

Watch Night Service Liturgy

Greeting: Tonight is a night to celebrate freedom from bondage and oppression.
Tonight we reclaim the truth that our lives have always mattered.
Tonight we remember the cost in courage, lives, and human anguish to give us our birthright of freedom.

Tonight we thank Jesus and all those who have followed the Divine example, making it possible for us to have so much to celebrate.

Tonight we accept our responsibility to protect and expand those same freedoms for those still oppressed and for those who will come after us.

Hymn: "Come, Let Us Use the Grace Divine" 606 UMH

Opening Prayer:

Spirit of Freedom, we do not realize where You have been, and we rarely recognize where You are going. You are unstoppable. You are beyond human control. You created us in Your image, with free will to choose the life we are going to live in this world. Unloose the bonds of our internalized racism, sexism, nationalism, and every other falsehood that cause us to deny our own personhood. Show us the truth, You who are the whole Truth and nothing but the Truth. Teach us about ourselves and the dignity of every creature, that we might all bring glory to Your Holy Name. Amen.

Litany of Thanksgiving:

Let us give thanks to God for our freedom.

Thank You for proclaiming as steadfast "Yes" when all the world has consistently shouted "No". You say "Yes" to human dignity, when You heard the cries of babies separated from their mamas. You say "Yes" to sacred worth, when others were yelling, "No, you are less than human, less than a beloved child of God."

We open our hearts to Your "Yes"!

Thank you for forming all of us into a beloved community, when others were preaching that we do not belong. You never

discriminate, because You are the one who made the color of our skin, and You fell in love with it. You do not discriminate, because You are the one who made the texture of our hair, and You fell in love with it. You do not discriminate, because we are all Your children, called by Your name, and are all members, by the blood of Jesus, in the same family.

We open our hearts to Your beloved community.

Thank you for inspiring hope. They laughed and mocked as Jesus was being lynched, just as others laughed and mocked through the ages, those with little power. Our cause was proclaimed hopeless, but just as Jesus arose from the dead sharing eternal hope, we too arise. They knock us down, yet we arise. They may shame and denigrate, yet we arise. They arrest us, imprison us, yet we arise. They bomb Christian churches and murder our children, yet we arise. Thank you for the hope that will not disappoint.

We open our hearts to hope.

We thank you, that on our darkest days, you are with us and never leave us. In the dark, stinking holds of ships, and prison cells You never left us. When we were hungry, and cheated, You were there and felt it all. In fact, whatever evil we have experienced, it was not done just to us, but it was done to You. And You counted it all joy to stand with us, and with all who are oppressed and stripped of their full personhood.

We open our hearts to joy.

Thank you for freedom: Freedom to be ourselves; Freedom to love ourselves; Freedom to be families; Freedom to become who You have called us to be. Thank you for the freedom to learn, and to grow: Freedom to question; freedom to create something new; the freedom to dream new dreams and to have a vision of a better future, not just for ourselves but for generations to come.

We open our hearts to freedom. Amen

Prayer of Illumination:

We open our hearts to Your Holy Word. Let it be a personal word, whispered in our ears, Your gentle voice, calling us into

your loving embrace. Let this be a fresh moving of Your Great Spirit. Use it to transform the way we think, the way we perceive, the way we believe, and the way we live as we strive to follow Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture: II Corinthians 4:7-12

Proclamation:

Beloved community, we have been set free from sin and have been embraced by God. Through the sacrament of baptism, we have been joined to the divine family and have been made part of the covenant community of which Jesus Christ is the open door. Jesus spilt his own blood, that we might gain membership without any other price. We have the Divine assurance of our salvation, of our new life in Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith. In response to this undeserved gift, we seek to follow in the ways of compassionate love, and restorative justice exemplified in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We do not want to take our freedom in Christ for granted, so it is only right that we from time to time, renew our commitment to this work of liberation. So today, just as those before us, we come before the Lord, to examine our lives and renew our commitment to follow in the ways of freedom, mercy and grace.

Covenant Service

Invitation:

Accept the freedom that God has given you to resist evil in whatever form it might present itself. Experience more fully the freedom of the family of God: freedom to think, freedom to love and be loved, freedom to forgive and to be forgiven, freedom to take up the responsibilities of a mature member of the community of faith. The work of liberation continues. Some the tasks necessary to nurture freedom seem easy and pleasant, but other tasks are dangerous and demanding. We cannot be uninvolved, because Christ is involved. We must look at our participation in this cause of Christ.

Let us, come to Christ in prayer:

**I am Your child, a member of Your own family.
I will not act like a stranger.
I will be open to Your direction and respond to the needs
revealed to me by the Spirit of Grace.**

God wants to use your life to transform the world.

Life Giver, Freedom Bringer, use me in whatever ways You need.

I trust You completely: I will do anything necessary, even if it means suffering for Your cause. Place me at the front of the line with You, or if You want, You can send me home. Give me an abundance of resources, or give me the bare minimum, because I trust You. I believe You are with me when I have everything I think I need, and that You are with me when I have nothing at all. I have faith in You, in Your cause, and in Your method of universal love, and so I place my life completely at Your pleasure and disposal.

We cannot do this alone. We are completely dependent upon the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Without You, we cannot love our enemies. Without You, we cannot bring others joy. Without You, we cannot bring peace to those who are troubled. Without You, we cannot show patience with the slow progress of others. Without You, we cannot respond to others with kindness. Without You, we live in a world of scarcity. Without You, we cannot be faithful to our commitments. Without You, we cannot be gentle with those who have suffered trauma. Without You, we cannot enjoy the freedom to make healthy decisions. Because of You, we have become a part of Your good and perfect gift to the world.

To open ourselves to this reality we must enter into four holy disciplines:

First, we need to dedicate our lives to full inclusion and go to where those who are not like us dwell. We need to listen to each other's stories and experience each other's pain. We need to laugh together and learn to dance to new rhythms. You desire for us all to become one as You are one.

Second, we need to force ourselves to move toward the pain, the injury and the harm revealed to our hearts in the lives of others. We must ask the Lord to heal us of our callousness, and give to us renewed hearts of compassion. We must train ourselves to hear the voice of God's judgment on our behavior, so we can become instruments of God's transforming love.

Third, we need to nurture a willingness to be uncomfortable in order to be faithful witnesses for the change God is working for in every society. This uncomfortable truth is a Divine prophetic word spoken to our hearts and moving us towards the change God desires in us and in our society.

Fourth, we need to strive to become each day people who exude relentless hope. To be witnesses for a God who is present and active, redeeming the world, and setting every person free. God desires our positive witness and enthusiastic belief in the Kingdom of God come upon the earth.

Let us prepare to renew our covenant with God and each other. In a posture of openness to God; let us pray:

Covenant Prayer:

Faithful and True, I want to be just like You, but I am not there yet. Forgive me for not only my lack of understanding, but my unwillingness to change. Thank You for not giving up on me, help me to better recognize the needs of others, and the freedom You have given me to be a blessing and not a curse, so that all might join me in bringing glory to Your holy name.

God desires that we get rid of all our idols.

I renounce them all: my racism, my ethnocentrism, my nationalism, my sexism, and every other way that I have pretended to be god. I acknowledge the gift of my undeserved privilege, that I have used unintentionally and intentionally to harm others. Every gift I have is not my own, but Yours for the salvation of the world.

God invites us to become one with Christ and one with each other.

I do not want the world to see me, but Christ in me. I will allow them to experience Christ's forgiveness as I forgive. I will allow them to experience Christ's mercy, as I show mercy. I will allow them to experience Christ's restorative justice as I work to restore the lives of those who have been traumatized.

Grace is the only way to come to a liberating relationship with the Divine.

Jesus, I accept Your sacrifice for me, showing me such unmerited favor. I come before you as a sinner. I have harmed the lives of others through the misuse of my privileges and resources. I have harmed others with my words, my thoughts and my actions. The opportunity to walk beside You is far more than I deserve. I do not want to bring You shame. I seek to become the servant of all and the master of none. I promise to listen to others, because I cannot speak for them. This life is not about me, it is about all of us in You.

You need to be aware that there will be suffering.

Jesus, I want to join with You in solidarity with all who suffer injustice and oppression. I will be there with You to wipe tears from their eyes. I will be there with You as You support those who grieve. I will be there with You when You raise Your voice so that the voiceless can be heard.

God has given us love as the rule of your life.

You are love, make me love too. I love You with all of my heart, all of my soul, all of my mind and all of my strength. I want join with you in extending unmerited favor to everybody with no one left out nor left behind.

God knows and searches your life.

You know that we journey together, because You have always been with me. You know where I have failed You and others, and You have celebrated every time I have gotten it right. You know that we are making progress, even if it seems too slow.

I want to keep becoming better.

Thank You, Light, The Light of the World, and Enlightenment.

Thank You, Love, Lover, and Sacred Embrace.

Thank You, Wisdom, Word, and Holy Conversation.

**Let these promises and good intentions bring forth the
fruit of righteousness to Your glory now and forever more.
Amen.**

Hymn: "Here I am Lord" 593 UMH

Dismissal with blessing: