

**Morning Worship from First Presbyterian Church of Magnolia, Arkansas**  
**Sunday, January 28th, 2018**

**PRELUDE** "Praise Him with the Sound of the Trumpet" - Robert Lau      Dr. Elizabeth Davis  
**CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP** "Rejoice in the Day!" - Dan Dykema      The Choir

*After the Choral Call, the liturgist should step to the lectern and say,*

“Would you join me in reading the responsive call to worship adapted from Psalm 18 and printed in our bulletins?”

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

(adapted from Psalm 18)

I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, so I shall be saved from my enemies.

**In my distress I called upon the Lord and from his temple he heard my voice.**

He reached down from on high and drew me out of mighty waters.

**He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from those who hated me.**

They confronted me in the day of my calamity; but the Lord was my support.

**He brought me out into a broad place and delivered me.**

He delivers a humble people, but the haughty eyes you bring down.

**It is you who light my lamp; the Lord, my God, lights up my darkness.**

For who is God except the Lord? And who is a rock besides our God?

**God girded me with strength and made my way safe.**

He made my feet like the feet of a deer, and set me secure on the heights.

**The Lord lives! Blessed be my rock, and exalted be the God of my salvation!**

Let us worship God beginning with prayer...

**PRAYER OF INVOCATION**

Holy God, you are deserving of the very best we have to offer -- the devotion of our hearts, the place of honor in our priorities and the first fruits of our labors. We enter this place and space of worship, asking you to be in our midst, to speak your message of love and mercy, conviction and challenge to us. We welcome your Spirit, knowing that in so doing, we abandon control and open ourselves in faith, and trust to your purposes and plan, rather than our own. May our worship be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, “I Will Call Upon the Lord”, number 2002 in our *Sing the Faith* hymnal supplement.

*The liturgist should step back from the microphone for the hymn.*

**\*HYMN OF PRAISE**      “I Will Call Upon the Lord”      *Sing the Faith #2002*

*After the hymn, the preacher will step into the pulpit and say...*

**\*CALL TO CONFESSION**

The psalmist reminds us, “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever.” In the full assurance of faith, let us confess our wrongs as we pray together the prayer of confession in our bulletins, pausing at its conclusion for a moment of silent prayer. Let us pray...

**\*PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

(In Unison)

God of grace and glory, you created us in love to choose blessings and to delight in your law, but we have chosen to follow our own sinful longings. Rather than seeing freedom in your commandments, we see constraints. Convinced that we know what we need better than you, we make choices that hurt others and lead us away from you. Forgive us for all the ways we fall short in what we do and in what we fail to do. Set our hearts ablaze with the desire to know, love, and serve you with ever greater faithfulness and joy. And may we ever choose to follow Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Amen.

**\*SILENT CONFESSION**

*Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.*

**\*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

God does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us... Friends believe the Good News!

**In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! Thanks be to God!**

***Glory be to the Father, & to the Son, & to the Holy Ghost;***

***As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, World without end. Amen, Amen.***

\*PASSING OF THE PEACE

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this. Let us share the peace of Christ with one another. The peace of Christ be with you.

**And also with you.**

*Share the peace of Christ with others as you will.*

*After a few moments, the liturgist will step into pulpit and say...*

“At this time I want to invite all of our younger friends to come forward for a Word from the Lord brought to them by Pastor Mike.”

*The liturgist will take a seat.*

CHILDREN’S SERMON

*(All Singing)*

***Jesus friend so kind and gentle, little ones we bring to thee;  
Grant to them thy dearest blessing. Let thine arms around them be;  
Now enfold them in thy goodness, from all danger keep them free.***

Ask the kids if they have ever played hide and seek? Did it ever seem as though you were hiding in such a good place that the person was taking forever to find you? Perhaps you felt like you would never be found. There are times in our lives when we hide so well and get so far from those we are playing with that we get lost. Our friends stop looking. But God always hears our prayers, and God is always with us. And God sends his messengers to call to us and look for us and find us and bring us home. And sometimes WE are those messengers who go looking and calling to those who get lost. Close with a prayer: "Thank you, God, for always hearing our prayers; help us to remember you are always with us, especially when we are lost and can't find our way to you. May we be willing to serve as messengers whenever you need us. Amen." Give each child a puzzle to remind them of God's presence, especially when life seems like a puzzle. (These can be purchased at the dollar store. An example would be the puzzle of two items linked together that seem impossible to get apart.)

