

Sunday Worship Service — August 23, 2026

Minimally Cleaned Transcript

Minimal cleanup only: timestamps and non-spoken transcript noises removed; obvious auto-transcription errors corrected when clear from the bulletin or context; wording, repetitions, casual phrasing, humor, and sentence structure otherwise preserved.

Greeting & Announcements

So, the first part of our greeting will be in Spanish, and then I'll do it in English as well.

If you'll please turn to the person next to you and offer them God's peace.

All right, go ahead and sit.

A couple of announcements for us this morning. Rita has brought some lovely flowers and plants. She's all sold out of the Swedish ivy, but if you would like some, please come. They're really easy to take care of.

[The source transcript has a gap in the announcements here.]

If I signed up for November 29th, for example, it would be Psalm 80:1-7 and 17-19: “Restore us, O God; make your face shine.” Also Isaiah 64:1-9: “Oh, that you would tear open the heavens and come down.”

After I've read my Scriptures, I think about them and reflect on how they affect me, how I think through them, and how they help me through my daily prayers and devotions. Then I would write my devotion. We are asking everyone to please follow the guidelines if possible. There's a reason for it, and it's to help us grow more in faith.

All the devotions need to be turned in to the office—to Nancy, Kelly, Seal, Lad, or myself—no later than October 4th. We are hoping these Scriptures give you God's love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. That's Galatians 5:22, during our Advent season. Thank you.

Call to Worship

If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, let Israel now say: “If it had not been the Lord who was on our side when our enemies attacked us, then they would have swallowed us up alive when their anger was kindled against us. Then the flood would have swept us away; the torrent would have gone over us. Then over us would have gone the raging waters.”

Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us as prey to their teeth. We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the hunters. The snare is broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Opening Prayer

We have no other help than the help that comes from you, the living God. We might think we can manage our own affairs in our own strength, but we are mistaken.

Lovingly convince us of your power to care and provide for us, Lord. Your ways are good. Teach us, empower us, and strengthen us to follow you. Amen.

Call to Confession

Please be seated for our call to confession. I'm going to read Voice One. Voice Two is going to be this side, and Voice Three is going to be this side and the balcony.

We are a pilgrim people on a journey deeper into the heart of God. Still, God calls us all to arise, setting aside all that hinders us from following.

You will run and not be weary. Walking God...

Prayer of Confession & Assurance

Lord, your story is one of redemption, holiness, salvation, and new beginnings—things that we need, things that we long for—because we mess up, we fall down, and we don't know where to turn.

We turn to you, Holy One. We turn to you for redemption. We place before you all those things, holy and unholy, that are part of our lives. We cry out to you: Save us. Help us start over, because we can't get out of our own way. Forgive us, God, as only you can. Help us to begin anew.

Remind us of what it means to be your people: to love you and love those around us, whether we want to or not, with our whole being. That is your call to us, and that is who you want us to be—people who follow the teacher, the preacher, the healer, and Savior, Christ the Lord. Amen.

Everyone who is in Christ is a new creation. Whatever is old is gone; the new life has begun. Through Christ, our relationship with God has been restored, and we are called to restore relationships with one another.

Friends, believe the good news that comes from God: in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Lord, we have questions—so many questions. We want to learn more about you, yet we don't know where to begin.

Help us to find a starting place in your story. Through it, shed light upon our darkness, our wanderings, and our doubts. Settle within us the discomfort that comes with the questions. Calm our deepest fears and anxieties as we find root in the Word told to us this day. Amen.

Old Testament Lesson — Isaiah 51:1-6

Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you, for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many.

For the Lord will comfort Zion. He will comfort all her waste places and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song.

Listen to me, my people, and give heed to me, my nation, for a teaching will go out from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples. I will bring near my deliverance swiftly. My salvation has gone out, and my arms will rule the peoples. The coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope.

Lift up your eyes to the heavens and look at the earth beneath, for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats. But my salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended.

Special Music Introduction

We have some wonderful musicians with us today. Bonnie and Bob are going to do much of our music today, so I hope you enjoy hearing their voices as well as their fingers across the keys.

[Special music omitted from transcript cleanup.]

It's always special when Mr. Patterson sings. We enjoy that.

New Testament Lesson — John 8:31-59

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free’?”

Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

“I know that you are descendants of Abraham, yet you look for an opportunity to kill me because there is no place for you in my word. I declare what I have seen in the Father’s presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.”

They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do what Abraham did. But now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are indeed doing what your father does.”

They said to him, “We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself.” Jesus said to them, “If God were your father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word.

“You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.

“Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God.”

The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?”

Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.”

The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets, yet you say, ‘Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.’ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?”

Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, ‘He is our God,’ though you do not know him. But I know him. If I would say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him, and I keep his word. Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad.”

Then the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.” So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Children's Message

Big kids and little kids are invited up to high school. Come on. Come on. Yep. Parents can come too, or grandparents. Come on. You can come sit on the steps.

All right. Can you guys make some room so that the little kids can sit on the front steps, too? Or you can sit on the carpet, too? Yes. Come on. Yep. Okay.

So, when I was little, I got cats and dogs from a place called the Humane Society or the Pound. Do any of you have a dog or a cat or a fish or a bunny rabbit? Or maybe at school, do your classrooms have animals in the classroom? Yeah.

So when I was little, we would go to the animal shelter because there would be animals there that needed homes, and so you would pay a little fee and then you would take the animal home to adopt them.

Well, we got the cat home, and what did the cat do? She climbed up the window curtains, put her claws in those curtains, and then slid down, cutting the curtains.

And you know what the dog did? The dog jumped up on the couch. The dog tried to eat the cat food. The dog dug up the flowers in my mom's yard. The dog ate the tomatoes.

They were naughty. They were not very good. But when we bought them and we took them home, we didn't take them home because they had good behavior. We didn't take them home because they had good manners. We took them home because we adopted them.

When God adopts us, we don't have to be on our good manners. God changes those things in us and gives us freedom. But we don't start out that way.

So, we're going to do a prayer, and then do we have Sunday school today? Okay. If I can have two additional adults that would be willing to join Peggy with Sunday school, that would be amazing. Okay, so let's go ahead and fold our hands and then we'll pray. Okay.

Dear Jesus, thank you for paying the price and freeing us from guilt and sin. Teach us to live free like you want us to. Amen.

Sermon — Like Father, Like Son Part 2

Pastor Lindsey Carnes

So, we take it for granted that everyone wants to be free, right? Everyone wants to be free in the deepest sense of the word. We even leave the countries where we came from because we want to be free. And if the opposite is bondage and slavery, nobody here wants that.

We may be enslaved to some old habits that are very pleasurable. And in that sense, we love our slavery. But when you step back from the pleasures and consider the happiness without that slavery, you'd like to be done with that type of bondage. You want to be happy in freedom rather than a slave to addictions. We all want to be free.

In John 8:36, Jesus says, "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." And this is what we're really after: to be free indeed. To be really free. And freedom in its deepest and fullest sense of the meaning is the type of freedom that Jesus talks about.

There's three types of freedom, though, and each one kind of builds on them. So, we'll try to sum it up just really briefly. If you're free, then you're truly free to choose to live that way. You've got the desire, the ability, as well as the opportunity to do what will make you feel free.

If you don't have the desire to do a thing, then you're not really fully free to do it. You might muster up the willpower to do something you don't want to do, like my children with chores, but nobody calls that full freedom. It's not the way that we want to live. There's a constraint and a pressure on us that we don't want to do that thing. Sometimes we just don't have the desire to do it and we can't make ourselves do it. But if you have the desire to do it and no ability to do it, then you're also not free to do it.

On the other hand, if you have the desire and the ability to do something but no opportunity to do it, then you're also not free to do it. But let's say you have the desire to do something, the ability to do it, and the opportunity to do it, but it destroys you in the end. Then you're also not fully free.

Indeed, to be fully free, we must have the desire, the ability, and the opportunity to do what will make us free. No regrets. And only Jesus, who died for us and rose for us, can make that possible. So if the Son sets us free, then we are free indeed, and only Jesus can do that.

I want to just draw a very brief picture for you of what that freedom looks like. So take skydiving, for example. Anyone ever jump out of a perfectly good plane? Oh, Miss Mary. Okay, so maybe Mary should be doing this sermon.

What you want to do is, you know, jump out of the plane and fulfill, to the fullest extent possible, the exhilaration of skydiving. But let's suppose that you're on your way to the Linden airport and you go up for your first big jump, but on the way there you hit a pothole on Shiawassee Avenue and you have a blowout, or maybe you run into a telephone pole. You are no longer free to jump, whether you have the ability to or not, because the opportunity has passed you by while you wait for the tow truck. You lack the freedom of opportunity.

But let's suppose you make it to the airport, but it turns out you skipped all the classes to learn how to use a parachute and you don't know the first thing about skydiving. And so you lack the most basic of abilities, like how to operate the parachute. The opportunity is there. The plane is there. You have the parachute, but you don't have the freedom of ability. And so they're not going to let you jump.

But let's suppose you make it to the airport, you've taken the classes, you have your parachute, you have all the abilities, and you take off in that tiny, perfectly good little plane. And as soon as they open the door, you look down and all of your desire vanishes. And in its place comes paralyzing fear. The opportunity is there, the ability is there, but you don't have the freedom of desire.

But then there's one last requirement for freedom. Suppose you get to the airport, there's no obstacles. The plane is there, so you have the freedom of opportunity. You have all the know-how. You've taken the classes. You have the freedom of ability. And then you look out that tiny little door and you see clusters of silos and barns and corn and houses and farmhouses, and a few miles down is the ground. You just can't wait to jump. You have the freedom of desire, and so you jump.

And as you free-fall, you're enjoying every second of it. But then your parachute is defective. You're experiencing all of that illusion. It feels like absolute freedom, but you don't know it yet. There is

bondage and destruction, and yet it feels like freedom, but it's just an illusion. And in 30 seconds, you'll be dead.

To be fully free, free indeed, God must set us free. There is no man-made parachute that can set us free. We have a Savior because he died for us, and there is no condemnation. He has caught us mid-fall, and our destiny and our desires are made new. God is our source and he is our content. He gave us new desires, and he is the new desire. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

But as Christians, sometimes we look at those who pitch themselves out of, you know, airplane windows just to exult in that, you know, exhilaration of a free fall. And yet they're looking for something. They're looking for just freedom and exhilaration.

But those of us who trust in Jesus and who treasure him will mount up on wings like eagles and be truly free. Not just now, not just for that one jump out of the airplane, but for a thousand years from now and for eternity.

Jesus is not just giving us information about being free. He gives us an invitation to find our true freedom in Christ. Amen.

Offering Invitation & Prayer

In the midst of struggle, wrestling with doubt and confusion, pinned to the ground and breathless, we ask God for a blessing.

In our emptiness, we feel like we have nothing to give. Then God reminds us that we are never worthless, that we can always offer something—even the vulnerability of welcoming someone into our emptiness.

So we find blessing in being honest, in standing side by side with others in need, in volunteering what we have, and in sharing what we lack. Let's come to the table with all we have and all we are.

If you would like a written prayer request included in our prayers today, please indicate that and the usher will collect it.

Just as we dedicate these gifts to you, Lord, we dedicate our lives. Use these gifts and use our lives, we pray. Our hope is that these offerings will make a difference in our community, especially in the lives of those who need your grace the most. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Please be seated. A few prayer requests for this morning: continued prayers for Emily's sick father, who is recovering at home; prayers for those who are traveling; for those caring for parents with medical needs; and for world peace and all who are living in war zones.

If you'll please bow your heads with me in prayer.

Lord, we pray for people whose homes have been ravaged by storms and fires, floods and droughts. May we unite with those who have lost every possession under heaven, and may they be able to find hope again here on earth.

We pray for all religious and political leaders. May our leaders unlock the genuine gifts of people and communities. May we seek to lead others with purpose and delight.

We pray for people who live with disability and bodily pain. May those who question their value or worth be given keys of hope and compassion, and may their anguish be healed.

We pray for people who suffer from depression and emotional turmoil. May God reveal joy and peace to those whose lives are fragile. May darkness ease into the light of Christ Jesus.

We pray too for those who hold the keys on behalf of our children. May we open new opportunities for education and insight. May we open for our youth the beauty of art and mystery and exploration.

We pray for those who are imprisoned behind bars. May we unlock restorative justice for people wrongly imprisoned. May we not warehouse people who suffer from mental illness. May the keys of mercy unlock our future.

And we pray for people who hold keys in jobs that do not open joy for them. May we seek to earn a living with purpose in our world. May our families find balance in work and responsibility, in play and deserved joy.

For our loved ones who now rest in the promise of eternal life and joy, may our beloved now see the face of Christ for all eternity.

Refugee Welcome Team Presentation

Good morning. Today I'm going to give a presentation about our Refugee Welcome Team, which has been a mission of this church since 2018.

This started when a couple of us attended a meeting that told us about the global refugee crisis. We came out of that meeting thinking, our church must be able to do something. We didn't know what that might be, but something.

I'll give this in English and Spanish, so bear with me. It'll take a little longer.

This started in 2018, and since then our community has been able to support more than 94 families. We've included more than 50 volunteers. We have new neighbors, and we've made countless connections.

In 2024, our government of Michigan, together with resettlement agencies, decided to start resettling people in Genesee County. That brought some new opportunities and wonderful new areas of service for us.

Year to date, through August, we have completed 50 acts of service. This is only what I've recorded; I know there's more that goes on. Twenty-one volunteers have been involved, and 30 families have been served.

Two cultural guides—which is like a one-to-one mentor situation—have been set up. We've directed more than \$3,000 in direct donations. And recently, we completed a family survey.

I can't talk about Refugee Welcome without talking about our wonderful deacons. Every year, our deacons include our families in their work. This year they delivered 40 Easter baskets, and just this week they are finishing up delivering back-to-school supplies for 28 children. The number keeps going up, so Ellen may correct me.

We had 29 families actively involved and an 83 percent response rate. We asked people to self-assess where they felt they were in their resettlement journey after one and a half to two years, what supports were still welcome, and we also asked for open comments.

We had really great results. Eighty-one percent reported doing good or great. Nobody said they were doing poorly, and that was really heartening. Fifty percent are still in need of interpretation services. Seventy percent requested more opportunities to hone their English-language skills. Forty percent

would like assistance connecting to more community services, and 100 percent still want to be involved with us.

We received some comments. They were all positive, and I want to read one that really touched my heart:

“My family and I are so grateful for all of the support we’ve received. We’ve taken advantage of every bit of help, every recommendation, every invitation. All the donations we received were a great blessing. Thank you for your help. We’re growing as a family and as professionals and entrepreneurs. Without you, none of this would have been possible. I always want to continue attending community integration activities to learn more about local culture and traditions. And, of course, we’re available to volunteer now to support other families in need. We’re ready to volunteer.”

This struck me because, after just two years in a new country, imagine having to leave everything you know—your language and your culture—and then being ready to help someone else. I thought that was wonderful.

We have some goals for this year. Our first goal is to match more cultural guides. I think this is a great way to match someone who has the skills to help with a family's needs.

The second goal is something called Lift the Bar. It's a little complex, and I have printed handouts in the fellowship hall if you'd like to get more involved.

Last year, legislation was passed that will remove some protections from refugees when they come to the U.S.—things like Medicaid and food assistance, or SNAP benefits.

Typically, when a refugee arrives in the U.S., having gone through many years of waiting and applying to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, being placed here, and coming here with all the permissions of our government, they would receive Medicaid and SNAP. That allowed them to have a little safety net while they got on their feet. Now that's being taken away.

Until a person receives legal permanent residency, or LPR, they won't be able to have or apply for these benefits. The tricky part is that you have to have been physically here for one year before you can apply for LPR. So we're guaranteeing that, for at least a year, people cannot receive these benefits.

I strongly believe this is going to create a burden for our clinics, our low-cost clinics, churches, and food pantries. Again, we're talking about people who are seeking asylum or coming here as refugees, completely legally, with documentation and work permits, who are no longer going to be able even to apply for these benefits for a year.

Lift the Bar is legislation that would rescind those changes and give that support back. I think it's tremendously important. If you're wanting to get involved, there is a handout. We're asking people to contact their legislator and ask them to co-sponsor this bill. The change starts October 1st, so it is going to begin affecting people very soon.

Our last objective is to continue meeting the needs in our community and to support English as a second language. We're doing that with a program called Language Partners with FARR, and some of us are also volunteering with the Genesee Literacy program, which has an ESOL component. We're going to respond as best we can to needs as they arise.

The last thing I want to do is simply say thank you. Thank you to Rita for bringing her flowers today. Without Rita, I don't think this day would have happened, because she really got me thinking that we could do something—and with the ice cream social, it could be a really nice time.

Thank you to all of the congregation for your prayers, your donations, and your continued support as I talk about this year after year.

Refugee Welcome Litany

Lord Jesus, you call all nations and peoples from all nations to yourself. You love refugees and the families who seek refuge in far-off lands, fleeing violence. Your kingdom is made up of the mighty and the meek, the powerful and the impoverished.

We pray for men and women and vulnerable children in danger, those in trouble, and those who need refuge. You protect those experiencing persecution and violence. You protect the vulnerable.

Turn our hearts toward your heart—toward compassion, righteousness, and justice. We thank you for our friends who now have homes where they once did not. We thank you for our new neighbors.

We thank you that you have transformed violence into peace, fear into safety. We thank you for the opportunity to build our community, to learn, and to see your great work of love.

Help us to love our neighbors as we would want ourselves and our children to be loved. Grant wisdom and grace to government leaders and to leaders in so many local churches that serve refugees, asylum seekers, and other immigrants.

You bring hope. You bring refuge. You bring justice. Be present with us, Lord. In your powerful name we pray. Amen.

Charge & Benediction

As you leave this place, remember to praise God. And also remember: praise is not just acknowledging God's goodness when things are going your way. Praise is also crying out when you are struggling, because praise is an act of trust.

Praise the Lord who watches over you now and forevermore. Alleluia and amen.

I'm going to do the first part of our blessing in Spanish, and then I'll do it in English.

May our ears hear the cries of the unwanted. May our eyes see the wounds of the sick. May our hearts break for the brokenhearted, and may our minds remember the lost.

But above all, may our lives be lived in response to God's gracious love for us. Now go live out your part in the city of the world and as the body of Christ. Amen.

And may the peace of Christ be with you. Also with you. Amen.