

Unison Opening Words ~ *Common Prayer: Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*

Lord, our strength and purpose come from you. Direct our steps today, and turn us from the perishable things at which we grasp. Cast your light upon us so that our lives may bear witness to the light of Christ. Amen.

Traditional Service Liturgy Following Opening Hymn **and** Contemporary Service Liturgy Following The Lord's Prayer before the Scripture Reading: This We Believe Document 'Article IV'

The Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is of one substance, majesty, and glory with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God.

- Romans 8:12-17.
- The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity.
 - The Nicene Creed describes the Holy Spirit as “the Lord, the Giver of Life.”
 - Breath signifies life.
 - God formed humanity in God’s image and then breathed into us the breath of life.
 - This breath transformed us from mere clay into sentient, capable co-creators.
 - And this breath – God’s breath – from the very beginning was purposeful – to lead us, through grace, in becoming more holy.
 - John Wesley wrote in his sermon *The Great Privilege of Those That Are Born of God*, “the life of God in the soul of a believer...implies the continual inspiration of God’s Holy Spirit; God’s breathing into the soul, and the soul’s breathing back what it first received from God; (1) [this] continual action of God upon the soul, and a re-action of the soul upon God... [creates] an unceasing return of love, praise, and prayer, [whereby we offer up] all the thoughts of our hearts, all the words of our tongues, all the works of our hands, all our body, soul, and spirit, to be a holy sacrifice, acceptable unto God in Christ Jesus.”¹
 - Wesley believes it is God’s grace-filled Holy Spirit that stirs us to waking from the slumber of sin.
 - With our new God-given awareness, grace ushers us to that moment of repentance, where we, like Wesley, experience the clarity of faith that leads us to profess our faith:
 - That we trust in Christ, Christ alone, for our salvation
 - That he [has] taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.²
 - For Wesley, this happened on Aldersgate Street in London in May 1738.
 - There he discovered “that the God for whom he had been so relentlessly searching was, in truth searching for him.”³
 - He wrote about it in his journal – fervently and joyfully!

¹ “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God,” *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology*, III.2.

² <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-is-aldersgate-day>

³ Will Willimon, *This We Believe* 49.

- And his very next journal entry questioned the very assurance of the faith he had a night before proclaimed.
- Professing faith in Jesus Christ one minute does not mean we will not doubt, perhaps in the very next minute.
 - It does not mean that we will not wonder. It does not mean that we will not wander!
 - Wesley used the language of *backsliding* to describe falling away from our walks with Christ.
 - Unfortunately, believers are not immune to crises of faith; we are not immune to inward inclinations towards sin translating into outward acts of completed sin.
 - Also, we are not on our own.
 - God did not set our creation into motion and then walk away.
 - God is omnipresent. Better yet, God is with us personally – Emmanuel.
 - Relationship with the Father through the Son is what interrupts the ‘temptation to sin’ pipeline.
 - The Third Person of the Trinity – God’s Holy Spirit – the *Paraclete* – our Helper and Advocate – is who faithfully and persistently guides us back and along the way that leads to eternal life.
 - It is God’s desire that we choose relationship with God.
 - We will not be compelled to do so.
 - Wesley continued preaching, “For it plainly appears, God does not continue to act upon the soul, unless the soul re-acts upon God...[God] first loves us, and manifests himself unto us. While we are yet afar off, he calls us to himself, and shines upon our hearts. (2) But if we do not then love him who first loved us; if we will not hearken to his voice; if we turn our eye away from him, and will not attend to the light which he pours upon us; his Spirit will not always strive: He will gradually withdraw, and leave us to the darkness of our own hearts.”⁴
 - We believe that God moves towards us in grace – that grace is a gift!
 - Gifts are no longer gifts, and grace is no longer grace, if forced.
 - As we live in and through the Spirit, we become more Christ-like.⁵
 - This means we look, act, and talk like Jesus – (3) to a visible degree – because we intimately and personally know Jesus.
 - When we obey Jesus, we are not just servants and friends; we are family.
 - Matthew’s Gospel records Jesus teaching, “*Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?* And pointing to his disciples, he said, *Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother*” (Mt 12:48-50).
 - And what is the will of our Father in heaven?
 - That the hungry be filled, the naked clothed, the lonely befriended
 - The infirm healed, the grieving comforted, the warring at peace
 - The lowly lifted, the captives freed, the creation protected
 - The lost found, the harmed embraced, the sinner forgiven

⁴ “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God,” III.3.

⁵ Ibid., 57.

- The people loved – all God’s people – loved.
 - “[God] will not continue to breathe into our soul, unless our soul breaths toward him again; unless our love and prayer, and thanksgiving return to him, a sacrifice wherewith he is well pleased.”⁶
 - Unless our actions, behaviors, service, and stewardship reveal to a visible degree our becoming more Christ-like.
- Paul names us *debtors* in today’s text – *debtors* to the Spirit rather than the flesh.
 - A debtor to the flesh receives payment in full upon death – the cost is your life.
 - A debtor to the Spirit is a person cognizant that “everything depends upon to whom the debt is owed. Debt owed to the Spirit gives life; it does not take life away.”⁷
 - Professor Steven Paulson illustrates this point saying, “When a beloved child needs help with college expense, long before she goes to college a parent is already there saving for an education. When the day comes to pay tuition, the parents gladly do it, and in fact make the child more indebted to themselves than ever before. Parents do not lend to their children as a bank does, because it is love, not law, that does it. Parents lend to open the debtor to the future, not to bind him or her to the past.”⁸
 - The 2020 – now 2021 Summer Olympics begin this Friday.
 - The Olympics are always a special time – and not just to see world-class athletes in their peak physique competing in prime time –
 - But to see a global display of all God’s children together, encouraging one another and building one another up.
 - Where just for a time, all of the walls humanity has built seem to come down...
 - New sports make their Olympic debut this year – including skateboarding, sports climbing, and surfing.
 - Though never an Olympian, when I think of *that* quality of athletic and inspirational caliber, I think of quickly of Bethany Hamilton.
 - (4) “Bethany Hamilton was born to surf. She grew up in Hawaii, where her parents and two older brothers participated in the sport. No one was surprised when [Bethany] took to the surfboard like a champ, winning her first competition when she was just eight. ... Bethany was thirteen years old when a tiger shark bit off her left arm. She lost nearly half her blood, but friends rushed her to the hospital, where she endured multiple surgeries. Relying on her Christian faith and courage, Bethany returned to the water with her surfboard in less than a month following the attack.

⁶ “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God,” III.3.

⁷ *Feasting on the Word Year A Vol III* 254-256.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 256.

One year later, (5) she amazed the sporting world by winning the Explorer Women's division of the 2005 NSSA National Championships."⁹

- Bethany paddles out to surf with one arm.
- Bethany pushes herself up to surf with one arm.
- Bethany maintains her balance and flies through the waves with one arm.
- Bethany wrote in her memoir *Soul Surfer*, "Look, lots of bad stuff happens to people. That's life. And here's my advice: don't put all your hope and faith into something that could suddenly and easily disappear. [In our context this morning – don't be a debtor to the flesh.] ... The only thing that will never go away, that will never fail you, is your faith in God."
- She also wrote, "Courage doesn't mean you don't get afraid. Courage means you don't let fear stop you."
 - If we live to the flesh, we die.
 - If we live to the Spirit, we have life, and life abundantly.
 - The abiding presence of Jesus' Holy Spirit assures us (6) "that God does not let go of those lives for which God in Christ has so dearly paid."¹⁰
 - This we believe.

1 – This continual action of God upon the soul, and a re-action of the soul upon God creates an unceasing return of love, praise, and prayer... - John Wesley, *The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God* III.2.

2 – But if we do not then love him who first loved us; if we will not hearken to his voice; if we turn our eye away from him, and will not attend to the light which he pours upon us; his Spirit will not always strive... - John Wesley, *The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God* III.3.

3 – to a *Visible* degree

4 – Young Bethany photo – please cite <https://www.pensandpatron.com/lifestyle/bethany-hamilton/> on the slide

5 – Bethany surfing photo – please cite <https://www.pensandpatron.com/lifestyle/bethany-hamilton/> on the slide

6 – The Holy Spirit assures us that God does not let go of those lives for which God in Christ has so dearly paid.

⁹ *Courageous World Changers*, 50.

¹⁰ Willimon, 56.