

Worship Service from First Presbyterian Church of Magnolia
Sunday, February 21st, 2016

The liturgist and pastor will meet in the hall outside the choir room a couple of minutes prior to the start of the service at 10:45am. The liturgist will enter followed by the Choir. The liturgist will step to the lectern, welcome everyone, and make announcements....

The Liturgist will then ask...

“Are there any other announcements or concerns of the church that need to be made known at this time?..... Thank you.”

PRELUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis

THE CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP

The Choir

After the Prelude, the liturgist should step to the lectern and say,

“Would you join me in reading the responsive call to worship adapted from Psalm 27 and printed in our bulletins?”

CALL TO WORSHIP

(adapted from Psalm 27)

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?

The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?

One thing have I asked of the Lord; one thing I seek;

That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

For in the day of trouble he shall keep me safe in his shelter;

He shall hide me in the secrecy of his dwelling and set me high upon a rock.

Therefore I will sing and make music to the Lord.

What if I had not believed that I should see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!

O tarry and await the Lord's pleasure;

Be strong, and he shall comfort your heart;

Let us wait patiently for the Lord as we begin our worship this day with prayer...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... Lord God - your ways are holy and good and your love is strong and true. You are swift to answer those who trust in you - those who walk in your ways and who make your living word their daily hope. Bless, we pray, our gathering today. Touch our hearts and our minds with the fire of your Holy Spirit. Grant that our praise may be more than words, our prayer more than speech, our songs more than mere harmony. Teach us and comfort us, strengthen us and lead us, that we might draw closer to you. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, “The God of Abraham Praise”, hymn number 488 in our Hymnals..

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

***HYMN OF PRAISE**

“The God of Abraham Praise”

The Hymnal #488

After the hymn, the liturgist will step into the pulpit and say...

***CALL TO CONFESSION**

How shall we stand before the One who numbers the stars and calls us each by name? How shall we keep covenant with One whose words we have not heeded and whose will we have denied? Let us put off the sin that separates us from God and one another by praying together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins, pausing for a moment at its end for a brief period of silent prayer or reflection. Let us pray...

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Forgive us, O God, for our small concept of the heart of the Eternal, and for the doubting suspicion with which we regard the heart of God. Give us more faith. Forgive us our incredible stupidity that makes us more willing to trust people we don't know with our children, our money, and our lives, when we are so reluctant to have faith in You who knows us completely. Pardon our incessant striving to find a complicated way through life when You already have a plan, and we refuse to walk in it. Please Lord, give us that faith that we can deposit in the storehouse of Your love, so that we may receive the dividends and interest that

You are so willing to give us, in the strong name of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

*SILENT CONFESSION *(Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.)*

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

God does not break covenant with us even when we have broken covenant with him. He is our shelter in the midst of our troubles and a fount of forgiveness when we have gone our own way. When we confess our sins, He rejoices over us with gladness and renews us in his love. Friends, believe the Good News!

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

*GLORIA PATRI

The Hymnal #579

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

Having been reconciled to God through the grace of His Son, let us also be reconciled to one another and share Christ's peace. 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, liturgist will step into the lectern 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 Ms. Karen."

The preacher 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.

As the children leave, the liturgist will step to the lectern and say,

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

This is a time for rededicating our lives to the purposes of God. Let us move away from complaints and from longing for what we do not have, to give thanks for all that has been entrusted to us. Let us give as we have been blessed 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

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... Holy God, in the confidence that you will multiply our best efforts, we bring our offerings for the work of your church in the world. It is a joy to bring these gifts to you, for we are as blessed in our giving as we have been in receiving. Use our resources to gather all your children under your wings, where we may dwell together in safety and security, in mutual love and growing commitment to Christ, our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

The liturgist will take a seat until after the Anthem.

THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

"The Apostle's Creed"

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...

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 and 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 then say...

This morning we have the second of our Lenten videos from the Skit Guys, this time relating the encounter of Philip and Andrew with Jesus in that last week of His life.

**ENCOUNTERS WITH THE CROSS
ANTHEM**

"Andrew & Philip"

**Video
The Choir**

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

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson for this morning is taken from Peter's Second Letter, the third chapter, beginning with the first verse and I will be reading selected verses. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #1063 in your pew bibles.

Listen now for the word of God...

"This is now the second letter that I have written to you, beloved, and in both of them I have aroused your sincere mind by way of reminder; that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles. First of all you must understand this, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation."

"But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

Our second reading this morning is taken from the Book of Genesis, the fifteenth chapter, beginning with the first verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #11 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more for the word of God...

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Elie'zer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "Behold, thou hast given me no offspring; and a slave born in my house will be my heir."

And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; your own son shall be your heir." And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

And he believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness.

And he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chalde'ans, to give you this land to possess."

But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?"

He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a she-goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon."

And he brought him all these, cut them in two, and laid each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram; and lo, a dread and great darkness fell upon him.

Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed

between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.

Leader: ...This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

The liturgist will take her seat.

Abraham (The Preacher) enters slowly from left, walking with his staff. He reaches center stage and looks to his right.)

Am I late? Is this the right place? I'm supposed to talk to some group about bargaining, most particularly, how to make a deal with God.

Are you the ones?..... Please excuse me if I wander a bit.... I **AM** the original wandering Jew.... Plus, when you're 175 years old, you wake up each morning with your eyes a little dimmer,... your ears a little duller,... your walk a little shakier,... and your train of thought occasionally leaves the station without you.....

But you don't want to hear about that..... what were we supposed to talk about?..... Oh yes, how to bargain... how to make deals....

150 years ago, I was a hungry lion prowling my father's shop.... we sold idols,... you know little hand made clay gods.... when people came into our shop they were desperate. Their lives were out of control.... they felt like they needed divine help to make decisions, or get what they felt like they needed to be happy. We had idols for every need.... We had idols to give you good crops.... a happy love life.... long life..... wealth....

Our family's little sculpture business was thriving.... I could sell anyone anything.... A very wealthy man older than I am now was once carried into our shop on a litter by 4 of his slaves, too weak and tired to do anything more than just breathe. He complained that he had just married a beautiful young girl, but he had been unable to consummate the marriage and that the joy of life was gone. He asked if I had a god that could help him with that, and I said, "Sure... got just the thing."

I took one of our standard fertility figures and set it down before him, and said, "If you pray to our model #17 here, he will not just help you consummate your marriage, but he will enable you to lie down and rise up happily with her 10 times a day. **I guarantee it.**"

He coughed and wheezed for a bit before whispering, "But mightn't that be hazardous to one's health?"

I thought about it for a minute and answered confidently, "It might, ... but ... if she dies, she dies."

He bought ten, one for every room in his house.

So, yes, I could bargain. I could close the sale. I could make deals. I was the best. Problem was, I couldn't deal with myself. I knew that my whole life was built on a lie. I was no more than a what do you call it... a snake oil salesman... a fraud... a con man. It got to where I could not look at myself in the mirror. I hated the liar who looked back at me each morning.

When I was almost 70, and my father Terah was 140, I had had enough... I had enough money.... and I had had enough lying for a lifetime. So we sold the family business and went to live in the north country near my brother, Haran. Away from the city, I could see the cycles of nature... the days, the seasons; birth and death; You can't imagine how big the stars are out there in the wilderness. Each night, as I waited for sleep to come, I would gaze at the stars, so constant, so regular in all their movements. I knew that there was a God somewhere.... a real God with real power, a power greater than myself, greater than the universe, who had made it all, and who even now seemed to be revealing himself to me.

Shortly after my father passed on to dwell with our ancestors, on one of those starlit nights, I finally heard Him call. Abram.... Abram... Leave this place. Take your goods and your kindred and go where I will lead you. I will make you a great nation, and will bless you, and make generations to come remember your name. I shall make you blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. In you, all the families of earth will be blessed."

I was no fool. I knew that when the real thing comes, you must put away past and pretense, and decide. You follow the truth, or the lie. It was an easy choice and I had had enough of lies. I could not do

anything other than to follow the voice of him who had sought me and found me in the wilderness and had condescended to call me by name and promise me a future that, until now, I could only dream of.

Please do not think much of me. I have never been a brave man. In fact, I was even then very much afraid. But I was more afraid of not following the voice of Him who called, than to just get up & go.

The Lord led us by stages Canaan, Shechem, Bethel, and into the Negeb. When the clouds closed up, and the rain vanished, and famine began, God led us down into Egypt. And I was afraid. I looked at my wife Sarai, who was as sweet a piece of fruit as was ever picked out of the garden of love, and suggested it might be best if we introduced her as my sister, which she was by another of my father's wives-- rather than as my wife. I thought that those who coveted her beauty might well kill me to get her and take her to their own tents.

At the moment the Pharaoh's ministers arrived in camp, my newfound God was silent and unseen, where the Pharaoh's presence and power was made all too real through his representatives, so I introduced my "sister". When they left, I was rather proud of my shrewdness, but then they came back with a caravan of gifts for me in return for her hand to become a wife of Pharaoh. In moments, she was gone and I was suddenly a very rich, but lonely man.

But, in spite of my deception and misjudgment, my new God came to my defense and afflicted the house of the Pharaoh with terrible plagues and told him that she was my wife. In no time at all she was back, and I was still rich.

The time came when my nephew Lot and I began having trouble keeping our flocks and goods separate, and we thought it best to separate our flocks and servants from one another. I let him choose where he would like to go, and he chose the plain of the Jordan, fertile and well watered, where the living was easy. I was again left with the wilderness, but I had peace, and could once more hear the voice of my God reassuring me that he was with me, and that he would continue to bless me.

Things were good for 12 years, but then some trouble arose between some kings in the surrounding countryside. The strongest of these kings was the King of Elam, who attacked Sodom and Gomorrah and took all of their goods, including my nephew Lot and his family.

One of Lot's servants escaped and came back and told me what had happened. Did I mention that I was not a brave man? But God had promised to make of me a great nation, and since I had not a single descendant, I was confident that God was not through with me yet. My faith in him, put my fears in their proper perspective. I had just over 300 men and God, doing battle with 4 kings and their armies. We attacked by night as God had directed me & we were victorious. I took nothing of the spoil, & returned home.

And one night, when sleep just would not come, God spoke to me again. "Abram... Abram... Do not be afraid. I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

Then I spoke from the heart, "Give me what you will Lord-- Land, livestock, money, power-- what difference does it all make in the long run if I have no son to share it with. Right now all I have is a slave to care for me in old age and mourn my death when it comes, and to receive all my goods when I am gone."

And then God spoke again, "This slave will not be your heir. You will have a son-- bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh." Then he told me to go outside the tent, and look up at the heavens. And I did. And there before me was the whole panoply of space. The stars were right where they had always been. Their movements just as precise, just as constant. He had brought me back in a moment to where my faith in Him had begun. And then he said, "So shall your descendants be."

In his voice, there was no deceit, no guile-- only love, and conviction. Of course I believed Him. But he didn't stop there. He wanted to cut a covenant with me. He wanted to formalize his agreement with me in a way that I could understand and appreciate.

He said bring a heifer, a goat, a ram, a dove, and a pigeon. Cut the larger animals in half kill the birds and lay them before me with a path between the halves. Let me say here, this is how a contract was made in those days. An animal of value was cut in half and then the two parties would walk between them, in effect saying, if I break this covenant, may the fate of this animal be my own.

Now I did exactly as I was instructed and laid out the carcasses with the open halves facing each other. To this day I don't know if it was exhaustion from the exertion, or just a factor of my age, I was well past 80 now-- or the hand of God. But a deep sleep fell over me and a deep and terrifying darkness fell over me. God was so near, that I could breathe him in. And then the invisible and Almighty God, the King of the Universe, spoke again. He told me that I would have descendants, but that they would be slaves in a foreign land for 400 years. He would bring justice upon that land for their oppression and bless my children with great wealth from all of their years of toil. He reassured my cowardly old self that I would live a long and happy life and die peacefully in my bed. But that when the time was right for his purposes, he would bring them to the promised land.

Then He took up the firepot and a flaming torch and he walked-- ALONE--- between the animals. And his meaning was clear. This was His promise and He would keep it, no matter what I did. He would never abandon me, even if I abandoned him. He would never fail to seek my good, even when I did evil in His sight.

.....What question was I supposed to answer for you?.... Oh yes.... How do you bargain with God? How do you get the best deal with the God who made you, who loves you, and who wants to bless you?

The answer my friends, is don't... don't bargain, don't try to get a deal. Don't promise, give. Human promises aren't worth the paper they are not written on. Just give. Give God everything, and he will multiply it, he will make your name great, and he will be your shield, and when all your bargaining days are over, he will lead you to the Promised land. **I guarantee it.**

Would you like to pray with me? Let us bow our heads before the God of the Universe and offer prayer.

Lord God, Creator of all that has been or ever will be, thank you for making covenant with us to be our God, to protect us from all that can kill our spirits, bring death to our dreams, and make us to live in fear. Grant us the faith to believe in your power and in your steadfast love for each of us. May that regnant faith drive out the fear of want so that we can be generous, the fear of shame so that we may courageously walk in your ways; the fear of death so that we may boldly live in peace and joy forever. During our long and difficult days, when we have trouble lifting our heads, remind us that your blessings are more numerous than the particles of dust at our feet. And when the nights are dark, and sleep eludes us, remind us that your gifts to us are more numerous than the stars. May each day of our lives find us living more confidently in your promises, and less dependently upon our own wiles or charms, as you bring us moment by moment to the glory that awaits us in your eternal kingdom, through Jesus the Christ, 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.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION

“Be Thou My Vision”

The Hymnal #339

*THE BENEDICTION

And now my children, May the Lord bless you and keep you, now and forever. Amen.

*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

Psalm 139

Tune: Londonderry Air (O Danny Boy)

O Lord you know my laughing and my weeping.

You see my thoughts and deeds from every side.

Before my birth, my life was in your keeping.

I can't escape, no matter where I hide.

For if I flee from you, through joy or sorrow,

To heaven or hell, I find you waiting there;

Or ride the wings of morning till tomorrow,

Yes, even there, yes even there, I'm in your care.

*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis