

Sunday, March 15th, 2015

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.

After a short prayer with the choir, the liturgist, choir, and organist will enter and take their seats. Following them, the pastor will step into the pulpit, welcome everyone, and make announcements....

OUR CONFIRMATION CLASS MEETS TODAY... at 1:15pm in the Conference Room. Bring your 2 questions. We'll finish up at 2:45pm

WE'VE GOT A GREAT MEAL TO SERVE TONIGHT.. to our college crowd at 5pm prepared by the Mission Committee. We'll eat, answer one of your questions, & have you headed to the dorms by 6pm.

THE MISSION COMMITTEE WILL SERVE UP DINNER... and a devotion at Southern Christian Mission on Tuesday evening at 6pm. Feel free to join us in the effort.

JOIN THE FAMILY FOR SUPPER... this Wednesday at 5:30pm. We'll share a dinner prepared and served by the Worship Committee followed by the usual youth and children's activities.

THIS WEDNESDAY EVENING IS GOING TO BE SPECIAL... We will have as our guests for dinner, Jeff and Christi Boyd, PCUSA missionaries to the West African Mission field (which includes Cameroon). They will be the program after supper, sharing what they know of the situation there, and letting us know how we can help further the cause of Christ through them in that region. Please make plans to be with us. This is a rare opportunity and we want to gain maximum advantage from it.

COOK'S NITE OUT MEETS TO EAT THIS WEEK... on Thursday at The Dairy Queen at 6pm. Please join us!

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 "My Heart Is Ever Yearning" - Johannes Brahms Dr. Elizabeth Davis

CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP "O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High" The Choir

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 119 and printed in our bulletins?”

CALL TO WORSHIP (adapted from Psalm 119)

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, and his mercy endures for ever.

Let all those whom the Lord has redeemed proclaim that he has redeemed them.

He gathered them from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

Some were fools and took to rebellious ways; and were afflicted because of their sins.

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

He sent forth his word and healed them and saved them from the grave.

Let them give thanks to the Lord for his mercy and the wonders he does for his children.

Let them offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving and tell of his acts with shouts of joy.

Let us worship God beginning with prayer...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... Loving God, who sent Jesus to earth to share our common lot and bring eternal life into our midst, help us to believe and to trust. Show us the light of your revelation and help us to welcome its presence in the life of this congregation as we gather and when we scatter to our daily activities. May we consciously represent you in all our deeds so that the world may come to a saving knowledge of your grace. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, "To God Be the Glory", number 485 in our *Hymnals*.

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

*HYMN OF PRAISE

"To God Be the Glory"

The Hymnal #485

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

*CALL TO CONFESSION

Our time of penitence before God gives us the opportunity to rid ourselves of the weights we carry and to free ourselves troubles of our own making. Let our individual confessions be gathered up in the confessions of the church as we pray together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins and continue with a moment of silent prayer at its conclusion. Let us pray...

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

(In Unison)

God of Grace, how difficult it is for us to grasp the awesome love shown to us in Jesus! We confess our deafness to his call, and the busyness in our lives that leads us to ignore or reject his invitation to follow. We like being in control and we take pride in being "good people". We have deluded ourselves into thinking that our efforts and ethics should be sufficient to earn eternal life. Open our eyes to our missed opportunities. Open our ears to the message that we can never be good enough to earn a place in your kingdom. Then open our hearts to receive your love and forgiveness. Open our hands to pick up our cross and follow after Him who alone can show us the way to eternal happiness and joy. Amen

*SILENT CONFESSION

(Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.)

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

This is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins". Through this act of mercy, we, with all who make humble confession, may be assured that our sin is forgiven!... 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 brought near to the throne of grace by the blood of Jesus, we have been reconciled to God. Let us also be reconciled one to 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, the 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 Preacher will return to the lectern and say....

MINUTE FOR MISSION

The Carpenter's Helpers Project

"One of the primary tasks given to the first deacons of the early church was caring for widows and widowers. Our church has a number of widows and widowers for whom simple projects such as climbing a ladder or stepstool to replace a lightbulb can be life threatening. For others it's having to endure the annoyance and waste of dripping faucets or running toilets. Still others must deal with overgrown yards that they once took so much pride in keeping. Our deacons have been planning a project for the Saturday after Easter that will help those who have given so much to us, while at the

same time giving us an opportunity to pass on an active living faith to those who come after us. Here to tell us more about it is Kathy Cole. Kathy..."

