you may get a blank stare.

But ask them to name a Bible verse and you are in business: As many will say - John 3:16. It's the perfect verse. Because it seems John 3:16 has become a kind of trademark for society — it provides a way to reduce and simplify one version of the Christian gospel to a quick sound bite.

In one sense, this use is justified. Because if we zoom out this verse can give a view of the big picture of God's work in Christ, but we must also remember this verse is not just a simple message.

God loved the world so much that God gave the Son so that we may believe and have eternal life (John 3:16). What is it about this "simple" Good News that we don't want to understand?

In this statement we must remember that placing our trust in Jesus means withholding our ultimate loyalty and trust from other things that ask us to pledge our allegiance.

Also, placing our trust in Jesus means noticing that the new life Jesus offered was especially difficult for the religiously accomplished.

And placing our trust in Jesus means confronting the inconvenient truth that God's purposes for those God loves are not synonymous with our own common-sense values of happiness, health, and safety.

You see, the trail of faith that Jesus blazed reveals that, while there is nothing in this world worth killing for, there are things worth dying for. The "lifting up" of Jesus reminds us that the true-life God has promised us is not the life that we can secure for ourselves through self-interest and caution.

Let us join together today in praising the one who has given us true life.

## **A Call to Worship**

Lenten travelers, the journey is long. Let us take a moment to rest and breathe.

**Only in God do we find our rest.**

Sometimes the road is easy, and we bask in the warmth of the Light who guides us.

**Other times the road is hard, and we hide from the Light, afraid for our actions to be made known in public.**

Somedays we delight in the joy of journeying together on this road.

**Other days we struggle with the temptation to judge and condemn one another as we travel this path.**

Today, let us come into the Light together as we learn to love God and one another through the twists and turns of our Lenten journey.

**Come, let us worship God together! Amen.**

## **PRAYER FOR THE DAY**

**Great and loving God, we ask that your Holy Spirit bless our time together and to refresh us with your presence. In the midst of a world full of trouble and strife, we thank you for watching over us, guiding us, and as we confess our sins, for forgiving us. Enable us to enter your presence today joyfully and reverently and let us depart with the assurance that our sins are forgiven. Fill us, O God, with the peace that passes all understanding. Amen.**

## **Praise Hymn UMH #357 "Just as I Am, Without One Plea" (verses 1-5)**

*Author: Charlotte Elliott (1835)*

*Composer: William B. Bradbury (1849)*

*Publication Date: 1989*

**1. Just as I am, without one plea,  
but that thy blood was shed for me,  
and that thou bidst me come to thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.**

**2. Just as I am, and waiting not  
to rid my soul of one dark blot,  
to thee whose blood can cleanse each  
spot,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.**

**3. Just as I am, though tossed about  
with many a conflict, many a doubt,**

**fightings and fears within, without,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.**

**4. Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;  
sight, riches, healing of the mind,  
yea, all I need in thee to find,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.**

**5. Just as I am, thou wilt receive,  
wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;  
because thy promise I believe,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.**

## **Gospel Reading..... John 3:14-21 (NRSV)**

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.[a]

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. 18 Those who believe in him are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20 For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21 But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God." [b]

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

## Children's Sermon

### **Faith Hymn UMH #420 "Breathe on Me, Breath of God"**

*Author: Edwin Hatch (1878)*

*Composer: Robert Jackson (1888)*

**1. Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
fill me with life anew,  
that I may love what thou dost love,  
and do what thou wouldst do.**

**2. Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
until my heart is pure,  
until with thee I will one will,  
to do and to endure.**

**3. Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
till I am wholly thine,  
till all this earthly part of me  
glows with thy fire divine.**

**4. Breathe on me, Breath of God,**

**so shall I never die,  
but live with thee the perfect life  
of thine eternity.**

## Message

### **Joys/Concerns**

#### **Pastoral Prayer**

Sweet and precious God,  
Almighty and awesome in glory,  
yet so near and so concerned about our hearts,  
thank you for knowing and loving us with an everlasting love.

Time and time again, we have messed up and relived the oh-so-common  
"if you get me out of this, I will never do it again."

We have attempted to bargain a favor on a promissory note that we make void daily.  
But thank you God, that even though you know we are headed to sin again,

you not only still love us unconditionally, but you offer us forgiveness, the opportunity to have a clean record, that bears the title: new grace AND mercy every morning.

So, allow us, Oh God, to not become complacent in our daily journey.  
Forgive us for not moving as fast as we should have in the past,  
and for not helping someone in need when we could have.  
You have given us the spirit of discernment,  
but please give us the wisdom to see beyond the transitory things of life  
and find you and your sustaining presence, that we may be a blessing to others.  
You know the silent cries in our hearts,  
we know that you have already met the need,

We ask that you touch families, friends, and most importantly our neighbors whom we name before you this day.

Thank you, for being sovereign in our lives,  
giving us the power to speak over our own lives, the lives around us,  
and to love one another with the love of Christ.

We will continue to give you glory, honor, and praise,  
believing that your grace is sufficient enough for us,  
and your love endures forever.

It is in the matchless name of Jesus that we pray. ...Our Father...

### **Offertory/Doxology**

#### **Offertory Prayer**

*God of unwavering love, you have held nothing back in your love for us, not even your Son. How we marvel at that kind of love, and how we long to reflect a portion of that devotion back to you. As 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 3:14-21)*

### **Departing Hymn UMH 400 "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing"**

Author: Robert Robinson (1758)

Publication Date: 1989

**1. Come, thou Fount of every blessing,  
tune my heart to sing thy grace;  
streams of mercy, never ceasing,  
call for songs of loudest praise.  
Teach me some melodious sonnet,  
sung by flaming tongues above.  
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,  
mount of thy redeeming love.**

**2. Here I raise mine Ebenezer;  
hither by thy help I'm come;**

**and I hope, by thy good pleasure,  
safely to arrive at home.  
Jesus sought me when a stranger,  
wandering from the fold of God;  
he, to rescue me from danger,  
interposed his precious blood.**

**3. O to grace how great a debtor  
daily I'm constrained to be!  
Let thy goodness, like a fetter,  
bind my wandering heart to thee.  
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,  
prone to leave the God I love;  
here's my heart, O take and seal it,  
seal it for thy courts above.**

### **BENEDICTION**

Beloved, today God sends us out with a blessing and a practice. Repeat after me: (breathe in) God, fill me with Love ...(breathe out) and empty me of condemnation. May you carry this prayer with you this week, knowing that with every breath you breathe, you are blessed and sustained by Love who journeys with us in light and in darkness. Amen.

### **Postlude**