

"Celebrating and Receiving our Commitments"

Deuteronomy 26:1-11
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Call to Worship

From every walk of life we have come, wearied, wandering, frustrated, broken, yet determined to return to the place where we have found the peace that passes understanding. Here in this place your Spirit has washed away the grime of our lives and left us feeling renewed, restored, revived!

We thank you, God of all times and seasons, that you are always present, always ready, and always visible in the sisters and brothers who share this place with us. **We come, confident of your presence and grateful for your mercy.**

Prayer of Invocation

Lord, open us to all that you would have us be for you and for others. Breakthrough into our lives and our church with new possibilities. Meet with us now, Holy Spirit. Meet with us in this moment of pausing, that we may know you more truly and know ourselves more clearly as we live each day before us in faith. Amen.

The Word Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Once you have entered the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and you take possession of it and are settled there, **take some of the early produce of the fertile ground that you have harvested from the land the LORD your God is giving you, and put it in a basket.**

Then go to the location the LORD your God selects for his name to reside. Go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him: **"I am declaring right now before the LORD my God that I have indeed arrived in the land the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us."**

The priest will then take the basket from you and place it before the LORD your God's altar. Then you should solemnly state before the LORD your God: **"My father was a starving Aramean. He went down to Egypt, living as an immigrant there with few family members, but that is where he became a great nation, mighty and numerous.**

The Egyptians treated us terribly, oppressing us and forcing hard labor on us. So we cried out for help to the LORD, our ancestors' God. **The LORD heard our call. God saw our misery, our trouble, and our oppression.**

The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, with awesome power, and with signs and wonders. **He brought us to this place and gave us this land—a land full of milk and honey. So now I am bringing the early produce of the fertile ground that you, LORD, have given me."**

Set the produce before the LORD your God, bowing down before the LORD your God. **Then celebrate all the good things the LORD your God has done for you and your family.**

Living the Word

"He brought us to this place and gave us this land—a land full of milk and honey. So now we are bringing the early produce of the fertile ground that you, LORD, have given us."

You may not get as excited as the Hebrew people when they finally got their 'milk and honey' land. But then we didn't have to travel through the desert for 40 years to get here... Even so, we are harvesting from

the fruits of all of our historical ancestors as we call ourselves Hayward United Methodist Church and worship here today.

Not only Moses and Jesus, but this week once again I heard names from the history of this church: Lloyd Anderson & Mildred, Don & Alice Clausen, Grace Asp, Gordon & Bess Brown, David & Carol Mott. I know there are many more, and each week I hear different names – too many to name here, especially as I am sure someone would be left out.

But you know who they are. The ones who came before, the ones who literally built this church building, as well as made up the congregation. I imagine there were a few in-depth discussions about what this sanctuary would look like, how the offices would fit on the octagon, and eventually how the kitchen would be remodeled and the fellowship hall added. There may even have been a few disagreements and some hard praying before people could agree.

Our unique differences cause us to think differently sometimes, but it is in each unique understanding that the variety of life is found. That is something to celebrate along with everything else we can celebrate today: that because we are all at least a little different, one from another, there are many ways to understand how and why things are decided.

Today we come together in celebration of our commitment to work together with 'Open Hearts, Open Minds and Open Doors' for the good of everyone. Today we celebrate the culmination of the four ministries of this church: the Ministry of Faith Formation, Caring Ministry, Missions and Outreach Ministries, the Ministry of Worship. Because they are the focus of our commitment, time, effort and finances – everything we apply our hands, feet and brains to should be for the good of the ministries. Currently we are in the midst of living into the MCCI prescriptions that will help us be ready for the future of this church.

Do you realize that we have been praying our breakthrough prayer for almost a year. Where have you seen breakthroughs in your life in the last year? It was discussed at Bible Study on Wednesday, and as a couple members shared with me outside of class, that through last Falls Disciple Bible study on the old testament and the series we have been watching pieces of since last January, many new insights are coming onto our heads. We understand so much more about the Bible and what God wants for us as the people and the Creation.

The last two weeks as we explored what it was like for the Disciples as they went out to share about Jesus with the people down the road and in places they had never been to before. Because of the Romans who build 76,000 miles of road, the travel for Paul was easier as he went.

Because Paul, after a conversion experience, went back to the Hebrew scriptures that he learned as a Roman Jew growing up, and saw them as a believer in Jesus, he now had a way to convert other Jews. Whole cities came to hear what he said about the Messiah they were waiting for from God. He reminded them of the Old Testament Scriptures that were pointing to the coming of Jesus. They embraced Paul and his stories of the man who came to teach about tolerance and forgiveness and the God they already knew who loved them enough to send a human to teach them how to live.

We often discuss if that same old story is something that we can share in some way, with others outside our own family and friends. How about you have you felt any faith breakthroughs in the last year that you can celebrate? How about as you explored the colors around you this last summer? I know many of you wrote down or shared pictures of where you saw God in the colors. Did you avail yourself of the opportunity to look for God in the colors this summer?

What are some of the Breakthroughs for the church in the last year? We agreed to forge ahead with the MCCI program to look to the future with a positive view of revitalization. A team of strangers studied our

church and heard our stories and our hopes for the future. All seven of them, (Sue, Scott, Kate, Rachel, Ben, Gary and Lorrie) who were here in May have since asked me how we are doing and telling me how much they loved our church. We know we have something special here, yet it is an extra blessing every time we get the opportunity to share all of this with someone who feels blessed while here.

In the whirlwind of the MCCI Express weekend and the beginning of summer, someone came up with a crazy idea to try and pay off the mortgage. I am a great believer in trying new things and I hoped we could at least pay down the debt.

God had a breakthrough plan. How about we pay off the debt and have enough left over to update the church computers and have some left to put in the reserve for any future building issues. I personally had to repent for the doubts that I had. Of course, God forgave me and said 'stay courageous – believe, and celebrate' we aren't done yet!

In the midst of a year of losing members through death, there has been a caring and bonding within the congregation as we surrounded each other as we grieved with stories and tears, more time together and food. In loss we have been drawn together. Next Sunday for All Saints Day we will celebrate those lives as they are now a part of the great clouds of witnesses that we call saints.

Let's see what else? The Salad luncheon – success; the garage sale – success; Root beer floats – some success... Oh, one more very important breakthrough for our church. As we were praying for new possibilities and breakthroughs – the old motel nursing home across the street was bought and given a new facelift.

Even more important is the new ministry that has been placed at our feet. Many of us who were tired of complaining and being frustrated by one of the biggest issues of our area – drugs and homelessness, began to talk about what could be done about it. The programs that are beginning across the street for women and north of town for men are opening their arms for our support. We say we are open – time to show it.

You may have noticed already, but the generations coming behind us are more inclined to make the decisions and move first, and deal with the fall-out afterward. Have you heard the saying "It is easier to ask forgiveness afterward than to get permission up front." That is really scary to some of us, yet what if that was said by God first? Maybe we just need to pray for new possibilities and breakthroughs, acknowledge them, accept them and get on with it leaving the worries and what ifs behind in order to move forward..

One of the greatest breakthroughs this past year, that you may not have recognized is the trust that we have built in us as a congregation, and our church leaders and they are moving us forward as God's people.

How will our four ministries be effected by the breakthroughs of this last year? Bible Study is going well and new insights are being found; Worship is giving us new ways to find God and to know God; we are quick to surround each other with caring when we are hurting because we have gotten to know each other better; and we are reaching farther beyond our doors and our old comfort zones to be apart of this community and the world.

The church is shrinking. We are going to die. Isn't it interesting how we can complain for years about problems, before we think to resolve them? MCCI may not be the complete answer. Even so, it is helping us grow strong to confront the need to revitalize and plant our feet firmly and we begin leaning into a future that is open wide before us. This is your place, supported by your gifts. We are in this together as servants for others.

Everything that we do should affect the ministries of the church in some positive way. We need to always be thinking with open minds, open hearts and open doors of new ways to live out these ministries. Well, what will the future look like?

Here is something to think about: What will Hayward United Methodist Church look like 10 years from now. Process what you might be doing in ten years...Often I hear grandparents telling me that they are upset because their children aren't bringing their grand children to church.

Can we create a place that will work somehow for them, while still being comfortable for us? Through our MCCI work we are becoming a model for other churches who want to look to the future.

For this morning, we have a lot to celebrate that we are doing well and moving forward. Within ourselves and by our actions, we are stating what we are committed to. Once again, we are able to do this because we do it together.

There is no way to tell what 2020 will bring, but if we continue to bring our minds together, our prayers together, our hands and feet together, and share our gifts...God will continue to show us the blessing that there are for us.

Gracious God, we offer ourselves in commitment to the ministries of this church and to the world. The gifts of our ancestors undergird the work we do. May our gifts encourage those who will also come after us. Continue to bless this church, just as we have been mightily blessed. Amen.