

**Sunday, February 12th, 2017**

*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 and take his/her seat. The pastor will follow, step into the pulpit, welcome everyone, and make announcements....*

*The preacher 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**

**Olivia Smith**

**CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP**

**"Rejoice in the Day!" - Dan Dykema**

**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 149 and printed in our bulletins?”

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

(adapted from Psalm 149)

Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song!

**Sing his praise in the assembly of the faithful.**

Let Israel be glad in its Maker;

**Let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.**

Let them praise his name with dancing,

**Let them make melody to him with tambourine and lyre.**

For the Lord takes pleasure in his people;

**He adorns the humble with victory.**

Let the faithful exult in glory;

**Let them sing for joy from their beds.**

Let the high praises of God be in their throats.

**This is joy for all his faithful ones. Praise the Lord!**

Let us worship God beginning with prayer.

**PRAYER OF INVOCATION**

Prince of Peace, our world needs you. We hear your Word calling us to remain faithful and hopeful when so many signs around us point to despair. Anger begets violence which begets more anger and violence in a seemingly endless upward spiral that threatens our existence and compromises our witness. Still you call us. Still you whisper our names. Still you invite us to stand in the gap, to speak up for those who have lost their voices, to name and resist injustice, to tell the truth in love, to build bridges of love and understanding. Meet us in our worship this day, O God, that we might listen once again for your voice and for the words of peace you speak to our lives and hearts. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, “I Danced in the Morning”, number 302 in our Hymnal.

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

**\*HYMN OF PRAISE**

**“I Danced in the Morning”**

*The Hymnal #302*

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

**\*CALL TO CONFESSION**

Knowing that we all fall short of the glory of God and the standard of righteousness established by Jesus’ example, let us come before Him and lay bare our guilt so that we might be forgiven and made whole. Let us pray together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins, pausing at its end for a moment of silent prayer. Let us pray...

**\*PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

(In Unison)

Holy and loving God, anger is often our weak spot. It fuels our resentments. It feeds our self-righteousness. It prevents us from letting go of past hurts and taking hold of the joy and freedom for which we have been redeemed. We cling to anger as if it could save us, hoping it will protect us from pain and loss. But, such is foolishness. Salvation is in trusting you to make all things right. Hope is found in keeping

our eyes on you and on what you have done for us, rather than on others and how they have let us down. Having received your grace in such abundance, let us not fail in our responsibility to share that same kindness and mercy to others. Amen.

\*SILENT CONFESSION

*Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.*

\*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. 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

You who once were far off have been brought near to God by the blood of Christ. Through him, we are no longer strangers and aliens, but citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. Therefore, let us draw near to one another and share the peace of Christ. 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, preacher 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 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 return to the lectern and say...***

“Would all who are able, please stand and join in one voice to sing our next hymn, “O for a World” hymn #386 in our *Hymnals*.

\*HYMN OF PREPARATION

“O for a World”

*The Hymnal #386*

*After the hymn, the liturgist will return to the pulpit and say,*

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

**Please be seated.** . . Hear the word of the Lord: “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.” Having been so richly blessed, let us continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings...

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

THE OFFERTORY

"Though I May Speak" - Emma Lou Diemer

**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... As we dedicate our gifts to you, O God, we acknowledge our responsibility to do all we can to bring peace to our relationships and peace to our world. Give us strength to be the first to offer the words of reconciliation. Embolden us to give freely so that others might know what freedom looks like. With gratitude for all that we have and all that we are, we offer our gifts & ourselves to you. Amen.

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 take a seat.*

## THE ANTHEM

"Let Us Love One Another" - Arnold B. Sherman

**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 twelfth chapter of Paul's Letter to the Romans, beginning at the fourteenth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page 987 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited. Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

*The liturgist will return to her seat 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 5th chapter of Matthew, beginning at the twenty-first verse. You are encouraged to follow along & you can find the passage on page #838 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more for the word of God...

"You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, & you be put in prison; truly, I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny."

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

## THE SERMON

"Dancing to the Altar"

Does Jesus really mean what he says? Is there anything more important than staying in a right relationship with God, and going to church? He says that you're at the altar worshiping, and if, in that sacred moment you remember someone has something against you, and you should leave and take care of that before you offer worship.

If we take that teaching literally the church would become a circus with everyone running around asking everyone else, "Do you have anything against me? Have I offended you in anyway?" You know that could really be terrible. We'd never have a class, a dinner, or a worship service, without each attendee turning the occasion into an inquisition? "Have I hurt your feelings?" Have I said or done anything I shouldn't have?"

You come to me about eight or ten times with that, "Do you have anything against me?" and I would say, "I'm beginning to. You're getting on my nerves really." Surely you don't take this literally. It's exaggerated, exaggerated speech, I have to be confident that Jesus believed, understood and knew and assumed that we knew, that when the body of Christ is healthy, it can receive, and swallow, and assimilate a

thousand bruises and blunders, and not make a big deal out of it.

So Jesus appears to be using hyperbole to teach us a lesson. We're not supposed to take it literally, but we are supposed to know that there is nothing more important than being right with others and by extension with God.

John says in his first epistle, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 Jn. 4:20). Love of God and love of others are inseparably linked. And regardless of whether you're the offender or the offeree, Jesus puts the burden on you to do what you can to make things right. Romans 12:18 reads, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." You may not be able to make things right. You can't control how the other person will respond. But if things aren't made right, don't let it be because you didn't try.

When you think about the little slights and social awkwardness that infect us in the light of the big picture. There are national and racial and gender and ethnic conflicts all over the world. Every interest group in the world seems hell bent on getting to a microphone in front of a camera to claim that they have been offended by some offhand remark, and that they are a victim.

How about in your own life? Has anyone ever said about you, "She didn't speak to me in the hall." "He didn't ask ME to help on the project?" "How come no one ever asks ME to serve as an elder?" "Well, I think the preacher was a little condescending when he answered my question."

Put that up against real conflicts and it seems a little small, even petty. The world is in the shape it's in and you think YOU have a problem. Get over it. Christian faith should be made of sterner stuff.

But then I remembered something a seminary professor once said, "There is no more sophisticated nor justifiable escape from our problems with each other than to enlarge the screen until we're made to feel silly for complaining about that slight or that bruise or that bump or that hurt or that condescension."

There is no more painful, no more hurtful dismissal of our hurts than by trivializing them in the light of a larger context. If I hurt, I hurt, where I hurt.

So, I go back to the text. If you are offering your gift at the altar and there you remember that a brother or sister has something against you, you leave the gift. You go first and be reconciled to the brother or sister and then come back and finish your worship. In other words, Jesus wants you and me to imagine ourselves in the most serious, most significant, most seriously sacred place and moment in our lives-- at worship.

Be quiet; be respectful. Don't you know what's going on? People are praying here.

Did you know that an altar is the oldest piece of furniture in the world. That's the first thing God made. Genesis tells us that "God set the whole universe on an altar." And if the prayers and praise of the saints ever stops, down everything goes. That's the end of it. The world will not survive.

Read the book of Revelation. The closing scene of all that God intended is a Sanctuary scene--and the focus is the altar & the worshipers.

So if you're offering your gift at the altar and there you remember-- and you will remember. That's the thing about the altar. It's a dangerous place, the altar. Be careful about going to church. It's a very serious thing and it can affect you in ways that will touch every moment of your life after this. There's something about being at the altar. I would avoid it if I were you. If I did not wish to be influenced by my own memories, I would absent myself from every worship service, because here, you will remember-- it will collide headlong into the glorious future that Christ has laid out before us. Something will change. Something is going to happen when that happens.

And if at the altar you remember--- why are we so likely to remember there? It's because here, surrounded by the prayers of the saints, enfolded in the everlasting arms-- we are not defensive and self-protecting. We're vulnerable; we're open. We're not impressing and being impressed. We're not convincing and being convinced. We're not comparing and being compared. We're just there before God and being that open and see, you remember.

I really believe that the greatest moral and ethical force in the world is worship. Nothing else comes

close, for two reasons. At the altar, when you are open and non-defensive, truth **will** happen.

So you ask, "Who's preaching?" And someone might well answer, "The same old hack who's always there."

"You going to go?" "I don't know, are you going?" "I don't know, I think I need to rest." So you stay home, cook a little, or watch a little TV, do a little shopping on Amazon, or take a nap-- but don't come here if you are afraid of the truth, because truth is in the air here, we breathe it in without even knowing when. So you decide, "I believe I'll skip church today. I cannot stand the truth."

The other reason is memory. Memory is an extraordinary thing. You think you have something pushed down to the deepest level of the deepest cave, and it will never emerge again. And then I'm at the altar in the presence of God, and that which I thought was totally and completely and buried erupts and comes to the surface. Now what am I going to do with it?

Memory is a strong moral force, the ground for moral and ethical duty. Do you remember God speaking to Israel in Leviticus 19, "You are to love the stranger, the outsider, as you love yourself." Why? "Remember, you were strangers in Egypt." If anyone knows what it is like to be a stranger, it's you. The memory of your own experience compels you to love the stranger.

Remember from the New Testament: Paul has gone to Jerusalem. He anticipates a big quarrel with those who are the pillars of the church, James and John and Cephas. They have a confrontation. They agree to disagree. Cephas will go to the Jews; Paul will go to the non-Jews. They all shake hands, the right hand of Christian fellowship. Paul said that when he turned to walk away, James and John and Peter, and called after him, "Remember the poor."

He couldn't get it out of his mind. He said, "I have, I have, I have never forgotten the poor." In fact, it was concern for the poor and an offering for the poor that took him to Jerusalem for the last time, that put him in position to be arrested, that sent him to Rome a prisoner, and brought about his death. If anyone ever asks you why Paul was beheaded, you tell them "for remembering the poor."

Memory is a powerful stab of awakening to face our duty. If you're at the altar and you're offering your gift and then you remember, then leave it and go. And it's urgent; do it now! Don't wait; delay is deadly. It will fester. Trifles light as air right now will hang like millstones around your neck if you wait. There is something more important than prayer.

A friend of mine, now deceased, I think she was past sixty when she told me this. She said that when she was a little girl, there were six children in the family. She said that the happiest time in their home was at supper. She called it supper. "We laughed and talked about school and what we'd done and this and that. Mom and Dad would talk and it was just such a wonderful time."

But she said, "I remember, I was about six or seven years old, just before supper, Mom and Dad got into some sort of quarrel. We'd never heard them quarrel. It reddened their faces, increased their voices. They were actually screaming and when we children came in, they fell silent. My mother turned her back, stirred in a few pots, put it on the table and said, 'Let's eat.' That's all that was said that night. That's all that was said the next night. That's all that was said the next night." She said, "It seemed weeks that we did not say anything at the table. By and by Mom and Dad started speaking. They became civil to each other. We talked a little bit, but our family was never the same. Never the same. They never dealt with it."

So if you're at the altar, deep in worship and it comes to the surface, take care of it, take care of it. You can come back later and worship.

A missionary to Nigeria recently shared a story about a young minister who had been converted and had been educated to become a pastor. His name was Jeremiah.

Jeremiah had life and exuberance and joy. Which is not to say he couldn't be sad. I saw Jeremiah working in the slums of Nairobi, comforting a mother who mourned inconsolably the dead child still in her arms. Jeremiah was weeping.

But on this day, he spoke with a young man, a convert like himself, who in the midst of the poverty and suffering that surrounded him, shared his story with Jeremiah. He would talk, and then Jeremiah would stand up, and dance exuberantly, uncontrollably around him. The young man seeking baptism would never

get to the end of his story before Jeremiah would jump up and dance.

Later, over supper, the American minister chided Jeremiah gently for so frequently interrupting his testimony. "If you could just learn to dance less."

He looked at me with a mixture of laughter and sadness in his eyes. "Ralph, the missionaries came to Africa and told us the story of Jesus. But they only told us half the story. We read the Bible and found the other half. Jesus wants us to dance.

"In my home, when people come to church, they all walk toward the church dancing. When they come to the altar to bring their offering, they are dancing. If they are not dancing, we tell them, 'go back, find out what is wrong with your life & make it right. Then when you are dancing, come back with your offering.'

"We have a gift for our white brothers and sisters. It is dancing... When you have learned to dance your faith, then you will know the whole story of Jesus."

So, if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there and be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift-- this time with a joyful heart and dancing feet!

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

Would you pray with me... Our Father, you alone can count the unpardoned injuries and intentional slights that have come between us and our enemies. Even worse, we have lost count of the misunderstandings that have given rise to unintended pain and suppurating wounds among those for whom we have cared for most deeply. Harsh and thoughtless words have been spoken. Opportunities for healing have been neglected. We know all too well how these divisions and intractable differences grieve You, and that You long for us to make an honest effort at reconciliation. We know that such an effort would please you more than any vow of loyalty or material gift we might offer in your name.

We dare not make this a prayer for You to lower your standards to make our recalcitrance acceptable; nor do we ask you to change those from whom we have become estranged. We know that we must always begin with *our responsibilities*-- with ourselves and our own shortcomings. So we ask you to change us. Change our perspective so that we may see those around us as heavenly trusts, in which we may deposit our love, and invest our time until that day when time is no more. Enable us to let go all of our false pride. Give us the grace of the outstretched hand and the open heart. Give us the courage that will enable me to go to and be the first to say, "I have been wrong. I am sorry. Forgive me." Strengthen us to repair the bridges which we must cross to become one once more-- with others and with you. And bless to Your glory any gesture of good will undertaken in the strong name of your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, 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, "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love", #2223 in our Sing the Faith hymnal supplement.

\*HYMN OF DEDICATION "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love" *Sing the Faith #2223*

\*THE BLESSING

\*THE CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

"Let There Be Peace on Earth"

Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me;

Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be.

With God as our Father, brothers all are we. Let us walk with each other in perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me; Let this be the moment now. With every step I take, let this be my solemn vow:

To take each moment & live each moment in peace eternally.

Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.

\*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis