

**Sunday Morning Worship from First Presbyterian Church of Magnolia, Arkansas**  
**Sunday, March 4th, 2017**

PRELUDE "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" - Gilbert M. Martin Dr. Elizabeth Davis  
CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP "Send Us Forth in Thy Love" - Dan Dykema The Choir

*After the Choir finishes, the liturgist should step to the lectern & say,*

"Would you join me in reading the responsive call to worship adapted from Psalm 124 and printed in our bulletins?"

CALL TO WORSHIP (adapted from Psalm 124)

If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when our enemies attacked us,

**Then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us;**

Then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone over us;

**Then over us would have gone the raging waters.**

Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us as prey to their teeth.

**We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers;**

The snare is broken, and we have escaped.

**Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven & earth.**

Let us worship God beginning with a short video bringing us the voice of a

Disciple, answering the question, "Who do you say Jesus is?"

*The video will begin immediately after this introduction.*

**A VOICE FROM THE CROSS**

**A Video**

**"A Disciple"**

*Immediately at the conclusion of the video, the Acolyte will extinguish one votive candle.*

*The Liturgist will then return to the lectern microphone and say...*

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... Gracious God, the journey is long and the cross is heavy. We come today to this place of worship tired -- tired of responsibility, tired of turning the other cheek, tired of returning good for evil and tired of serving you unnoticed. In the quietness of these moments, help us to turn our eyes upon one who has taken responsibility, who has turned the other cheek, who has returned good for evil, who has borne our burdens for us. Enable us to enjoy our lightened load, to continue our Lenten journey, to find the oasis of your love and to drink the waters of mercy and compassion. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, "I Sing the Mighty Power of God", hymn #288 in our *Hymnals*.

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

\*HYMN OF PRAISE "I Sing the Mighty Power of God" *The Hymnal #288*

*After the hymn, the liturgist will step into the lectern and say...*

\*CALL TO CONFESSION

Our God is ever more ready to listen than we are to pray, and more ready to forgive than we are to confess. Aware of the sins that have placed distance between us and our Savior, let us bring our whole selves to this time of prayer, opening our hearts to Him in honest acknowledgement of our shortcomings that we may be forgiven and made whole. Let us pray....

\*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

(In Unison)

Merciful Father, as we are confronted by the bread & cup of the Lord's Supper and are reminded through them of the courage and faith of Jesus that allowed him to obediently and bravely give his life for our sakes. Forgive our cowardice and make us willing to experience ridicule and rejection for the advancement of your kingdom. We confess that we have not claimed the promises contained within our baptism, and have chosen to live in defeat even when we were on the threshold of victory. Almighty God, give us the assurance and renewed comfort of forgiveness so that we may live out more fully all the gifts of your grace through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

\*SILENT CONFESSION

*Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.*

\*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

The psalmist wrote, "Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, & in whose spirit there is no deceit."... 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

All who have drawn near to God in honest confession may be assured that Christ has also drawn close to them. Jesus is with us even to the ends of the earth to lead us, forgive us, comfort us, encourage us, and bring us his 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, 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.***

Hold up a really ugly hat, and ask if any of the children want to volunteer to wear it. Ask them to imagine that they have to wear the hat every day, and be teased by other children. Have them tell you how that would make them feel. Then ask the other children if it would be hard to be friends with the child in the ugly hat, and if they would find it difficult to defend the child from teasing. Let them know that there are some people who get picked on a lot — and it is usually for their race or religion, not for wearing a funny hat. Tell them the story of Queen Esther, a Jewish woman who saved the lives of all the Jewish people in the land that stretched from India to Ethiopia. Explain that she could have kept quiet, but she stood up for people who were being picked on, and she asked the powerful king to spare the lives of the Jewish people (Esther 7:3). Ask the children to tell you why it is sometimes hard to stand up for a person who is different. Encourage them to put on the funny hat, and to see what it feels like to be different. Close by encouraging them to stand up for anyone who is being teased or hurt or left out, just because they don't look like everyone else.

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

**THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING**

Let us offer our gifts in gratitude so that we can be a part of something far greater than ourselves. 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**

**"Dove of Peace" - Gilbert M. Martin**

**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 come to an awareness of the tasks set before us to bring peace to our relationships and peace to our world. Give us strength to be the one to offer the words of reconciliation. Let our hearts be so full of love that we can forgive — and reach out to others who have lost their way. Open our eyes that we may fully see the abundance that is ours as well as the poverty of the world around us. 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 and 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 & 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." The liturgist will then return to her seat on the Chancel or with his family. Thanks so much for your help!*

## ANTHEM

**Dionté George, alto saxophone soloist & The Choir**

**"Give Me Jesus" - Howard Helvey/Craig Courtney**

*After the choir finishes, the Liturgist will step into the pulpit & say....*

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson this morning is taken from the tenth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, selected verses beginning at verse 10. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #1086 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

"Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. "Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; & whoever does not take up the cross & follow me is not worthy of me"

*The liturgist will return to her 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 for today is taken from the Book of Esther, the fourth chapter, beginning at the twelfth verse. If you would like to follow along in your pew bibles, you can find it on page 429. Listen once more for the Word of God:

"When they told Mordecai what Esther had said, Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this."

Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai, "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish."

Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him."

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

## THE SERMON

"For Such a Time As This"

Rev. Mike Morgan

A few days after being told to take a hike and a cold shower by his then Queen, Vashti, King Xerxes is walking through the city and suddenly eyeballs the ravishing young woman, named Hadassah, whose name means *compassion*. He orders his servants to take her into custody and bring her to the palace, where she will be bathed, massaged, manicured, perfumed, and dressed in the most beautiful robes she has ever seen, so he can make her his new wife & change her name to Esther or "*Star*" in the process.

As the next scene opens, old Mordecai, Esther's uncle and adopted father, overhears a conversation between two traitors, Bigthana and Teresh, plotting to overthrow the king. Old Mordie then tells Esther, and Esther tells the right people, who tell the king. **The plan is thwarted, and the full account was written down in the daily court record in the king's presence.** Remember that detail, it becomes important in just a bit.

In scene four the villain enters. His name is Haman. Haman is a raging bigot, who hates Jews with an unholy passion. He is an Amalekite. Perhaps you remember that Amalekites were the group that God told Saul to utterly destroy, instructions which Saul did not carry out, and now generations later, the Amalekites, are back in the person of Haman and they want blood.

Haman was second in command in Persia and demanded that every one bow in his presence. And everyone obediently complied-- except for Mordecai. He would only bow before the living God.

Of course this made Haman apoplectic! Haman then lies to the King and convinces Xerxes that all the Jews are against him and will rise up to overthrow him. He gets the King to issue an edict that on a certain date, the people of Persia are to rise up and kill all of the Jews, and to motivate them, they are told that anyone who kills a Jew gets his property. To make sure that the Jews are defenseless, he has their weapons confiscated.

Jews everywhere are thrown into a panic, because they know that, barring a miracle, they will be defenseless when attacked and that their lives are over. Mordecai weeps and fasts. And when Esther, his daughter, sees him weeping and fasting, she inquires as to what has happened. He responds with these words: You have been chosen queen **for just such a time as this.** You are God's chosen instrument of our deliverance.

Esther knows that she can't just go walking into the king's throne room, even though she is his wife. She knows that if she goes in there without an engraved invitation, and he doesn't give her the little dip with his scepter, then her head comes off. So she tells Mordecai to have all the Jewish people in Persia, to pray and fast for three days. And then she tells Mordecai, "I will go to the king... and if I die, I die."

Three days later, Esther puts on her cutest ensemble. She knows the way to king Xerxes' brain is through his eyes, not his stomach. She just stands there in the doorway to the throne room until she catches the king's eye. The bible tells us that "He was pleased,"-- probably the greatest understatement in the Bible-- and said, "Hello, darlin'." She enters much to his pleasure. He holds out the tip of his scepter and says, "What do you want. I'll give it to you, up to half of my kingdom."

She answers seductively: "I just wanna have lunch with you, honey. Let's you and me have our own little banquet. You can even invite Haman to come along."

And then, when the party's over, he says, "What do you want?" And she says, "I want to have another party with you tomorrow." So they schedule another banquet for the next day.

Haman is so proud of himself. Not only has he just had dinner with the king and the queen, he's been invited for a repeat engagement. He struts out of the throne room and walks outside of the palace to get in his ride and all the people bow-- except for Mordecai.

He goes home and reports to his wife: "I just had the greatest day of my life & it's been spoiled by that jerk, Mordecai."

So his friends and his wife say: "Listen, the guy's a pain in the neck, **give him a** pain in **his** neck. Build the gallows. Make 'em tall. Then you can bring him down-- about six feet."

And before he goes to bed, he leaves instructions that gallows, 75-feet-tall, be built right outside of the castle. He goes to bed and he sleeps well, knowing that he's going to take care of Mordecai in the morning.

**But guess who doesn't sleep well?** Xerxes! A little indigestion from the banquet, and he can't get to sleep. So, he has the court clerk come in with the court records. **Does anybody remember what was written in the court records?**

The court clerk reads about a time when two men by the name of Bigthana and Teresh plotted against Xerxes, and Mordecai overheard them and told Esther and his life was saved. The king turns to

the clerk and asks: "Did we ever do anything for this guy, Mordecai? Did we ever give him a medal? A week off? A reward of any kind?"

And he says: "Nope, nothing."

About that time Haman shows up. And the king says: "Haman, if I really wanted to honor a hero, someone who has earned my loyalty and my respect, what would you suggest I do for him?"

Haman, the ultimate egotist, thinks the king is talking about him. And so he says: Well, you could let him wear the robe that you have worn. You could let him wear the crown and ride on the back of the stallion that you have ridden upon. You could let him do all this. You could let him be led through the city streets and have all the people bow down and worship him.

And Xerxes says: That's a great idea. I want you to go out and make that happen for my old friend, Mordecai.

Then Haman grits his teeth and spends the morning chauffeuring Mordecai through the streets of Susa. He's so upset that he almost forgets about the banquet he's supposed to go to that day. When he arrives, there's the king and the queen eating, so Haman quietly sits down and begins to eat. And pretty soon the king says to the queen: "Now tell me, honey, what is that you really want?"

She says: "I'll tell you. There is a man who is so villainous and evil that he wants to destroy all my people."

And the king leans back and stiffens his neck, and he says: "Who is it?"

And she points that pretty finger right at Haman's nose.

And the king is so angered that he stands up and he runs out of the banquet hall. Haman falls before the couch of the Queen, and begins begging for mercy. The king comes back in. He thinks that Haman is putting a move on his wife-- **and that really does it!** The king hears about the gallows that have just been built. And he snaps his finger, and the next thing Haman knows, Haman is hanging on his own gallows, along with all ten of his sons.

Mordecai is promoted to take the place of Haman. Haman's order not to sell weapons to the Jews is overridden by the king, so that, even though he can't take back the one allowing people to attack and kill Jews, the Jews can at least defend themselves, which they do, killing more than 75,000 of their attackers.

There are two things to remember from this story. First, Never underestimate the power of God which is always at work for us.

So that they might remember their deliverance and the courage of the young queen whose cleverness and bravery had saved them, Mordecai ordered the annual observance of the feast of Purim.

So that we might remember our deliverance and celebrate the love and courage of one who put everything on the line to confront and defeat our accuser, Christ himself instituted this feast which we celebrate today.

Some of us have a Haman in our life right now. A troublemaker. A bully. Somebody who is just a thorn in our flesh. This feast is to remind us that regardless of appearances, the story's not over. The culprit may be in our throne room. But it is the sovereign hand of God that runs history. because God always has the last word, don't get discouraged. Don't give up. Don't throw in the towel. The sovereign hand of God is still working.

**Second, never underestimate the power of a disciple.** For just such a time as this, we have been given extraordinary powers through the Holy Spirit to change the world around us. If the world seems too large a target, then begin in your own neighborhood. May God give you the strength and the wisdom to say at the right time, the right words. You may never be called upon to speak to a king in his throne room, but you may be called upon to speak to a teenager who is going to be interested in dabbling in drugs, or dealing with sex. You may be called to stand face-to-face with a teenager, an adolescent, a young adult who has failed. They don't need to hear the words of a lecture, but words of love. You will be called upon to stand face-to-face with your children who are confused and need direction. They don't need compromise. There are times they need to be told firmly and sternly the direction they need to go.

Esther was a little Jewish, orphan girl when we first met her. When we leave her, she is the Queen of Persia. Some of you came from humble beginnings. Some of you came from obscure places. Remain faithful to God. Hear his call on your life. Don't bow before the Hamans of the world. And when you feel that you are the arrow being released from God's own quiver, then go. Go in God's speed and go in God's power.

Perhaps it was for just such a time as this that you came to be on the Earth.

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

Would you pray with me... We come to you in the quiet of this Sunday morning, and we still our hearts and pray that you will be known to each, we pray, as each of us has need. Grant that we may each may leave this place with faith rebuilt and hope restored.

We pray for those who bear upon themselves the burden of loss, a load of care, lives full of confusion. Send our minds and hearts to dwell with them, and spur our hands and feet to do for them what you would have us do. We pray for those about to face some sorrow unforeseen, some bereavement unexpected, some temptation unannounced. Walk with us as we walk with them through the valley of the shadow. We pray for the young, that they may not grow old in bitterness; for those of middle years, that they may do good deeds with diligence; for the aged, that in sunset time they may have peace.

Broaden our vision, Lord. Deny us the sin of looking only at ourselves. We are your creatures: cause us then to act as if we were. We are your children: shape us then until we bear upon our hearts the marks of Him who is our Savior.

Loving God, who in Jesus Christ gives us our salvation, consecrate by your Holy Spirit, these elements of Holy Communion. Bless this bread and this wine that they may be for us the body and blood of our Savior. And bless us as we receive them this day that we may be your faithful people, through 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.

#### THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

##### **The Invitation**

God knows that we are sinners. Yet it is for you that he gave his body and his blood that we might be fed upon the bread of life and drink from the cup of salvation. Allow him to wrap you in his righteousness, to hide your sins beneath his own perfection, and then come. Come to eat your fill and drink deeply of his pardon, for this is his feast and you are invited, not because you are worthy, but because he loves you. He has set a place at His table for you.

##### **The Words of Institution**

On the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord took the bread, and blessed it. After giving thanks, he broke it & gave it to his disciples saying: "Take, eat. This is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In like fashion after they had eaten, he took the cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Drink ye all of it." As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again in final victory.

##### **The Distribution of the Elements**

##### **The Prayer After Receiving**

Thank you, Father, for sending your light to shine in our darkness and to lead us through the days still left to us on earth. We pray that we may go forth prepared to follow where you lead as you give us the light to do. Remind us always that to turn away from you is to fall, to turn toward you is to rise, and to stand before you is to abide forever. Grant us, dear God, in all our duties your help; in all our uncertainties your guidance; in all our dangers your protection; and in all our sorrows your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let all of us who are able stand & join in one voice to sing our hymn of dedication, "O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go", hymn #384 in our *Hymnal*.

\*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go"

*The Hymnal #384*

\*THE BENEDICTION

\*CHORAL 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