

WORSHIP SERVICE PLAN**(Traditional & Online Service)** (White/Gold)

February 8, 2026 • Fifth Weekend in Ordinary Time • Annual Meeting

Isaiah 58*"Life on a Theme"*

Who we choose to be as a church rests on how we respond to God's lawsuit.

(online only) Preparation for Worship

Gather these items for worship. If an items unavailable, fret not:

- a piece of **white** cloth
- an end table or stand
- a plate
- a cup
- a glass or bowl with water
- a lighter/match
- a doorknob or handle (or a picture of one)
- a computer or internet-accessible device
- a thank you card to God for something this week

For each item you have, thank God for the provision. For each piece you do not have, thank God you don't need it. Place the table/stand in the area you plan to worship. If more than one person will be present, place the table in the middle of where you will be seated. Drape the cloth over it. Arrange the cup, plate, glass of water, and other items on the table. Keep the Bible in front of you. Have enough Communion elements for each person in your household.

Questions for the announcement loop*In preparing for Worship, consider the following:*

- What would you say is the theme of your life?
- What do you *believe* you need to meet God's expectations?
- Are there any doors God could show you that you would be unwilling to open?
- What do you think God wants your legacy to be?

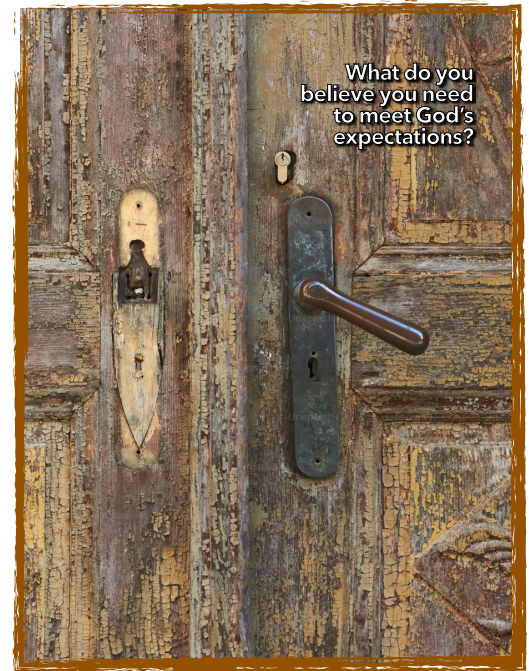
Opening Sentence**Isaiah 58:12 (CEB)**

They will rebuild ancient ruins
on your account;
the foundations of generations past
you will restore.
You will be called Mender of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Livable Streets.

Welcome ! We are glad you are with us! We have a few Community Notes for you to consider as we worship throughout the week, living that Christian life...

Welcome Visitors!

We are glad you are here! Our nursery is in the Education Building and our restrooms are in the buildings other than this Sanctuary.

**Great Expectations**

We expect God to answer our prayers, to bless our food, take care of our children (household or neighborhood), to forgive us, to honor our commitments, to secure our place in Heaven, to be on our side (whatever that really means). And why not? If the angels' announcement to the Shepherds says anything, it says we are due favored peace from God. But God's blessings have a catch. No, God isn't looking for payment. And, no, it definitely is not quid pro quo (how would we even achieve that?). But consider God's expectations of us. We proudly say God loves us unconditionally. Do we really believe God doesn't expect the same from us? And what does unconditional love look like in a world like ours? Can God expect us to be answers to prayer, to bless with food, to take care of children, to forgive, to honor our commitments, to secure Heaven on Earth, to be on God's side? As you move through the week, take time to read Isaiah 58 in a sitting, more than once. Weigh carefully God's indictment, and God's preferred sentence of grace. What would it look like for you to take concretely and literally the directives God provides in this prophecy? What would it take for you to change your expectations of yourself?

Save the Date!

Our church by-laws and our Book of Order requires that we have an Annual Meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to review the previous year (2025) and look ahead to the next. As a part of this meeting, the Administrative Life Committee wishes to help our understanding of how our finances work as well as introduce the operating budget for 2026. We will also review the Annual Report. In addition to our usual tasks, we also must answer a procedural question. Brody Cameron has resigned his election as Ruling Elder and we must decide whether to replace him or leave the position unfilled. As always, the last part of our agenda is acting on the terms of call for the Pastor. The Session has set Sunday, February 8th, immediately following the morning worship service in the Sanctuary as the meeting time and place. Please plan to attend.

We Already Have to Talk about Lent

Ash Wednesday is coming soon (February 18th). In preparation for the season of Lent and our theme, "Light for the Journey", we're in need of a few items if you have them to share. First, we will need mirrors of all shapes and sizes starting February 15th. Please mark the back of your mirror with your name and phone number if you share one with us. The second thing we need are your thoughts! As you are willing to share, take 5 minutes to gaze at yourself in the mirror (set a timer!) and then write a paragraph of what you think you see in the reflection. Your reflections can, of course, be anonymous and we won't share them without your express permission.

Communion, Again?

Even though we shared Communion with the online service last weekend, we will be sharing it together at our in-person services. The snow day(s) we experienced were a disruption but the opportunity to share the Table together in person must have its due. As we gather at the Table, consider all those who should be gathered with us and bring those prayers with you.

We celebrate our February babies! (to make up our snow day!)

(10am only) Greet one another in Christ!

(10am only) Gathering Song

"He Came Down" GTG #137

He came down that we may have love;
He came down that we may have love;
He came down that we may have love;
Hallelujah forevermore. (2X)

(10am only) Prelude:

"All Creatures of Our God and King" arr. Sandra Eithun

Who we choose to be as a church rests on how we respond to God's lawsuit.

In this moment, let us stand, take a deep breath, silence our devices, and continue in worship together. Let us make use of the *Call to Worship* that is before you...

(10am only) Call to Worship

Count your blessings

Name them one by one

Count your blessings

See what God has done

Count your blessings

Be sure not to leave out yourself

From receiving them

Or being them

Sing:

"His Name Is Wonderful" CEL #118

Prayer of Confession/Preparation

Sometimes for all the blessings we catalog we need, we too often forget to be as diligent about being a blessing. It's not good that we do that. It's important to talk about our shortcomings so that we're ready to hear what God has to say. Let us begin with silent prayer...

(Please pray silently...)

Pray: Great God, we live in a traumatic world. Between the ravages the climate visits on us, the disasters our diseases press upon us, the wanton and self-imposed wounds we visit upon ourselves and each other, ours is a traumatic world. Your answer to all of this is to bless us. We gladly receive this. But Lord, forgive us, for

forgetting how far-reaching the relief was meant to be. That our being blessed was not just to answer our hurts, but to turn us into answers. May we come to reflect your generosity as enthusiastically as we receive it. Thank you for listening, God. Amen.

(10am only) Assurance of Pardon

God's love can change everything, even the power of our sins over us. God's will that we have this power:

In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

The Peace of Christ be with you

And also with you.

(10am only) Gloria Patri (Glory to God)

Glory be to the Father and to the Son

And to the Holy Ghost

As it was in the beginning

It is now and ever shall be

World without end: Amen, amen.

Reading of Scripture

Say: God's Word is a gift. And good gifts are meant to be opened. Our hearts and minds are gifts. And good gifts are meant to be opened. God offers to help us open our presents by God's own Spirit. Let us take God up on that offer and ask for help to understand. Let us pray...(everyone sings)

Pray/Sing: "Break Thou the Bread of Life" (verse 2)
GTG #460

**Bless thou the truth, dear Lord, now unto me,
As thou didst bless the bread by Galilee.
Then shall all bondage cease, all fetters fall.
And I shall find my peace, my all in all.**

A style of prophetic writing we find in the Bible has God leveling an indictment against the people followed immediately by a prescription for addressing it. This passage from Isaiah is a perfect and concise example. In the face of the Exile, which God blames on Israel and their behavior, God points the way to a different legacy. Listen closely to the Word of God to us all and our ongoing place in God's story...

Read: Isaiah 58 (CEB)

Fasting from injustice.

¹ Shout loudly; don't hold back;

raise your voice like a trumpet!

Announce to my people their crime,
to the house of Jacob their sins.

² They seek me day after day,
desiring knowledge of my ways
like a nation that acted righteously,
that didn't abandon their God.

They ask me for righteous judgments,
wanting to be close to God.

³ "Why do we fast and you don't see;
why afflict ourselves and you don't notice?"

Yet on your fast day you do whatever you want,
and oppress all your workers.

⁴ You quarrel and brawl, and then you fast;
you hit each other violently with your fists.
You shouldn't fast as you are doing today
if you want to make your voice heard on high.

⁵ Is this the kind of fast I choose,
a day of self-affliction,
of bending one's head like a reed
and of lying down in mourning clothing and ashes?
Is this what you call a fast,
a day acceptable to the LORD?

⁶ Isn't this the fast I choose:
releasing wicked restraints,
untying the ropes of a yoke,
setting free the mistreated,
and breaking every yoke?

⁷ Isn't it sharing your bread with the hungry
and bringing the homeless poor into your house,
covering the naked when you see them,
and not hiding from your own family?

⁸ Then your light will break out like the dawn,
and you will be healed quickly.

Your own righteousness will walk before you,
and the LORD's glory will be your rear guard.

⁹ Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;
you will cry for help, and God will say, "I'm here."

If you remove the yoke from among you,
the finger-pointing, the wicked speech;

¹⁰ if you open your heart to the hungry,
and provide abundantly for those who are afflicted,
your light will shine in the darkness,
and your gloom will be like the noon.

¹¹ The LORD will guide you continually
and provide for you, even in parched places.
He will rescue your bones.

You will be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water that won't run dry.

¹² They will rebuild ancient ruins on your account;

the foundations of generations past
you will restore.

You will be called Mender of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Livable Streets.

¹³ If you stop trampling the Sabbath,
stop doing whatever you want on my holy day,
and consider the Sabbath a delight,
sacred to the LORD, honored,
and honor it instead of doing things your way,
seeking what you want
and doing business as usual,

¹⁴ then you will take delight in the LORD.
I will let you ride on the heights of the earth;
I will sustain you with the heritage
of your ancestor Jacob.
The mouth of the LORD has spoken.

*One: For the Word of God in Scripture,
for the Word of God among us,
for the Word of God within us...*

All: Thanks be to God!

Children's Sermon

Adults, you'll need:

- a picture or model of a door (I made one out of Legos)
- Make space for questions if you get them
"Through the Door"
- So, do you know what this is? It's a door! What do you do with a door?...Right, so to get to the next room, to enter the house, to get out of a place, to buy something, to sell something, to be born, to learn, to be celebrated, you have to open the door.
- But if you don't know what's on the other side it can be scary to open the door.
- Our faith can be like that. God has given us many doors. And God says don't be afraid. We need to learn to open the doors God gives us so that we can see what God wants to show us, to get what wants to give us.
- So when you're around the people who care about you, ask them about the doors they've had to walk through for God.
- Don't forget to pray!

(10am only) Anthem:

"Glory Bound!" By Sally Albrecht and Jay Althouse
Soloist: Lora Melton; Percussionist: Chason Alligood

"Life on a Theme"

Who we choose to be as a church rests on how we respond to God's lawsuit.

Have you ever been sued? I mean, really, has anybody ever gone through the effort to prove you at fault for something and formally, legally demand compensation? Most of us have car insurance so we're kind of covered there. In fact insurance is a buffer for all kinds of lawsuits. So is being a corporation. Some years ago, a man living off of Mebane Oaks Road was caught, tried and convicted of possessing and distributing thousands of child pornography images and video. But Grok AI can produce hundreds of thousands of not only CSAM but also images of people being undressed without their consent and the company might pay a fine, but no one is going to jail. Being indicted or even convicted of felonies is no guarantee that you will face consequences. But being in a lower economic class really is.

But with God, your money doesn't matter. Your status doesn't matter. Your political position, popularity, spheres of influence, your family name, your personal philosophy, your personal preferences are all immaterial to God's system of justice. When God indicts us, we can hire whomever we want as lawyers, argue the case any way we want, we can even deposition God's own self and the result is going to be the same: we will be convicted and face sentencing.

But when God sues us, what do you suppose God wants from us? What are the compensatory damages for failing to love our neighbor? What should the sentence be for hypocrisy or selfishness or violence or being fake with our faith?

Now back in the day, your run-of-the-mill fire and brimstone preacher would easily have said, "DEATH!", for being out of step with God's law, God's expectations. And why not? You have Israel (Israel of the Bible, not the present-day state) committing crimes against God to the point that the consequences are the Exile: no longer in the Promised Land, no longer in a position to claim

God's protectionism. Well, good grief! What did they do?

Read: Isaiah 58:1-5, 13 (CEB)
God's indictment.

Sooo...what's so wrong with what they did? I mean, why did a little disobedience warrant the loss of homes and lives? But it wasn't just a little. It was a nation-wide push to live life on their own terms instead of God's. To do things the way they saw fit while at the same time expecting God to be available and blessing on their terms. They wanted God to be with them even though they had "abandoned" God. They wanted to still be God's chosen even though they had rejecting choosing God's path.

It is at this point that the fire and brimstone usually shoots out from my eyes and the pronouncement of rank judgment on the horrors of society. And its not like we don't have a lot to choose from. But where I part company with many of my colleagues is where they choose sins or ills that are self-serving to their version of morality. They pick and choose which sins are a priority for God. The trouble is we don't have to do that. God lays out perfectly well what God cares about.

The indictment from Isaiah 58 reads like an eye-witness account. And why not? What do we imagine God cannot see? When I think about people not wanting to cuss in church, for example, I can't help but wonder what they think God hears outside, EVERYwhere else. It's the irony of Adam and Eve trying to hide from God in the Garden of Eden even though they're nude (on multiple levels). We are seen by God always. And our sins are legion. But God names four things specifically. We should pay attention specifically.

Hypocrisy and Fake Faith

It seems obvious, but it's hard to be close to God when we don't do things to be close to God's priorities. We can't worship God if we spend all our time worshipping ourselves. That "oppress all your workers" quip is a particular burning rebuke because that was part of the reason they left Egypt generations before. Pharaoh literally thought of himself as the sun god, Ra, and that the Israelites

(the workers) were at his disposal. They literally turned into Pharaohs themselves. At the end, this is pretty basic stuff. This is breaking the first commandment kind of stuff: you shall have no other gods before me. That includes us, y'all.

But the people raise an objection. They note that they go through the motions of ritual and habit, trying to use that to substitute for actual devotion to God. I mean...it's GOD: who are they kidding? Forcing our daughters to call me "Father", even while true, only really matters if I've actually *been* a father to them. It certainly matters more that way. Claiming to be God's chosen has got to mean that they (or we) have taken at least some time to try and realize in some concrete way WHY God chose us. To live that out in some way verifiable. As the letter of James says so well, "You must be doers of the word and not only hearers who mislead themselves (James 1:22)."

First and second counts of the Indictment.

Big NO on Reconciliation

Then God moves on to the third charge. Quarreling and brawling. Specifically, hitting each other "violently with [our] fists." Well, I mean, come ON God! We fight! We have differences of opinion. We're different people. Conflicts are bound to happen, right? It's in the name: Israel = "One who struggles with God." I mean, if anyone's being a hypocrite here it's got to be God, right? Right?

No.

The indictment is so simple that the force of it might get by us. We fight and brawl and THEN we fast, we worship. We make it so that being in conflict, conflict that leads to violence, is how it SHOULD be. Conflict that leads to saying hurtful things. Conflict that causes irreparable harm. Conflict that works to keep us separated, isolated. Conflict that tries to normalize the idea that reconciliation is impossible. We are accused of refusing to really reconcile with God and each other. And y'all we are exceptionally guilty. When I think of how many conversations are off limits. I think of how many positions and arguments and schools of thought are embodied into tribes that

either live separate lives or choose to live in a zero sum game.

The third count of the indictment.

Remember the Sabbath

It can be quietly nostalgic to consider blue laws. That time when everyone and everything stopped. But the truth of what that time meant for us is playing out in our 24/7/365 lives. This is not a call for return to those laws, which in the end were a superficial, going through the motions thing. Having blue laws was not a substitute for true devotion any more than having a Bible on my shelf is a substitute for actually reading it. Being able to quote Scripture puts me on par with the Devil himself. Living that Scripture out makes me one of God's chosen. Keeping the Sabbath is not a ritual thing (or at least, not supposed to be). Keeping the Sabbath isn't even about observing #4 on the Commandments List. It's about turning our attention where it belongs. It's about truly letting God govern our lives rather than scorekeeping, gatekeeping, and blessing-seeking. It's about honoring God for real, not by title or claim or some other consolation faith prize.

The fourth count of the indictment.

Okay. Fine. We've been charged. Found guilty. What now? It's not like God can sue us for everything we have. All we have is from God. It's not like God can put us anymore into a prison than we already feel sometimes. It's not like we can make it up to God or anybody else. Some of our sins are mortal. So what does God expect? What does God *want*?

Read: Isaiah 58:6-12, 14 (CEB) ***The sentence God wants.***

Where ever you see the word "fast" in this passage, think "worship" or "devotion." Fasting is a way of putting God's desires ahead of your own. It's a way of saying that God will indeed have first place in your life. First right of refusal over your decisions, over your fate. It's visceral, personal. Being hungry is not fun. Being hungry on purpose takes determination and will. And God is telling us to

direct that power, that authority over our lives, over ourselves, to some pretty accessible tasks.

First, release restraints and yokes (burdens). Set free the mistreated. I mean, really, how many fire and brimstone sermons have you heard that emphasizes these? Releasing restraints is not just about rope or handcuffs. It's about the shackles we place around people's hearts, around their pasts, even around their status. What are we doing right now to release restraints?

Then God says share our bread with the hungry. Share our everyday, ordinary food with people who are hungry. Okay, that doesn't sound so hard. Except the truth is we turn it into an occasional thing, something for which we burden with restrictions, exceptions, societal contractual obligations. Lots of "Feed the hungry, if..." God's sentence here is much less complicated than that.

Then God says bring the homeless poor into your house. I mean, come ON God. That can't be a thing. What about safety? What about making sure people deserve it? What about recognizing how hard I've worked to get what I have? Should I put my children first? We don't have that much room... Again, God's sentence is much less complicated than we like.

Then there's covering the naked. That means clothing them or getting them a blanket or giving them cover from exposure.

God says to not hide from your own family. Do you think God only means blood relatives? And what are we not to be hiding? Ourselves? Our wealth?

As I look at the sentence that God levels as a whole I am baffled. The fire and brimstone I grew up with and continue to hear on occasion doesn't say anything about these things. Instead of judgment and yelling and coercion, there is grace and kindness and compassion. There is a sense of leveling the playing field, not for self-righteousness, but rather for human needs. God even says in verse 10,

*"If you open your heart to the hungry,
and provide abundantly for those who are afflicted,*

*your light will shine in the darkness,
and your gloom will be like the noon."*

Y'all, who we choose to be as a church rests on how we respond to God's lawsuit. Consider God's expectations of us. We proudly say God loves us unconditionally, and it's true. Do we really believe God doesn't expect the same *from* us? And what does unconditional love look like in a world like ours? It looks like the sentence God levels in Isaiah 58. As you move through the week, take time to read Isaiah 58 in a sitting, more than once. Weigh carefully God's indictment, and God's preferred sentence of grace. What would it look like for you to take concretely and literally the directives God provides in this prophecy? What would it take for you to change your expectations of yourself?

My family in Christ, may it be so. Amen.

Song of Reflection

"Gracious Spirit, Heed Our Pleading" GTG #287

Offering

God chooses to love us, abundantly. We should respond by choosing to be loving, abundantly. This is why we should give and share what we have and who we are. Let us reflect together on what has been given...

(10am only) Offertory

"My Faith Looks Up to Thee" arr. Lloyd Larson

(10am only) Doxology

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise God all creatures here below.
Praise God above ye heavenly hosts;
Creator, Christ and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

Blessing

(text is for the ONLINE service)

Let there be no doubt, Great God: you love us. And we are grateful. Let there be no doubt, Great God: we should be loving in turn. As we receive the gifts you provide, may the gifts we are meant to be emerge. In the great name of Jesus Christ, we pray this together. Amen.

Service of Communion

- Say: Let us first show we belong to a faith larger than ourselves. Let us say what we believe:

I believe in God—

That God created us for a reason,

That God chose people for a reason

That God fought for us for a reason

That God fought against us for a reason

That God called us out on our sins for a reason

That God made us partners with God for the building of the kingdom

That God created us for a purpose.

That God's already called us to be

prophets, priests, teachers, students,

companions, travelers, historians, parents,

grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings and most importantly children

That God has convicted us

But the sentence is within our reach

Because by God's grace,

God's love really does

change everything

and makes us people of God

because of Jesus Christ

Who was, who is, and is to come.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

- Say: The Lord be with you...and also with you. God invites us to the Table as we are, given who we are! God invites us to the Table even though we may think we don't belong. Yet God invites us, does NOT force us, because God still loves us. So let us answer together as one Church across time, across our homes, across our various situations, and eat and drink of what the Lord offers. Let us pray...
- "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" GTG#465
**What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer.
O what peace we often forfeit;
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.**
- Holy God, Without a doubt you have called us out. You have arrested us and brought up the charges. Charges against which we cannot possibly defend. And yet, Lord, even as you convict, your desire is not to destroy, to demean, or even defeat. You still seek to empower us. You still want our legacy to be different than what our sins call for. You demand that we take

compassion and kindness seriously. You demand that we take generosity and reconciliation seriously. You exercise these things with us. Lord, help us, may we honor you by exercising them with each other. Let the legacy of our individual lives of faith, of our congregation, be a lasting testament to your grace.

- It's so easy for us to give ourselves a pass on your expectations. As uncomfortable as it may be, let us draw courage from you, strength from you, inspiration from you as we embrace your expectations wholesale. Lord, help us not shy away from opening the door of opportunity your goodness represents.
- Thus, let us be Godly people. Let us make a harvest of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Teach us to live lives weeding out apathy, selfishness, cravenness, callousness, and evil. We pray this not only for ourselves, but for so many that we can name... (take time to name your own prayers)
- Thank you for believing in us, Thank you for transforming us. Thank you for teaching us, even how to pray when words fail us, saying,
- **Pray: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**
- (take the bread in your hands) On the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus took the bread and having blessed it he broke it, gave it to his disciples and said, "This is my Body given for you. As often as you eat of it, do this in remembrance of me." (break and eat some of the bread)
- (take the cup with juice in your hands) In the same manner he took the cup, and, having blessed it, he gave it to his disciples and said, "This cup represents the new covenant sealed by my blood for the forgiveness of many. All of you drink of it." (drink some of the juice)
- Say: As often as we eat this bread and drink this cup we proclaim the Lord's saving death until He comes. These are the gifts of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

- The only proper response to the grace of God is gratitude. Let us pray together with the whole Church:
- **Pray: Thank you, God, for making us your kingdom. Help us live out that thanks by being a refuge to all you call us to. Thank you for including us at your Table. Help us do the same with ours. In the great name of Jesus Christ we pray this together. Amen.**

Hymn of Sending

(10am) "My Faith Looks Up to Thee" GTG #829

Sending & Benediction

Let us say together our benediction...

Who we choose to be as a church rests on how we respond to God's lawsuit.

(raise your hands and say) "Get up, take heart, Jesus is still calling you..."; Go, and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guide your hearts and minds this day and forever more. Amen!

Sing: "God Be With You Till We Meet Again"

**God be with you till we meet again;
Loving counsels guide, uphold you,
May the Shepherd's care unfold you;
God be with you till we meet again.
Till we meet, till we meet,
till we meet at Jesus' feet.
Till we meet, till we meet,
God be with you till we meet again.**

(10am only) Postlude

"Forever" arr. Victor Labenske