

Call to Worship

Our God has searched us, found us and called us as individuals into Christ's Church.

**God has gathered us here in community, and promises to be in our midst through the Holy Spirit.**

We give thanks that the Trinity comes to us and for their active presence in our lives.

**In the reading and meditation upon the written word of Scripture, in the singing, the preaching and the sharing of peace, may our hearts and minds be alert and receptive to the living word of Christ for this day.**

Prayer of Invocation

**Generous God, as recipients of many material blessings, we are among those who have provisions beyond our needs. We come together to remember with gratitude that all we have is an outpouring of your generosity, gifts to be shared. As we worship this day, help us to become people who live with the spirit of generosity. Amen.**

The Word 2 Corinthians 8:7-15

Paul wrote these words to the new Christian community at Corinth: Be the best in this work of grace in the same way that you are the best in everything, such as faith, speech, knowledge, total commitment, and the love we inspired in you. **I'm not giving an order, but by mentioning the commitment of others, I'm trying to prove the authenticity of your love also. You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Although he was rich, he became poor for your sakes, so that you could become rich through his poverty.**

I'm giving you my opinion about this. It's to your advantage to do this, since you not only started to do it last year but you wanted to do it too. Now finish the job as well so that you finish it with as much enthusiasm as you started, given what you can afford. **A gift is appreciated because of what a person can afford, not because of what that person can't afford, if it's apparent that it's done willingly.**

It isn't that we want others to have financial ease and your financial difficulties, but it's a matter of equality. **At the present moment, your surplus can fill their deficit so that in the future their surplus can fill your deficit. In this way there is equality. As it is written, *The one who gathered more didn't have too much, and the one who gathered less didn't have too little.***

Living the Word

Today is a day to celebrate who we are and what we are doing as Hayward United Methodist Church. If you are new to this church you may hear bits and pieces of what we are about, yet this morning I want to share with you some of our work this last year, beyond what you see in worship.

Two years ago, we began praying as a church, a simple prayer: *"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. Amen."* When we look at the ceiling of this octagon shaped building, we see the roof comes to a peak, which from outside has a steeple that points to God. When our eyes wander down the eight walls, they face everything beyond us. So, 'with our eyes on God we are sent in every direction...' Even the building calls us to be in connection and mission with the community.

Sixteen months ago, we were invited to be a part of a program entitled Missional Church Consultation Initiative – MCCI. Through a year of self-study and reflection, we were invited to consider five prescriptions to move us forward in ministry. They each had components for us to work on, and we are still working...yet God has put new opportunities before us this year.

Last Fall we waved good-bye to our summer people as they went south for the winter. It gets a bit quiet here November through March, yet we are still here celebrating work and worship in smaller groups.

The first of the year, 2020, we had no idea what was coming. February, we entered into a stunning pandemic, that no one was prepared for, even though we were still praying for new opportunities.

By February 27 we had very tentatively put together online worship, though we had little idea of what we were doing or if it would work...There were a few technical challenges, and even after eight months, we are still moving on to perfection.

Very-near-by, a motel that had turned into a nursing home sat empty for a year – it was looking pretty derelict. Suddenly it was being remodeled into a women's shelter. There was a need for more beds for this use in the area and God brought it real close to us, so we wouldn't miss it.

We have given them some financial support, some donations for their thrift store and supplied a place for meditation and picnics in our Memorial Garden along with a play area for the children who live there.

Some have come to worship, some are now watching us online, and they wave to me, when I drive by. Our members and friends serve in 30 different mission projects in the area, from food distribution to water and land trusts, to many other volunteer positions.

This is much of who we are here at Hayward United Methodist Church. If you want to know more about us, I invite you to spend some time on our website find our basic church information and explore other of our ministries. If you want to keep up with the weekly ministry you might be interested in receiving our Midweek Update. If so send me your email and I will include you.

Every part of yourself that you give for others, lives out the love Jesus Christ, who came to give us an example for our lives. So, we do come in thankful celebration today even within the uncomfortable circumstances of being in the midst of a pandemic. We celebrate the difference that each of us make when we walk this journey together.

But there is more to celebrate. In this part of the world, where we see the cycle of seasons so evidently before us, it may be one of the easiest locations for us to grasp the cycle and seasons of being a Christian during our lives.

Like winters that can be too cold and long, where we have to be extra creative in keeping our spirits up – to Springs that bud and begin to blossom before we get a chance to see the snow all gone, each year is filled with expectation and uncertainty, except for the knowledge that whatever season we are in...the next one is coming.

I have told several people that after last winter I have been praying for this winter to be without snow. A selfish request and the nice Fall weather had given me time to get my scraper and my boots out, yet, of course I wasn't mentally prepared when it came.

The cycle of the seasons, help us understand the fruits of the trees. The cycles of our lives, help us understand that the fruits of our lives that are produced are different from year to year according to the climate we live in. As we live into the fruit of God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, we define what we believe.

Historically, creeds were often said together during worship to give a unified voice to what we believe. There is power in the words we say together. Just as with the Lord's Prayer, when the words are spoken in one voice, we can feel the empowerment of being a part of something greater than just ourselves and we are enabled and equipped to go out into the world as disciples of Christ together.

The difficulty with a creed written by someone else, is that we may find ourselves repeating words that we don't understand or aren't sure we believe in. But if we explore the creed ahead, we can then know how we feel about saying the words together. So, on this day as we celebrate, I would share with you "A Creed for the Sowing of Seeds" by Sister Joyce Rupp (OSM), who is an award-winning author and retreat leader around the world.

It begins like this: *I believe that the Word of God has been planted many times in my life, often by another who received the seed in ready soil, brought forth a harvest, and shared that goodness with me.* Do you believe that others who have lived and grown in the faith before you did, have made a difference in you by planting a seed of the knowledge of God in you? This might include a Sunday School Teacher, or a grandparent or a parent, a friend or even a passer-by in your life, how has it made a difference.

*I believe that the call to be a Sower of the Word is a privilege and a blessing, that one can ever earn the right or claim the duty, that it is a gift freely given, and a ministry to be constantly celebrated with gratitude.* We are all called to share that knowledge of God that we have inherited in some way. No amount of money or work can get it for us. It comes only to us as a free gift of God and is something we can praise God for by passing it on.

*I believe that great things can come forth from even the tiniest seed planted in love and cared for tenderly in the hearts of others. I believe that even the most insignificant aspects of life can be the seed of God's giving, and that deeper faith can root and mature in very ordinary soil.* This gift is for everyone and can be provided in the least likely moments or places of our lives. It doesn't always come to us with fireworks, but in fact, it is often a part of 'the usual', that God presents to us day in and day out.

*I believe that it takes much patience to sow seed, to freely give it away to the heart of the earth, and to allow it to take root and grow in its own good time.* Anyone who has taught a child, knows how hard it is to let that child go out on its own and then to wait and see if the lessons have paid off...

*I believe that some dying has to take place within a seed before it can give itself over to life, that every heart has its own germination time, and that there may be difficult moments before the sacred harvest comes.*

Just as the current struggles of the church include finding ways to reach the up-coming generations with the knowledge of God, we are realizing that their learning styles are different from how we learned. So, we need to abandon some things that are important to us in order for them to receive the seeds in a way that will be important to them.

I have recently been told that other than their own name, the children aren't learning cursive writing. It made me remember the beautiful handwriting that I discovered on a Valentine that my great grandfather signed to his daughter, my grandmother. They spent hours and hours perfecting beautiful handwriting. It was a sign in the early 1900s of a person's literacy.

My early cursive was a disappointment to my father, which I worked hard to improve. But as I got into high school my style changed to a half writing/half printing way that was criticized by teachers into my college years. Then we started typing everything and the cursive, other than signing our names, didn't matter so much.

Still because I had to write all of those pages of letters to learn, I am shocked that they aren't teaching it as much anymore. As the creed says there may be difficult moments before we see the proof of the harvest.

*I believe that only God knows what growth will come from the Word planted through my ministry. I am content in knowing that I have tried, with the Sower's grace, to seed that Word in faith and with joy. I believe that I will always know a season of hope, and that I will once again experience the newness and beauty of Spring after even the harshest reign of Winter's ice and snow.*

All that is required from us is to do the best we know to do, God will do the rest with us and with other's help as well. Then with hope we know things will all turn out.

*Most of all, I believe in the Sower of all seeds, in the God of Springtime, in the Giver of all good and perfect gifts, my Lord, and My God!*

We will come back to this creed in a few minutes. One of the dramas in society today is making a commitment. Just the word 'commitment' brings on shudders for some. But there are times to be committed. To say what you believe and to live into it as well as you are able.

Dear church members and friends: The 2020 commitment card that we have printed, is for your convenience. We want to give you the opportunity to commit yourself to this church's ministries. We only ask you to fill it out according to what you believe is possible for you to live into in the next year. We also know that life can change with a moment's notice and then your commitments may have to change.

So why even commit? Because like voicing our beliefs together, making this commitment together will also enable and empower you to be a part of something much greater than you could do by yourself. As you pray for the church, you know that others are praying as well. As you are present with the church family physically or via online, we come together to share our joys and concerns, including many blessings!

As you support the budget or give to one of our mission opportunities, you are joining with others to make a difference where it is needed. Imagine your gift to the Food Shelf or the Women's Shelter making all the difference and bringing you closer to a relationship with someone who becomes important in your life.

As you are willing to sit at the table to work through the planning for the ministries, or ushering for worship, or some other service to the church, we are able to continue to function around here, all taking small parts so no one has to do too much.

As you are willing to plant the seed of your knowledge for others, you are being the witness that God has called you to be. If we don't commit to sharing the Word of God, trying new ways for new ages, the church will eventually no longer exist. We need all of us to commit to some level of our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service and our witness.

You have been invited to offer your commitment to God, through the mail this year, as a simpler way to respond. As you prepare to return your commitment card to the church, include a prayer, offering your thanksgiving for all of the gifts we have received as a church. Despite all of the complications, this last year has been an amazing year of being the church. I am thankful for the past, the present and for all that the future holds for this congregation.

In our lives we believe many things. Some things that we believe at first, we later grow out of and new understandings and beliefs are formed. In the church there are many creeds of belief. Today I just shared one of them. When you say a creed and it is the words you believe, it should be said with the power of your belief. I now ask you to say what you believe like you mean it, and if there is a line you don't agree with, then for that part be silent. Please join with me and we will say it together.

"A Creed for the Sowing of Seeds"

***I believe that the Word of God has been planted many times in my life, often by another who received the seed in ready soil, brought forth a harvest, and shared that goodness with me. I believe that the call to be a Sower of the Word is a privilege and a blessing, that one can never earn the right or claim the duty, that it is a gift freely given, and a ministry to be constantly celebrated with gratitude.***

***I believe that great things can come forth from even the tiniest seed planted in love and cared for tenderly in the hearts of others. I believe that even the most insignificant aspects of life can be the seed of God's giving, and that deeper faith can root and mature in very ordinary soil.***

***I believe that it takes much patience to sow seed, to freely give it away to the heart of the earth, and to allow it to take root and grow in its own good time. I believe that some dying has to take place within a seed before it can give itself over to life, that every heart has its own germination time, and that there may be difficult moments before the sacred harvest comes.***

***I believe that only God knows what growth will come from the Word planted through my ministry. I am content in knowing that I have tried, with the Sower's grace, to seed that Word in faith and with joy. I believe that I will always know a season of hope, and that I will once again experience the newness and beauty of Spring after even the harshest reign of Winter's ice and snow.***

***Most of all, I believe in the Sower of all seeds, in the God of Springtime, in the Giver of all good and perfect gifts, my Lord, and My God! Amen.***