

**First Presbyterian Church of Magnolia, Arkansas**  
**Worship Service- March 5th, 2017**

**PRELUDE** "Let Us Break Bread Together on Our Knees" **The Handbell Choir**  
**CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP** "Lord, Draw Us Near" - Dan Dykema **The Choir**

*After the Choir sits down, the liturgist will step to the pulpit & say...*

"Would you join me in reading responsively our call to worship, adapted from Psalm 32 and printed in our bulletins."

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

(adapted from Psalm 32)

Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven!

**Happy are they to whom the Lord imputes no guilt!**

While I held my tongue, my bones withered away.

**For your hand was heavy upon me day and night;**

Then I acknowledged my sin to you, & did not conceal my guilt.

**I said, " I will confess my transgressions to the Lord."**

Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.

**Therefore all the faithful will make their prayers to you in time of trouble;**

When the great waters overflow, they shall not reach them.

**You are my hiding-place and you preserve me from trouble;**

You surround me with shouts of deliverance.

**Do not be like horse or mule, which have no understanding;**

Who must be fitted with bit & bridle, or else they will not stray.

**Great are the tribulations of the wicked; but mercy embraces those who trust in the Lord.**

Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the Lord;

**Shout for joy, all who are true of heart!**

Let us worship God beginning this morning with the lighting of the first Lenten candle by **Jessica**

**Arnold**. She will be speaking the words of the woman caught in adultery as she watched her

Savior on the cross looking up to heaven and praying to the Father on behalf of the very ones who were crucifying him, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do."

**THE LENTEN CANDLE READING**

*The reader will offer the reading, extinguish a candle, & offer the Invocation.*

**THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY:** I will never forget the day I met Jesus. I had become involved with a married man. At the very time we were together, an angry mob burst into my home and dragged me out into the street. "Adulteress!" they screamed. They would not let me go, but carried me toward the walls of the city. I knew what they were planning for me. Many of them picked out their rocks as they dragged me along-- rocks which fit their hands just right-- rocks which they would use to stone me to death. This was their answer for my sins-- complete condemnation.

We were well on our journey toward my death when I overheard part of a conversation. The people said something about a teacher, something about a trick, something about a chance to catch him in his words. This idea seemed to please the group very much. The mob suddenly changed direction and took me to the temple courts. When they found the man they were looking for, they stopped and slung me in front of him. I will never forget what they said. "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"

They waited to see if he would join them in stoning me for my sin. I felt every condemning eye burning a hole of judgment through me as we awaited his answer. I knew that if he agreed to condemn me, his answer would be the last straw. His answer would bring the first stone. He bent down and wrote on the ground with his finger. The angry mob questioned him relentlessly, wanting to know his answer for my sin. Finally, he stood and gave his answer: "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

Again, he stooped down and wrote upon the ground. There was a long silence, and then I heard a sound-- the sound of a shower of rocks. I looked up in fear, believing that my moment of death was at hand. But these rocks were not being thrown at me. They were dropping to the street from the hands of men who realized that condemnation was not God's solution for my sin. One by one, they walked away and left me with Jesus.

He stood and asked me, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," I said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," he said. "Go now and leave your life of sin".

His solution for my sin was not to stone me, not to condemn me, but to forgive me. He called me to leave my life of sin, and I did. His grace was the beginning of a new life for me.

Now, from the cross, he offers his forgiveness to all. He has done no wrong. The Romans and his own people have condemned him to die. He has every reason to condemn us all. But he hasn't. Did you hear him? He prays to God that we might be forgiven for what we have done to him. His way is not to condemn, but to forgive. So few have heard him. So few seem to trust him. But every sinner who believes him will receive what I received that day: forgiveness to leave the sins of the past behind-- forgiveness to start a new life.

#### PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Would you pray with me?... O Lord, your word is a lamp unto our feet and we give you thanks for the faithful souls who placed your words upon the written page, the courageous saints who translated it into our own language, the kind teachers and preachers who have helped us to apply it to our daily lives, and for the gift of your Spirit who causes your Word to live again in song and proclamation. Help us this day to glorify your name by all that we say and do here and to carry your light with us when we leave so that we may be salt and light to the world. We ask it in the strong name of Jesus. Amen.

*After the Invocation, Jessica will leave the front.*

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

"Would all of you please stand and join in singing "Be Thou My Vision", #339 in *The Hymnal*.

\*HYMN OF PRAISE

"Be Thou My Vision"

*The Hymnal #339*

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

\*CALL TO CONFESSION

For far too long we have listened to the seductive voice of the serpent. Now that we are reaping the fruits of our disobedience, let us confess our sins and seek the help and forgiveness of Almighty God, by praying together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins. Let us pray...

\*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

(In Unison)

God of word and silence, you desire our attention and faithfulness, yet we are distracted. We lend our ears to voices that promise prestige and success, pleasure and power. We are stunned at how easily we are lured by the temptations. We find ourselves living your wilderness experience all over again. You desire our obedience, yet we crowd you out with calendars jammed with meetings, minds filled with lists and trivia and hearts filled with worry and care. God of word and silence, lead us this Lent into the deeper stillness where priorities become clear, vision becomes focused, and your Word heard and obeyed. Give us the strength and courage to live this season with open eyes and ready hearts. Amen.

\*SILENT CONFESSION

*(pause for about 30 seconds of silence)*

\*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

"If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; everything has become new."... 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

Christ has made peace through the blood of his cross, and reconciled all things unto himself. 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 return to the lectern and say...*

“At this time I want to invite all of our younger friends to come forward for a message from the Lord prepared just for them by Ms. Karen.”

*The liturgist will take a seat until after the handbells.*

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 handbell choir leaves, the Liturgist will step to the pulpit and say,*

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

As with Adam and Eve, our greed and pretensions are exposed before God. It is so tempting to want more of everything for ourselves. But we know that only in generous sharing will we finally realize that we have enough, and that God has blessed us richly beyond our deserving. Let us give with gladness and continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings....

*Take your seat for the offertory.*

**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 pulpit and say...*

**\*OFFERTORY PRAYER**

Let us pray... By your surprising grace, O God, our eyes are opened, our ears unstopped, our hearts attuned to the needs of others. Accept these gifts, Lord, so more people may know your acceptance and forgiveness. Bless them that may help spread preaching, teaching, and healing among us and throughout the church universal. Expand our horizons, we pray, and extend the limits of our caring, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

“The Apostles’ Creed”

**I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into Hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick & the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

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

**ANTHEM**

**"Living Bread" - Gilbert M. Martin**

**The Choir**

*As the choir sits down, the liturgist will step to the lectern & say...*

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson this morning is from the fifth chapter of Paul’s Letter to the church at Rome, beginning with the twelfth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #980 in your pew bibles.

Listen now for the word of God...

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned — sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those

whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

*The liturgist will return to her seat and the preacher will step into the pulpit & say...*

Our gospel lesson today is found in the fourth chapter of Matthew's gospel, beginning at the first verse. You can find this passage on page 837 in your pew bibles. Listen once more for the word of God.

"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

<sup>4</sup> But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

<sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup> and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

<sup>7</sup> Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"

<sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; <sup>9</sup> and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

<sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"

<sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him.

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

**C: Our thanks be to God!**

THE SERMON

"Become a Biblical Scholar"

The story is told that a new preacher was asked to substitute for the regular teacher in the elementary school class that was studying great heroes in the bible. He decided to begin, innocently enough, by finding out how much the class already knew about the hero for the day, Joshua, so he asked them, "Who can tell me who knocked down the walls of Jericho." All the boys denied having done it, leaving the poor preacher appalled by their ignorance.

At the next Session meeting he shared his experience with the elders. "Not one of them knows who knocked down the walls of Jericho," he lamented.

The group was silent until finally one seasoned veteran of disputes spoke up. "Preacher, this appears to be bothering you a lot. But I've known all those boys since they were born and they're good boys. If they said they didn't know, I believe them. Let's just take some money out of the repair and maintenance fund, fix the walls, and let it go at that."

This humorous example of biblical illiteracy is not as funny as it first seems.

It was a lack of attention to the importance of God's word that led to the Fall in the Garden of Eden. It was a holistic understanding of God's word that enable Jesus to resist the wiles of the tempter in the wilderness in today's reading, and later when he appeared as Peter on the road to Jerusalem, and still later in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Ignorance of God's word doesn't just reveal our laziness, it exposes us to all sorts of dangers.

Instead of relying on a right understand of the Scriptures for guidance, we rely on our feelings and tell ourselves that it is the Holy Spirit speaking to us through our consciences. And when that inner voice is challenged directly by God's word, our tendency is to dismiss the conflicting Word as proof texting or Pharasaism. We rarely consider the fact that the tempter is sitting on our shoulders whispering his venom into our ear, and telling us what we want to hear by offering suggestions like, "God is love" or "God wants you to live abundantly doesn't he. He WANTS you to be happy!"

Almost 20 years ago, pollster George Gallup Jr., a devout Episcopalian, completed a survey of American's familiarity with the Bible. His conclusion was that America had become a "nation of biblical illiterates." Only four in 10 Americans know that Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount. A majority of citizens cannot name the four Gospels of the New Testament. Only three in 10 teenagers know why Easter is celebrated.

Three out of four Americans (and nearly half of "born-again" Christians) believe the Bible teaches that "God helps those who help themselves." Self-reliance is not only not scriptural, but that it contradicts the Bible and sound theology. Only God determines a person's destiny. To believe otherwise "exposes our false theological cornerstone — that we are the center of things, that it is up to us to determine our destiny, and that God is merely our assistant ..." It is an echo from the Garden of Eden-- "You can be like God."

A similar number of born-again Christians deny the existence of the Holy Spirit and Satan. One in five denies Jesus' physical resurrection and believes he was a sinner.

There are just as about as many mainline Protestants revealed that believe in UFOs as believe in the devil. One-third of Methodists and Presbyterians believe in astrology.

Christianity in America is, in large part, innocuous," he writes. "It tends to be easy, upbeat, convenient, and compatible. It does not require self-sacrifice, discipline, humility, a zeal for souls, or a fear as well as love of God. There is little guilt and no punishment, and the payoff in heaven is virtually certain." "We have become the kind of society that civilized countries used to send missionaries to."

Maybe this is the result of pursuing the good life that we have neglected to nurture the faith on which that good life is founded. If so, our only fault is inattention. If our common faith has faltered, or has shriveled for lack of nourishment, or has been supplanted by sentimentality and emotionalism, at least we have not succumbed to cynicism. Faith has not been lost, only misplaced. As a people of faith, we can retrieve it together.

We can begin as individuals. Guides for reading the bible in one year are on the table in the Narthex.

This week, flash cards with 100 memory verses for men, women, and teens will be available for you. Commit one verse a day to memory and in a shade over 3 months you will have them all in your brain and on your lips to take wherever you go in the service of Jesus Christ.

Or, if understanding is what you seek, pick up two or three different translations-- the *Revised Standard Version*, the *New International Version*, and perhaps a paraphrase such as *The Living Bible* or *The Story*. Read the same passage in all of them, and then rewrite it in your own words. Buy a concordance or a copy of *Vine's Word Studies* if you need more help.

And yes, I know it will take time, and time is short these days, but you have to make a choice about what is more important and faith leaves you only one option.

Every Christian is kind of a musician and the Bible is the instrument that we play. Do we read the music & play the it as the Great Composer intended, or do we improvise, or hit more than our share of clinkers.

We are like the young engineer whose first job posting took him to Ireland for a year. He had accepted it because it would enable him to earn enough to marry his long-time fiancée that much sooner. She had gotten a job near her home in Little Rock and their plan was to put their money together and put a down payment on a house when he returned. They wrote often and even skyped once a week, but as the lonely weeks went by, the girlfriend began expressing doubts about his being true, exposed as he was to the beautiful Irish colleens.

The young engineer wrote back. He declared with some passion that he was paying absolutely no attention to the local girls. "I admit," he wrote, "that sometimes I'm tempted. But I fight it. I'm keeping myself for you."

In the next mail, the engineer received a package. It contained a note from his girl and a harmonica. "I'm sending this to you," she wrote, "so you can learn to play it and have something to take your mind off those girls."

The engineer replied, "Thanks for the harmonica. I'm practicing on it every night & thinking of you."

At the end of their year apart, he took the first plane to Little Rock to be reunited with his girl. Her whole family was with her, but as he rushed forward to embrace her, she held up a restraining hand and said sternly, "Just hold on there a minute, Billy Bob. Before any serious kissin' and huggin' gets started here,.... let me hear you play that harmonica!"

So..... how's your harmonica? You can remain as you are and when the tempter arrives at a more opportune time to test you, you can fail as did Adam and Eve. Or you can demonstrate the power of God's word to defeat evil in every form. When life tests you, follow Paul's advice to Timothy, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

Let God add that item to your bucket list.

#### THE PASTORAL PRAYER

Almighty God, whose Son our Lord was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, there to be tempted by Satan, we pray for your grace to resist the temptations that come our way. Remind us of the power of your Word to create and to destroy. Never let us forget that your Word does not go forth and return empty without accomplishing the purpose for which you have sent it. Grant us so to hunger after your word, that we may seek it and study it until we rightly understand your purpose and love for each of us, rightly handling the word of truth. May the Bible become a part of us and may our living reflect its importance. We pray for the honesty to truthfully confront our sin and falsehood and, having told the truth about ourselves, embrace us by your love. In our weakness, come to us in your strength. In our waywardness, move toward us with forgiveness. In our foolishness, deliver us with your wisdom. Be with us during these forty days of Lent and teach us that, having repented and confessed our sin, we might eagerly receive your forgiveness and live eternally with you.

Remembering your gracious acts in Jesus Christ, we take from your creation this bread and this wine and joyfully celebrate his dying and rising, as we await the day of his coming. With thanksgiving, we offer our very selves to you to be a living and holy sacrifice, dedicated to your service. Gracious God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these your gifts of bread and wine, that the bread we break and the cup we bless may be the communion of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through this gift free us from the bondage of our sins, that we may become the salt and light needed in this world, and that we may reflect your glory with the whole of our lives. Amen.

#### THE LORD'S PRAYER

*(Sung by Congregation)*

Malotte

*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, & the power & 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. 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. Our time together as a church may be ended but we pray that we may remain forever united in our witness, our service, and our love for you. Amen.

Let all of us who are able stand and join in one voice to sing our closing hymn, "I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me", #369 in our *Hymnals*.

\*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"It Is Well with My Soul"

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well, with my soul *Refrain*  
*It is well, with my soul. It is well, with my soul,*  
*It is well, it is well, with my soul.*  
Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,  
And hath shed His own blood for my soul. *Refrain*  
My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!  
My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul! *Refrain*  
And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,  
Even so, it is well with my soul. *Refrain*

\*THE BLESSING

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and the love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord: And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be amongst us, and remain with us always. Amen.

\*THE CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

"Go, My Children, Fed, and Nourished"

Go, my children, fed and nourished, closer to me;  
Grow in love and love by serving, joyful and free.  
Here my Spirit's power filled you, Here His tender comfort stilled you;  
Go, my children, fed and nourished, joyful and free.

\*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis