

**Morning Worship Service from
First Presbyterian Church of Magnolia, Arkansas
Sunday, February 11th, 2017**

PRELUDE "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing" - Douglas E. Wagner Dr. Elizabeth Davis
CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP "Rejoice in the Day!" - Dan Dykema The Choir

After the Choir finishes, the liturgist should step to the lectern and say,

"Would you join me in reading the responsive call to worship adapted from Lamentations 3 and printed in our bulletins?"

CALL TO WORSHIP (adapted from Lamentations 3)

Who can command and have it done, if the Lord has not ordained it?

Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good & bad come?

But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:

It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him.

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never end;

They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

The Lord is my portion, therefore I will hope in him."

Let us worship God beginning with prayer....

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... God of love and life, and from whom we have rebelliously kept our distance, you have nonetheless most graciously drawn close to us and kept our feet from slipping. For all whose burdens chafe and whose sins cause us no small measure of suffering; for those whose road seems dreary and endless; for those whose lives have no music in them; and for those whose hearts are lonely and whose souls have lost their courage, help us to turn to your Word read and proclaimed, so that your light may radiate into even the darkest places in our lives. Make your face to shine upon us, and turn our eyes to where the heavens are full of promise. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness", #276 in our Hymnals.

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

*HYMN OF PRAISE "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" *The Hymnal #276*

After the hymn, the preacher will step into the lectern and say...

*CALL TO CONFESSION

Why should anyone who draws breath complain about the punishment of their sins? Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the Lord. Let us lift up our hearts as well as our hands to God in heaven and pray together the prayer of confession as it is printed in our bulletin, pausing for a moment of silence at its conclusion for a time of silent prayer. Let us pray...

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION (In Unison)

O God, we confess that we have not fulfilled the trust you have given us as servants of Christ and stewards of your mysteries. Help us peel away the layers of disguise that keep us from truth. Forgive us for avoiding the honest look within ourselves and for abandoning the search for your life changing and life giving truth. Forgive us our ignorance of your unchanging will and for our attempts to bend it to fit our own desires and circumstances. Feed us on your Word and lead us to the Light that we may walk the Way, know the Truth, and live the Life that you intend for us through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

The Lord will not reject forever. Although he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; given to us in Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 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

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us now be reconciled one with another as well and 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.*

Place a U-Haul box on the floor and ask the children if they know what this box is for. Ask the children to raise their hands if they have ever moved. Ask all of the children to pretend they are moving. What would they put into the box? Then ask the children how they felt just pretending to be moving. Some answers might be: excited, nervous, scared, anxious. ... Agree that there are some good feelings about moving and also some scary feelings. Ask the children who is going with them on their move. ... After they have listed all of their family members, press them: Is anyone else going? Someone who is always with us? Agree that, yes, no matter where we go, God is with us-- even if we are going into the scariest place we can imagine! For this we are always thankful.

As the children depart from the front, the Liturgist will step back to the microphone and say...

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

Every generous act of giving, like every perfect gift, is from above. We are not the authors of truth, but we are called to proclaim it. Having heard God’s gracious call, let us respond by giving cheerfully and gratefully 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

"Lord, Be Glorified" - Kilpatrick/Wagner

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... Good and generous God, we pray that your life would so overflow in us that our neighbors both near and far would be fed by your Spirit. Use the offerings of our resources and our lives to proclaim the gospel; to spread your love; and to bring forth your kingdom. For the sake of Christ we dedicate our lives to your service. Amen.

Invite the congregation to... “Be seated,” and take a seat.

THE ANTHEM

"New Born Again" - L. Shackley

The Choir

After the Anthem, the Liturgist will return to the lectern microphone & say:

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson this morning is taken from fourth chapter of the gospel of John, beginning at the seventh verse. If you would like to follow along, you can find it on page 925 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

“There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

“The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

“Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

“The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?"

“Jesus said to her, "Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

“The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."

The liturgist will return to his seat 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 for today is selected verses taken from the book of Jeremiah, the twenty-ninth chapter, beginning at the fourth verse. If you would like to follow along in your pew bibles, you can find it on page 676. Listen once more for the Word of God:

"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:

“Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”

"For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.”

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

“The Incurable Hope”

A doctor, a lawyer, and a preacher went deer hunting. As they were walking, out into a clearing in front of them stepped a big buck. All three of them shot at exactly the same time. Immediately the buck dropped to the ground and they all rushed up to see how big it actually was. It was HUGE! The biggest baddest buck that any of them had ever seen. The only problem was that they couldn't determine whose shot had actually killed the deer.

A heated debate ensued, but fortunately a few minutes later a game warden happened by, and asked what they were arguing about. The doctor told him that they were debating who shot the buck. The officer took a look at the buck and within a few seconds, he said with great confidence, "The preacher shot the buck!"

They all wondered how he knew that so quickly.

The officer answered, "Easy. The bullet went in one ear and out the other."

That's just harsh, isn't it. But let's face it. Preachers have a tough job. Get out there they said. Say something meaningful they said. Oh, and you need to do it in 20 minutes-- or less!

You don't have to be a preacher to know that feeling. Some of you are teachers, coaches. Some of you are parents and you've had a child for not 25 minutes but 25 years and you'd like to think some of

your words had some staying power.

Today we will meet a preacher, a prophet, who had a pretty tough assignment. He was called to be God's spokesman at a time when the kingdom was falling to pieces. And the worst part is that God called him to preach and told him before he ever began that every word he spoke would go in one ear and out the other. No wonder he was called the weeping prophet.

For a time, the nation of Israel had been unified and strong, but as power was passed from one generation to another, God's ways were not. Kings are evil and the kingdom becomes divided and so does the allegiance of this once strong nation until we find these words in II Chronicles 36:15-16:

The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy.

No remedy. Really? Not exactly what you want to hear from your doctor or even my mechanic, much less the God of the universe.

But just because there's no remedy, doesn't mean there's no plan. Here's our bottom line today:

We are never without hope because God is never without a plan.

Say that with me, "we are never without hope because God is never without a plan."

Perhaps you remember this Scripture from Jeremiah 29:11, one of the most well-known Scriptures: *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*

Keep in mind, before this was on a graduation card, God is speaking directly to his people. Now at first glance I'm thinking this plan sounds really good. We know we're never without hope because you're never without a plan. So God, what's the plan? Lay it on us.

Notice that verse 10 right before it says:

This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place.

Oh the 70-year plan? Pain, suffering, destruction. Maybe we could handle a 70-minute plan! We could still sweat it out and be real scared for a bit. But I really need to know a little more about what to do next. Should I invest in stocks or bonds? Buy or rent my home? Should I stockpile a little gold, invest in 6 months worth of surplus MRE's to put in my Armageddon proof shelter?

And God says, "Just go with it and trust me. I have a plan, a plan for good and not evil." We don't always understand God's timing but we're never without hope because God is never without a plan.

You see here's what God knew about Israel and it's what he knows about you and me:

What you love will change the way you live, but how you live will never change the way you're loved.

Even though the people had forgotten God, he had not forgotten them. How they lived would not change the way he loved them, and God wanted them back. God wasn't working on payback. He was and is working on the way back. Their way, OUR way, back to him.

So there stands Jeremiah. He is left behind to declare, "You're not without hope. God is not without a plan. He will bring back his people." It was a tough assignment but one with which Jeremiah was faithful.

Just like you and I, sometimes Jeremiah would have to remind himself of this hope as we see in the book of Lamentations chapter 3:

²¹ Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:

²² Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.

²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

Isn't that a beautiful picture and yet hard to take in? God is just and righteous yet fully compassionate. Sometimes I hear the question, "Is God the God of wrath of the Old Testament or the God of mercy in the New Testament?" The answer of course is, "yes." That's the beauty of looking at the entirety

of God's story and the fullness of his nature,

God is completely just and completely merciful.

See for me, I can't be both. For me to be one, it comes at the expense of the other. In my family, I'm more the justice guy. You know, a sense that there is right and there is wrong. And there are consequences. There's just a certain way things should be. Do I have any justice types in the house? I see some of you are trying to raise someone else's hand.

Now some of you lean a little more towards mercy and compassion. Praise the Lord. You are much more inclined to give a second chance, or a third, or a fourth. In our family, that's Debbie. I used to tell my kids all the time, be so thankful for your mother.

When my kids were young and we would get ready to go to church on Sundays, I would wake them and tell them that the car will be pulling out at 9:15am sharp-- and I didn't mean 9:16. 8:31. If you haven't fixed your hair, had breakfast, or brushed your teeth, TOUGH, We are leaving on time!

Of course 9:15 comes and goes. No kids. So what do I do? Being a sensitive and loving father, I understand that one of my jobs as Dad is to teach them responsibility, so I back out of the driveway, with kids doing an Indiana Jones slide and roll underneath the closing garage door and chasing the minivan down the street. Why? Because I said everyone needs to be in the van to leave at 9:15.

Now I have a choice. I can either keep driving or I can listen to my compassionate wife who says, "Honey, maybe we should stop the van so they don't have to dive into a moving vehicle."

Men this is free, but your wife has the gift of mercy, if you're given a choice, go with her gift-- especially if she's the one chasing the van.

You see God is completely both just and merciful and here's how: Jesus took on our sin and gave us his righteousness. The full wrath of God was poured out on Jesus so that the full mercy of God could be poured out on us.

So tell me... Have you accepted his mercy? Have you accepted his plan for you? Or are you trying to work out your own plan?

Listen to Jeremiah 2:11-13:

"Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.)

But my people have exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols.

Be appalled at this, you heavens, and shudder with great horror," declares the Lord.

"My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

I have the sense that some here are plumb tuckered out... exhausted from digging your own cisterns. Love, career, money, pleasure, shopping, eating. Did I go there? Oh yes I did. Even good things can become modern day idolatry if it displaces God from the throne of our lives. Family, our children. Good things can become a mirage of God things. The problem with the cisterns we dig ourselves is that we have to keep filling them because they simply don't hold water. We get our fix but it just leads to the next and it never satisfies. It can be exhausting but it's the best this world has to offer you.

In John 4, Jesus meets a lady who has dug her own cisterns as she had burned through relationship after relationship. He meets her, out of all places, he meets her at a well and offers her something better...peace. He says something like what Jeremiah said:

¹³ *Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

¹⁵ *The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."*

Maybe you've tried all the best water this world has to offer, but have come up thirsty and unsatisfied. Jesus offers water from the well that never runs dry.

Could I encourage you to pray this prayer, this week:

Dear Lord, If I have you and nothing else, I have everything. Amen.

If I have you Jesus, and a lousy job, or even no job, If I have you Jesus and poor health, If I have you Jesus and I'm lonely, sick, If I have you Jesus and Washington refuses to call me to see what I think, If I have you Jesus and it's a fight just to get out of bed in the morning, If I have you Jesus and nothing else, I have everything.

You are never without hope because, why? "God is never without a plan". His plan for your life? His name is Jesus.

That's a truth for you to hang on to. Don't just let it go in one ear and out the other.

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Would you pray with me... Dear Lord, If we have you and nothing else, we have everything.

Help us to trust that promise. Remind us that you have a plan and that you are working it out and that it includes us, despite our sinfulness and unworthiness. We rejoice that you do love us as we are, where we are. So help us to surrender to your plan for our lives, knowing that, as much as you love us at this moment, you also love us too much to leave us this way. So go ahead God, change us until it doesn't hurt anymore. Take us to a secret place where, untouched by the enemy, we might absorb the peace given to us in your word: "If you are for us, who can be against us?" If our hearts have grown weary under the continual bombardment by the criticisms from cynical people, the pressures to perform, or from the state of the world around us, strengthen us and nourish our souls with your songs of hope and love. Where we have allowed such trivial things to overwhelm us, take us and remake us so that we may accomplish all that you desire, rendering all honor, glory and praise to you. In the name of Jesus, who is our Righteousness and our Peace, and 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 & join in one voice to sing our hymn of dedication, "Our God, Our Help In Ages Past", hymn #210 in our Hymnals. If you are unable to remain for the brief congregational meeting which will follow the hymn, please feel free to exit during the final verse.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION "Our God, Our Help In Ages Past" *The Hymnal #210*

*THE BENEDICTION

May the love of God, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit fill you with faith and make you of good courage so that you may find hope and peace in every circumstance.

*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE "Go Now in Peace"

Go now in peace. Never be afraid.

God will go with you each hour of everyday.

Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true.

Know He will guide you in all you do.

Go now in love, and show you believe.

Reach out to others so all the world can see.

God will be there, watching from above.

Go now in peace, in faith, and in love. Amen, Amen, Amen.

*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis