

Worship Service from First Presbyterian Church of Magnolia

Sunday, March 13th, 2016

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

The preacher will take a seat.

PRELUDE "As Jesus Stood beside the Cross" - Samuel Scheidt

Dr. Elizabeth Davis

THE CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP

The Choir

"O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High" - E. Power Biggs/Proulx

After the Choral Call, the liturgist should step to the lectern and say,

“Would you join me in reading the responsive 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, whose sin is put away!

Happy are they to whom the Lord imputes no guilt, and in whose spirit there is no guile!

The Lord's hand was heavy upon me day and night, until I acknowledged my sin.

When I confessed my transgressions to the Lord, He forgave me the guilt of my sin.

The Lord is our hiding-place; He will preserve us from trouble.

He will instruct us & teach us in the way that we should go;

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

Who must be fitted with bit and bridle, or else they will not stay near you.

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 with prayer...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... In poverty and in plenty we look to you, our Father, for you are the giver of every good and perfect gift. You have accepted us even when we could not accept ourselves. Help us in this hour to let go of all that separates us from you. Grant us now the ears to hear your word, the eyes to see others from your point of view, and the lips to speak your message of reconciling love. Meet us in our jealousy, false pride, and anger, that we may rejoice with you in welcoming sinners to places of honor among us, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”, hymn number 356 in our Hymnals..

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

***HYMN OF PRAISE**

“Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”

The Hymnal #356

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

***CALL TO CONFESSION**

The One who received sinners and ate with them invites us to feast on God's forgiving love. Let us come to claim the healing and reconciliation he offers as we confess our sin together and pray the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins, pausing at its conclusion for a brief period of silent

prayer. Let us pray...

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Merciful God, you love us with an extravagant love, and generously give to us all that you have. Yet, like the younger brother, we stubbornly pursue our selfish and foolish desires rather than follow your wise counsel. When we do choose worldly ways and find ourselves impoverished in spirit, we hesitate to ask your forgiveness because it means admitting our error. Like the older brother, we prefer remain-ing aloof, judging others and withholding compassion and mercy until we are sure that they merit our forgiveness. We ask now for the grace that we have failed to extend to others and which we do not deserve, and beg you to receive us as your own chastened children. Teach us that our truest treasure is found in our relationship with You, and that to love You is to love our brothers and sisters as well. Amen.

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

***THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

In Christ we are a new creation, and God does not count our sins against us. Our heavenly Father robes us in Christ's own righteousness and celebrates our return.... Friends believe the Good News!

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

***GLORIA PATRI**

The Hymnal #579

*Glory be to the Father, & to the Son, & to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be,
World without end. Amen, Amen.*

***PASSING OF THE PEACE**

Having been reconciled to the Father through the grace of His Son, let us also be reconciled to one another and share Christ's peace. The peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

Share the peace of Christ with others as you will.

After a few moments, liturgist will step into the lectern and say...

"At this time I want to invite all of our younger friends to come forward for a Word from the Lord brought to them by Ms. Karen."

The 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.**

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

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

As stewards of all God has entrusted to our care we bring our offerings with the desire that they be used to answer the needs of our brothers and sisters in need. May this also be a time for us to rededicate ourselves with our tithes and offerings to the glory of God. 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

"O God Be Merciful to Me" - J.S. Bach

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... Bless, O God, the offering of these gifts. Use them in your work. Help us to produce the fruit that you expect to receive and to offer it to you as you have commanded. Bless the fruit of our labor that we bring forth in this offering. Bless too every thought, word, and action that we have that they may be the fruit of true repentance, and of strong faith and a caring love. We ask it in the name of Christ Jesus, our crucified redeemer. Amen.

The liturgist will take a seat until after the Anthem.

THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

"The Apostle's Creed"

Let us remain standing and reaffirm our Christian faith using the traditional words of the Apostles' Creed printed in our bulletins. Let us say what we believe...

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

Invite the congregation to... "Be seated," and then say...

This morning we have the fifth of our Lenten videos from the Skit Guys, this time with Simon Peter relating the story of his denial.

ENCOUNTERS WITH CHRIST

"Peter's Denial"

Video

ANTHEM

"King of the Wounds" - Craig Courtney

The Choir

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

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson for this morning is taken from the fifth chapter of Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth, beginning with the sixteenth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #1006 in your pew bibles.

Listen now for the word of God...

"¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation;[a] the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. ¹⁸All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling[b] the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

The liturgist will return to her seat on the chancel or with her family or friends in the congregation.

When the liturgist finishes, the preacher will step into the pulpit & say...

Our Gospel reading this morning is taken from Luke, the fifteenth chapter, beginning with the eleventh verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #909 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more for the word of God...

"¹¹And he said, "There was a man who had two sons; ¹²and the younger of them said to his

father, 'Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.' And he divided his living between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. ¹⁵ So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. ¹⁶ And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.'" ²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son. ²² But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; ²³ and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; ²⁴ for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to make merry.

²⁵ "Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.' ²⁸ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, ²⁹ but he answered his father, 'Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!' ³¹ And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

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

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

“Hard Heads, Hard Hearts, Hard Times”

This morning we will hear for the umpteenth time the story of the prodigal son, also known as the lost son. This parable follows closely the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. The first is lost because it wanders off of its own volition, not premeditatedly or selfishly in the manner that the younger son wandered off into the far country, but simply because that's what sheep do. Without a shepherd to watch over them and keep them together, they just eat themselves lost.

The lost coin gets lost the same way all inanimate objects get lost-- through the carelessness of the owner. How many times did you have this or a similar conversation with your mother---

“Mom, where are my tennis shoes?”

“Wherever you put them last, dear.”

“But I didn't put them anywhere.”

“Well they didn't sprout legs and walk off, hon.”

Things get lost through no fault of their own.

But then we come to the parable of the lost son. The younger son, is tired of boring farm life. He is tired of milking and feeding; plowing, cultivating, and harvesting. He is tired of eating greens and beans. He wants to go to the big city and really live. He wants to see the bright light. He wants to live in technicolor, wide screen panavision. Each day what he doesn't have, what he can't see, can't do-- eats at him like acid.

And sure enough, one day the son's pent up resentments explode into rage and he comes to his father and demands his share of the inheritance. While today's older parents often give part of their estate to their children years before they die to avoid inheritance taxes. But in the Middle East of the first century, this foolish young man is telling the father who loves him to, “Drop dead!”

Amazingly, though, the father goes along with it. He divides his estate between his two sons. And notice that the older son doesn't object to this, so he's not any better than his brother when it comes to the parental respect thing.

So the younger son takes the money and runs! He heads off to a "distant country," which, to Jewish ears would have meant that he goes off to live with the "sinful" Gentiles who are non-Jews. He's grinding his father's faith into the dirt. And what does he do with all that cash? Well, he starts partying one day, and doesn't stop until the day he wakes up hungover sitting on the sidewalk, with nothing left but the clothes on his back.

Some Gentile farmer thinks he will have a little fun at the expense of this Jewish kid and gives him a job feeding pigs. Now to Jews, pigs are unclean. So for a Jew during the time of Jesus, to have a job feeding pigs is to no longer be a Jew! And to top it off, when he gets hungry, he longs to eat what the pigs are eating. To Jesus' first listeners, this means that this faithless young guy is not only feeding pigs, but he even wishes he was a pig! There's no further he can wander, no lower he can sink. He has hit rock bottom and then some! He's not looking down at hell; he's looking up from hell!!!

But here is the miraculous thing about grace-- one is never closer to grace than when one has hit the bottom. At the bottom, there is a clearing of the eyes, the cloud of self-deception vanishes like a mist, and one can see things as they truly are. And then the younger son "comes to himself, comes to his senses, and realizes that his father's hired servants live like kings compared to how he is living now. He will go home, admit his wrongs and ask his father to take him back-- not as a son, that is simply too much to ask or expect given how he must have hurt his dad. No, he will ask simply for a job, to sleep in the bunkhouse. Right now milking and feeding; plowing, cultivating, and harvesting sounds like a good way to live. What he wouldn't give right now for a plate of beans and greens.

That's all it takes. One moment of clarity, and he is on his way home. He acknowledges his wrongs and he changes the direction of his life. In short he repents. This idea of acknowledging one's wrongs, asking for forgiveness, and changing behavior is more timely than we might think.

When asked if he had ever sought God's forgiveness, one presidential candidate replied, "I'm not sure I have ever asked God's forgiveness. I don't bring God into that picture.... When I go to church and when I drink my little wine and have my little cracker, I guess that is a form of forgiveness. I do that as often as I can because I feel cleansed. I say let's go on and let's make it right."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from his prison cell about such grace. He said, "Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."

But having repented. The lost son goes home, is met by his father, who embraces him, restores his identity by placing a signet ring on his finger, a beautiful robe upon him to hide his own rags underneath, and sandals on his feet. He orders his servants to kill the fatted calf and call the neighbors because they are going to have a party.

Meanwhile the older son, the rightful owner of all the estate that is left, smells the cooking fires, hears the commotion, and comes in from the field to be told by one of his slaves that the younger brother is home and that his father is throwing a beer and barbecue shindig to welcome him home.

He is dumb with disbelief and he thinks, "WHAT!?! How can this be? This drugging, boozing, little whoremonger comes home, broke and broken, and my dad is throwing him a party? Why? He doesn't **DESERVE** a party. I'll be damned if I'm going inside to celebrate with that reprobate!"

But the father quickly misses his older son, and goes out to look for him. Note, the father didn't go out looking for the younger brother, he merely went out to meet and welcome him home. But he does go out to look for the elder brother, who is now just like the lost coin and the lost sheep, he is being sought by the one person who cares.

What can be said about the older brother? Well, he's a good person. That's OK. There's nothing wrong with being good. The father never rebukes him for being good. Jesus never criticized the

Pharisees for being too good either. The older brother's problem is not his behavior, it's his attitude. He worked hard, stayed out of trouble, did all the right things, but he failed to be a true child of his father. He can appreciate the qualities that make for good farmland or grazing pasture. He can count his cattle and knows the current market price on every head. He knows how to keep his books and understand a profit and loss statement. But he has never learned to appreciate his father's love which gave him all these things and so much more. Although he only says a few sentences, there's enough in those two sentences to keep a good therapist occupied for years.

The older son meets his father's concern with contempt. "Look!" he says. "All these years I have been slaving for you. . ." A slave? That's a deliberate slap in the face to the father, isn't it? I don't know what the son could have said that would have hurt him more. His oldest son. His heir. For years they have worked side by side. All his life has been poured into that boy. I'm sure that the father was proud of him. He didn't go into the far country. He stayed home. "That's my boy!" But it only took a few bitter words to destroy that feeling, maybe forever. He thinks of his father as a taskmaster. And he sees himself as a slave.

His younger brother had been imprisoned in the lowest depths of hell on earth and has come back from a fate worse than death. The older brother stayed home, tended to business, did the right things, worked hard and now finds himself in the depths of a hell of his own making. When he says to his dad, "I'll be damned if I'm going to go in there and have a good time," what he really means is, "I am damned already."

When the father pleads with him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found," he is saying, "You have my property, you have my love, and I would even give my life for you--- EVERYTHING I have is yours. Please share my joy as well. If you won't do it for your brother, do it for me."

The elder brother refuses to acknowledge that he even has a brother and refers to him as "this son of yours". And reminiscent of the scene played out years before when the younger son left home, the older brother turns his back on his father's love and by his actions tells his father to "Drop dead."

Saint Augustine said, "A darkened heart is the far country, for it is not by our feet, but by our affections that we either leave or return to you." In a way, this older brother is more lost than his high-rolling sibling. So close to grace, beloved of his father, yet he feels he must earn that love. Home on the farm, but really living in a far country. The younger brother has come home; and we are left wondering how long the older brother will remain in the far country of his heart.

Who is the real prodigal in this parable?

It's not the one with the shady past. It's the one who stays outside.

The one who couldn't bring himself to forgive.

The dead one, the lost one, is the one who stubbornly chooses to remain outside the Father's party.

Wouldn't you like to know how the story ends? How will the younger brother behave from now on? Will the two sons ever be able to reconcile? Will the father's joy be made complete? We get to write our own ending to our story.

If we remain hard hearted and hard headed, we will live in hard times.

If and when we get tired of being miserable, all we need to do is come in to the party. And every time someone new enters the celebration, go ahead and raise a little hell. I don't know about you, but I would rather raise it, than live in it!

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Sometimes within the church, O God, we become weary in our well-doing. Sometimes we "burn-out," give up, write "I quit" across our membership. Today we remember that you have never quit on us, that you have never given up, and you have not "burned-out."

Remind us that apart from you we can do nothing; that cut off from your Spirit we cannot endure, that as we drift away from you, our access to your renewing strength is diminished. But call also to our

remembrance that your love for us is infinite in its capacity. Your patience is timeless in its duration. Your readiness to forgive, to welcome back, to celebrate is constant.

Impress upon us that our greatest joy is in the service we perform in the name of your eternal love. We are commissioned, O God, to be as you are, benevolent toward those who come to us from afar seeking forgiveness and restoration. Grant us the wisdom & the words to speak blessing & welcome even when those to whom we speak reject us. So employ us in making known your forgiveness, that your love may show forth, in all its power, to the world, through 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 us who are able stand as we all join in singing our closing hymn, "Softly and Tenderly" which is printed in your bulletins.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"Softly and Tenderly"

Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling, calling for you and for me;
See, on the portals He's waiting and watching,
Watching for you and for me. *Refrain:*

*Come home, come home,
You who are weary, come home;
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling, Calling, O sinner, come home!*

Why should we tarry when Jesus is pleading, pleading for you & for me?
Why should we linger and heed not His mercies,
Mercies for you and for me? *Refrain:*

O for the wonderful love He has promised, promised for you & for me!
Though we have sinned, He has mercy and pardon,
Pardon for you and for me. *Refrain:*

*THE BENEDICTION

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, remain with you always. Amen

*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