*As the children leave, the Liturgist will return to the lectern and say...*

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

**Please be seated.** . . God has withheld no good gift from us, graciously pouring out His grace upon us. In humble gratitude let us return a portion of that bounty along with the fruits of our labor, as we continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings...

*The liturgist will sit down until the Doxology begins to play.*

**THE OFFERTORY** "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing" - Robert Lau **Dr. Elizabeth Davis**

\*DOXOLOGY (In Unison)

*The Hymnal #592*

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

*After the Doxology, the liturgist will return to the lectern and say...*

\*OFFERTORY PRAYER

Let us pray... O God, let it be that we give not because we feel we should or in expectation of recognition. Let it be that we have not given because we will get a tax deduction. May we give because we have a yearning to make this world your world. Let your kingdom come, O God, through us. Accept and use these gifts of substance and self to make that hope a reality. This we pray with grateful hearts. Amen.

Let us remain standing and reaffirm our Christian faith using the traditional words of the Apostles' Creed printed in our bulletins. Let us say what we believe.

\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

“The Apostles’ Creed”

**I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into Hell; the third day He rose again**

**from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick & the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

*Invite the congregation to... "Be seated," and take a seat.*

**THE ANTHEM**

**"Lord of All Creation" - Jay Althouse**

**The Choir**

*After the choir finishes, the Liturgist will return to the lectern & say....*

**SCRIPTURE READINGS**

Our first lesson this morning is taken from the fifth chapter of James' Letter, beginning at the thirteenth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page 1056 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

"Is any one among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

"Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects. Eli'jah was a man of like nature with ourselves and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth its fruit."

*The liturgist will return to his seat either on the chancel or with family or friends in the congregation.*

*When the liturgist finishes, the preacher will step into the pulpit & say...*

Our sermon text today is taken from the eighteenth chapter of First Kings, beginning at the twentieth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #312 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more for the word of God...

"So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel, and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel.

"And Eli'jah came near to all the people, and said, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Ba'al, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word.

"Then Eli'jah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD; but Ba'al's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let two bulls be given to us; and let them choose one bull for themselves, and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it; and I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood, and put no fire to it. And you call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, he is God." And all the people answered, "It is well spoken."

"Then Eli'jah said to the prophets of Ba'al, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire to it."

"And they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Ba'al from morning until noon, saying, "O Ba'al, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped about the altar which they had made.

"And at noon Eli'jah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is musing, or he has gone aside, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened."

"And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them.

"And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice; no one answered, no one heeded.

"Then Eli'jah said to all the people, "Come near to me"; and all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been thrown down; Eli'jah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD came, saying, "Israel shall be your name"; and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bull in

pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, "Fill four jars with water, and pour it on the burnt offering, and on the wood."

"And he said, "Do it a second time"; and they did it a second time. And he said, "Do it a third time"; and they did it a third time. And the water ran round about the altar, and filled the trench also with water.

"And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Eli'jah the prophet came near and said, "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that thou, O LORD, art God, and that thou hast turned their hearts back."

"Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

"And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God."

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

THE SERMON

"God's Messengers"

Maybe you remember the the story of Flip Wilson's character, Geraldine, who went shopping with the credit card of her boyfriend, Killer. When she returned with a new dress, killer asked her, "How much did it cost?" . . . . Geraldine replied, "\$250." . . . . "TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY DOLLARS!... I told you not to spend more than \$100." . . . . "I know that, lover. But when I saw myself in the dress, I could hear Satan standing beside me saying, 'That dress looks like a million dollars on you girl.'" . . . . . "Well then why didn't you do what I do when I am tempted and I say, Get thee behind me Satan." . . . . . "I did," she answered, "But then he said, "Girl, that dress looks *even better* from back here."

Like Geraldine, we tend to hear what we want to hear. It has been this way from the beginning. God had told Adam and Eve not to eat from the Forbidden Tree, but when Satan told them what they wanted to hear, that they could be like God, it sounded good, so they believed the serpent, disbelieved God, and they ate.

Saul knew what he had been told by God through the prophet Samuel, but he thought he knew better, so he did what he thought best in his own mind and brought about his own destruction.

David knew that Bathsheba was the wife of another, but he told himself that he was king after all, surely God would forgive him a momentary indiscretion. But that momentary indiscretion led to an inconvenient pregnancy followed by lies and murder, and trouble inside David's own house for the rest of his life.

Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived. He knew what was right and wrong better than any other, but still he chose to ignore the ways and the counsel of God and did his own thing, and allowed his wives and his own people, who were supposed to be dedicated to God, to construct forbidden pagan temples and to worship idols if they wanted.

His son Rehoboam sought counsel from elders and his younger contemporaries. He heard what he was supposed to do from the elders, but chose to follow the counsel of his buddies since it was what he wanted to do anyway. The result was the division of the kingdom.

After the division, the Northern kingdom, Israel, began to engage in every manner of immorality and godlessness. We're not talking about a short period of disobedience here and there or an occasional king who got carried away with his own sense of power and importance-- it is king after king, generation after generation of corruption and evil on a scale we can only imagine.

And God would not continue to bless a people who had so completely turned their backs on him, because those who saw the evil and perversion of the Israelites might reason that they were being blessed *because* of their evil. But while he withdrew his blessing, he did not withdraw himself or his warnings from them. He kept sending them warnings in ways that they might hear and heed.

He sent Hosea and told him to marry a prostitute so that his life would convey the pain and frustration he felt in having his beloved Israel turn away from him, to pursue the good life with other gods.

In today's sermon text we hear part of the story of Elijah who comes bearing God's message of re-

repentance and his promise of forgiveness to Israel's king, Ahab. After Ahab built a temple for Baal, and his Baal priestess wife Jezebel, imported 450 priests and prophets of Baal to further her religion. Elijah then brings a word of warning to King Ahab-- that because of their faithlessness and evil, God will send a catastrophic drought so severe that not even dew will form. Since Baal was the Canaanite god responsible for rain, thunder, lightning, and dew, God through his messenger, Elijah, is not only challenging Jezebel, her priests, Ahab and the people of Israel-- he is challenging the god Baal.

After more than three years of drought and famine, God tells Elijah to return to Ahab and announce the end of the drought: not occasioned by repentance in Israel but by the command of the Lord, who had determined to reveal himself again to his people.

But Ahab couldn't leave well enough alone. He seeks out and confronts Elijah, referring to HIM, as the "troubler of Israel". Elijah replies that it is Ahab who has troubled Israel by allowing the worship of false gods. Elijah then asks, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him."

And the people were silent. The Hebrew for this word, "go limping" or "waver", is the same as that used for "danced" in verse 26, where the prophets of Baal frantically dance. Elijah speaks with sharp irony: in the lack of firm religious commitment to the one, true, and living God, Israel is engaging in their own futile religious "dance" just like the foolish prophets of Baal.

So Elijah proposes a test-- let the people of Israel, and all the priests and prophets of Baal come to Mt. Carmel. Let two altars be built-- one for Baal and one for God. Let wood be laid on both altars. Slaughter two oxen and lay their bodies in pieces on the wood. Elijah then invites the priests of Baal to pray for fire to light the sacrifice. They pray from morning to noon without success.

So Elijah then begins the trash talk. "Maybe your God is lost in his meditation. Pray louder. You just need to get his attention..... Maybe he stepped away for a minute. Pray louder, boys, I am sure he will hear you and answer you..... Uh- Oh, guys, I think your god fell asleep. You better wake him up... Pray louder.... PRAY LOUDER.... And the priests respond by cutting themselves and adding their own blood to the sacrifice (such mutilation of the body was strictly forbidden in the Mosaic law) to show their god how serious they are. They continue praying until the sun just begins to set and their hopes are going down with it.

Then Elijah orders that the altar of his god be drenched with water, soaking the wood, the stones and filling the trench dug around the altar. Then he asks God to accept the sacrifice. The fire of God falls from the sky, consuming the water, the sacrifice, the stones of the altar, the dust itself, and licks up every last drop of water in the trench as well.

Elijah then orders the deaths of the priests of Baal and the people respond obediently.

Finally, Elijah prays earnestly for rain to fall again on the land. Then the rains begin, signaling the end of the drought and famine.

Now I suggest to you that America needs prophets today . . . who will set before the nation the essential choices . . .

A time like this demands strong minds, great hearts, true faith, and ready hands — people whom the lust of office does not kill, people whom the spoils of office cannot buy, people who possess opinions and a will, people who have honor, people who will not lie, people who can stand before a demigod and damn his treacherous flatteries without blinking, people of integrity who live above the fog in public duty and in private thinking, while the rabble with their thumb-worn creeds, their large professions and their little deeds mingle in selfish strife.

People have become lovers of themselves more than lovers of their God. Espionage and sabotage are not the only weapons that harm such a war effort. Love of power and authority has enslaved the hearts of many Americans. The seeds of racial hate and intolerance are still being sown and bringing forth a bitter harvest of conflict and unrest. sown.

The old-time evangelists and preachers used to stress the tragedy of men and women individually going to hell, but we don't hear very much about that nowadays, because they say people don't believe in hell, but I notice they talk a lot about it in their conversations about their enemies. But today we are living

in a time when enough individuals choosing to go to hell will pull their families, friends, and country down to hell with them.

The choices you make in moral and religious questions determine the way nations, churches, and families will go. We badly need a prophet who will have the ear of the people and who will say, "If the Lord be God, follow him, but if Baal, then follow him."

We must decide whom we will serve. Millions of people in America live in moral fogs. The issues are not clear to them. They cannot face the light that reveals those questions in black and white. They want grays and neutral tints. They want to live in a spiritual twilight. But there still remains a choice to be made. And the choice before us is plain, Jehovah or Baal. Christ or chaos. Conviction or compromise. Discipline or disintegration.

The average church member has forgotten and forsaken the old disciplines of worship, prayer, study, and service. He attends church when it is convenient. His contribution of time and money seldom involves sacrifice on his part. The Church, the Word, the Sacraments have no compulsion over his life.

Of course, to be honest about it, the fault is not alone that of the church member. Ministers and church officers, are also to blame, because the church has failed to challenge the faith of lay people. The programs of too many churches have called for neither effort nor sacrifice.

The remedy for this sad state of affairs lies in the seeking of God's will for the individual church, and the adoption of a daring program for which will challenge us all.

Our strength is limited only by our faith in asking God's help.

"According to your faith, be it unto you."

That is a measure that would enable us to move mountains, or if our faith be limited, cause us to stumble over mole hills.

Just as Joshua challenged the people of Israel before they entered the Promised Land to "Choose this day whom you will serve"... Just as Elijah challenged the people of Israel to stop dancing around, take a stand, and decide, "If the Lord be God, follow him, but if Baal, then follow him."

And may you answer, with a loud voice, **"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."**

#### THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Would you pray with me...

O God, our Father, we thank you for your messengers who keep us right when we are tempted to go wrong; for those who set us a good example; for those who give us good advice, and kindly rebuke, when we need it; for those who make us want to be better than we are; for those who love us, and who believe in us, and whom we could not bear to disappoint.

Our Father, forgive us for the times when we went wrong; for times when we knew the right thing and did the wrong thing; for things that now we wish that we had never said and done; and for all those things, which make us ashamed when we think about them.

Forgive us and fit us for the task of being messengers of your word to others for the sake of our Lord Jesus, who taught us to pray saying...

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.

Let all of us who are able stand and join in one voice to sing our hymn of dedication, "Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart", # 326 in our *Hymnals*.

\*HYMN OF DEDICATION "Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart" *The Hymnal #326*

\*THE BENEDICTION

\*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE *Sing the Faith #2040*

Our God is and awesome God! He reigns from heaven above  
With wisdom, power, and love. Our God is an awesome God!

\*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis