

Call to Worship

God promised to bless Abram so that he might be a blessing. **We cry out from our wilderness of violence, hunger, homelessness and all of the other ills of our world in need of blessings.**

May we be surrounded with God's radiance and guided to hear whispers of loving peace. **Come, Holy Spirit, so that your light of salvation through Jesus will erase the tears and fears as we walk in the light to be blessings for others.**

Prayer of Invocation

**We gather together in your name. our hearts are raised in praise and prayer. Abide with us as we seek your will for our lives. Inspire us – so that we might be faithful as you are faithful, loving as you are loving. We call to you today, God of Presence, God who guides us through the wilderness, God of Hope. Amen**

The Word

Philippians 2:13-24

God is the one who enables you both to want and to actually live out his good purposes. **Do everything without grumbling and arguing so that you may be blameless and pure, innocent children of God surrounded by people who are crooked and corrupt.**

Among these people you shine like stars in the world because you hold on to the word of life. **This will allow me to say on the day of Christ that I haven't run for nothing or worked for nothing. But even if I am poured out like a drink offering upon the altar of service for your faith, I am glad.**

I'm glad with all of you. You should be glad about this in the same way. Be glad with me! I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to see you soon so that I may be encouraged by hearing about you. I have no one like him. **He is a person who genuinely cares about your well-being. All the others put their own business ahead of Jesus Christ's business.**

You know his character, how he labors with me for the gospel like a son works with his father. So he is the one that I hope to send as soon as I find out how things turn out here for me. **I trust in the Lord that I also will visit you soon.**

Living the Word

In Genesis 12:1-3, Abram is the opening player in God's plan for global mission. God tells Abram to leave his country, and then God promises: *"I will make of you a great nation and will bless you. I will make your name respected, and you will be a blessing...all the families of the earth will be blessed because of you."*

Theologically this segment of scripture is called the 'Abrahamic Covenant.' When we look at the text through a missional lens, it can also be called the 'Great Commission' of the Old Testament. It is God's call to Abraham, Sarah and their descendants, to be blessed and to bless all peoples on earth.

The call and promise are repeated three times to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 18:18; 22:18), once to their son, Isaac (26:4) and once to their grandson, Jacob (28:14-15). The missional idea of God, right from the time of Abraham, was to bless all peoples, all nations, and all races. This is the missional thread of the entire Scripture.

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – our God – is interested in blessing all people of all nations and of all races. The words bless, blessing and blessed appear not only throughout the Christian Scripture; they are part and parcel of all Christians and all Christian churches. We worship the God of blessing whose plan is twofold or two-sided. God blesses us and, in turn, we are to be a blessing to others.

Now, what is a blessing? When I pray “Lord, bless me,” I expect the Lord to give me all the best things in life, for family and ministry. When I say “bless you” to someone, I expect God to give that person all the best things in his or her life. Simply put, blessing is extending God’s love into the lives of others.

God blesses us individually and collectively as a church for the missional purpose of blessing others. If the church claims to be a blessed faith community through Jesus Christ, then all people, all nations, and all races ought to be blessed by the church. How many of our churches truly claim that blessing in actively blessing others?

People and communities may not look like us; they may not speak the same language; they may not have ever seen stained glass windows, a steeple tower, or a pipe organ; they may not know how to love God and love people. It doesn’t matter.

This missional thread that connects Jesus’ commandment to love God and neighbor through the church with the surrounding community is the joy of God’s Great Commission: all people, not just one race or one community, are welcomed, embraced, accepted and celebrated.

Peter Block, author and consultant on community-building, challenged the clergy and laity of the Wisconsin Annual Conference in June of 2012, to know not only who are neighbors are, but also their needs and gifts, and to use that knowledge to determine the churches ministries, not the other way around, where we decide what ministries we want and then go looking for neighbors that might want only what we want.

It is a double blessing to connect people’s needs and gifts with the vision and mission of local churches. This is what the New Testament Great Commission is all about, Matthew 28:18-20 – “*Jesus came near and spoke to them, “I’ve received all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.”* People go into the church to be blessed and go out into the community to be a blessing to people of all ages, nations, and races.

In Philippians 2:15, Paul writes, "you shine like stars in the world," using the plural word 'stars' because church is all the people, not just one person. Webster's Dictionary defines the word shine as reflect, radiance, glow, bright, and excel.

Church people, who are the children of God with a primary function of being the light of the world (Matthew 5:14), are called to reflect the amazing grace of God, to radiate God's unconditional love, to glow in selfless service to the poor and to the needy, to burn bright in active faith, and to excel in the ministry of mission and outreach.

You shine as stars to all people in the world, approximately 6.2 billion in communities, people groups, nations languages, and ethnicities. Paul characterizes those without faith as "crooked and corrupt," which can simply mean that people are in darkness and need to be brought into light to become lights of the world.

People are going through darkness – sorrow, grief, loss, disappointment, frustration, sickness and failure; these are opportunities for church people to invite, to embrace, and to accept. We are called to show people 'the light at the end of the tunnel' and to lead them to the light. Jesus met people at the point of their need and focused on their healing in ways that they could rejoin the community.

From the dark prison cell in Rome, Paul challenged the church at Philippi to be a high-powered light, "you shine like stars in the world because you hold on to the word of life." In other words, the church at Philippi were challenges to go into their community and ask: "Is someone in this darkness in need of light?" The same challenge and the same question applies to our congregation. It is a missional challenge. It is a missional question.

Matthew 5:16 reads: *"let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven."* It is likely that Paul would have used images in his letters from the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus preaches, "Let your light shine before others." Paul writes, "You shine as stars in the world."

In essence, both convey the same message. We who claim to be followers of Jesus are mandated to shine, before and among people, and in the world.

Church people shine in three dimensions. We shine upward: worshiping God regularly with adoration, confession, encouragement, communal prayer and songs of praise. We shine inward: in small groups, Christian education, fellowship and building up one another within the faith community.

We shine outward: taking the Gospel of love and justice into the world, to people who are in darkness, looking for help, hope, and healing, to people hungry to become light. The purpose of all three dimensions is to glorify God, to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

As people become members of this church we ask them to commit faithfully participate in the ministries of the church by their prayers, their presence, their gifts, their service and their witness to

the world, through the gathering of Christians that we call the church. But this isn't just for the 'members' of the church, but also everyone who is willing to follow Jesus Christ's example and called to be a disciple.

It is a commitment for each of us to live as the people God has called us to be. As we baptize an infant, we repeat as a congregation that "we renew our covenant faithfully to participate in the ministries of the Church by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service and our witness that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."

How are you doing with all of that? Do you realize what you agreed to when you said those words? God does, and God waits in hopeful expectation that you can live out those commitments to the children and to those who decide to join in membership here.

Pastors are given a certain amount of authority and every time I plan bold print for you to read from the screen, I check and recheck that they are in line with the Christian teachings of this church. I am not trying to trick you into saying something that you may not agree with, but some of it if truly considered may be something you are still working on or striving for. The word faithfully means you are regularly trying to do your best in these areas.

The ministries of the church – Worship, Outreach, Education and Caring, can only happen with participation from each of us. How can you participate? by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, your service and your witness. I am going to use me as an example, only because I know my story best.

About a month ago, God sent a message into my head to pray for one of the other pastors in this community. I said a little **prayer**: "Ok Lord, you know what is going on, help him to be OK and to feel your presence. The next day it was there again. So I prayed again. This went on for 3 days, each time I prayed that God's strength would support him and God's presence would be known to him. The fourth day I tried to call, but it went, after ringing, to his answering machine. The message I left was, "This is Cathy, I just want you to know that I am praying for you."

I saw him about a week later and he thanked me and said I must be in touch with the Spirit, as he had been going through something very hard for him on those specific days. The next week I saw him again at the Ministerial meeting, he was visiting with another pastor and I joined them and he told the other pastor that I was a Spirit led pray-er.

I get a lot of prayer requests every week and I pray ceaselessly as I allow my mind to focus on what God has for me. I faithfully pray for my family and for this church and for the Hayward Community. How about you? Do people know you as a pray-er? That is a gift you can share....

Let's look at '**presence.**' I know, I get paid to be here every week for worship, so does the pianist, yet the leadership team is here almost every week and even more impressive – since COVID 19 invaded our world, and they are unpaid staff. Paid or unpaid they all share a faithful presence in worship. The faithfulness of your presence was much easier in other years, yet many of you stop by or send greetings during the week, so I know that you are still with us on this odd journey...Then there is presence in the other ministries of the church to be considered. So my question to you is - are you a faithful presence in some part of the ministry of the church?

Next comes gifts. Can you faithfully share your gift of time, of your resources, whatever they are, in God's ministries? I don't like to talk money and so I am not going to say this out of pride or boast, it should be said: I have a tithe, 10% of my gross salary taken electronically out of my bank account for the church. By giving electronically I give regularly without even trying. Then if I want to give to any other project, I can usually find some funds for that as well.

Your shared resources may be a smile or hug, encouragement or a sharing of your talents. When you live out of abundance rather than scarcity, it is surprising how much can still be left over. What gifts can you share?

**Service** is how we work together to keep the business side of the church going. It is everything from straightening the pews each week, to mowing the lawn, to counting money, to attending periodic meetings to help make the decisions. If everyone was faithfully contributing to the service of this church we wouldn't have to keep asking for your help... The burden is easier to carry when we carry it together. How do you serve your church?

The final way to commit yourself to faithfulness in the ministries of the church is by your **witness**. In the last year every time someone asked me about this church, I shared that through prayers for new possibilities and commitment we paid off the mortgage in 12 weeks, and that we have welcomed our New Reflections - neighbors across the street in prayers, gifts and service! I said it over and over wherever I could get a few words in. I was witnessing to the good ministry that continues happening here and to the potentials that you agree to pray and dream about.

Witness is not pounding the Gospel into everyone you meet, but sharing what is good about your church. Staying positive even when the frustrations and irritations come, as we work through them together. Others will see that, in you and how you handle the good and the difficult. What and how do you talk to others about what God is doing in this church through Christ, through you for others?

We don't do any of this for the good of the church, but to continue to live into our call to be a Christian. Many of these things can't be measured by others, or even by the church, but God knows. It hurts me that we have to go through the membership list each year and decide if someone has done even one of the things on the list.

What is even more 'sad' is that our standards are low enough that attending one service a year or giving one time to the church in a year we define as faithful participation, so no one will be offended. Members or not, we are all called to be faithful disciples of God.

Thank you to everyone who is already faithfully sharing in the ministries of this church. God knows best of all who the faithful are...

We ask for blessings and we receive but only in part. The full blessing comes in sharing what we have received with others. We walk in the light to be blessings for others. We are blessed to be a blessing.

PRAY

Jesus, would I have answered when you called?

Lord, let our lights shine today, tomorrow and everyday!