The minister will take a seat and Kathy will come to the lectern and speak to the congregation.

The Deacons are sponsoring a workday on Saturday, April 11, 2015. The gift this event provides is twofold. Members of our church who could use an extra pair of hands or two around the house receive them, and volunteers, The Carpenter's Helpers, receive the blessing of serving their fellow church family members. The chores can be anything around the house or yard that you do not feel comfortable doing yourself such as replacing lightbulbs, mending screens, minor electrical or plumbing repairs, cleaning flower beds, trimming hedges, etc. Let us know what you need, someone will come around and take a look to see what parts or volunteers will be needed. The repairs will not cost you anything, it is a service of the church and the Deacons. To volunteer your home's needs or to volunteer your hands to help our Master Carpenter call the church office. If you have any questions about the work day, ask one of the deacons: Mary Bounds, Debbie Morgan, Maggie Nelson, Ashley White, or myself. And thank you for any way in which you will be able to take part.

When she leaves the microphone, the Liturgist will return to the lectern and say...

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

With joyous thanksgiving, we offer sacrifices of time and resources to announce God's healing grace to the world. It is our privilege to share the steadfast love that is saving us, and to offer life to those who are perishing as we continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings....

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

THE OFFERTORY "Jesu, Priceless Treasure" Michael Burkhardt/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... God of Love, receive these gifts of love we bring for the assistance of those crying out for food, for shelter, for jobs, for understanding, for love. Bless this offering of substance and self as we seek to do our part to express the love you have imparted to us in Jesus, in whose name we pray. 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.

ANTHEM

"O Come and Mourn" Hal Hopson

The Choir

Jequetta Rogers and Nic Mannino, Euphonium

After the Anthem, the liturgist will step into the lectern and say...

Each Sunday of Lent we are using a short video produced by "The Skit Guys" to help introduce the morning message. This morning we will hear from Nicodemus.

LENTEN VIDEO

"Nicodemus"

After the video, the Liturgist will return to the lectern & say...

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson this morning is taken from the book of Numbers, the twenty-first chapter, beginning at the fourth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page 134 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food."

Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people.

And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live."

So Moses made a bronze serpent, and set it on a pole; and if a serpent bit any man, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

The liturgist will return to his/her seat either on the chancel or with his family or friends in the congregation. Thanks for your help!

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

Our Gospel lesson this morning is taken from John, the third chapter, beginning at the fourteenth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #924 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more for the word of God...

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

"And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God."

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

"Law and Grace"

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a legalist. He was a devoted student and follower of the law. For him, the law wasn't just love God and love your neighbor. It wan't just the ten commandments. It was a list of 613 laws that every well trained Pharisee had committed to memory and understanding before they were bar mitzvahed at 13. And they devoted their lives to keeping them-- each one, however difficult that may be. Truth be known, it wasn't jus difficult, it was impossible, and every one of those devoted scholars who had tried it, knew it.

For instance, let's say your mother or father calls you on a Sunday morning and says, "I'm broken down by the side of the road you have to come and get me."

You have two answers you can give them:

A.) Sorry Mom, it's Sunday and I have to keep this day holy. I'm going to church.

B.) I'll be right there.

So, are you going to honor the 4th commandment to keep the Sabbath holy or break the 5th commandment ordering us to honor our father and mother.

Now imagine there are six-hundred thirteen commandments. You have to know all of them and deal with their all too frequent conflicting demands.

Nicodemus's devotion and attention to the law had not gone unnoticed. He was wealthy, respected, and he sat on the Sanhedrin, sort of a combined Parliament and Supreme Court of Israel. When he spoke, people listened. What he did, people watched. That was why this morning visit to the Temple was so important. It wasn't just his own soul he was worried about-- he knew that if he did the wrong thing or said the wrong thing, someone else would likely follow his lead, break the law just as he had done, and place their own salvation in question. He lived every day of his life as if the weight of the world rested upon his shoulders. But that is the fate of all legalists, those who prefer to live the letter of the law with no regard for its spirit, its intent.

Nicodemus came about his legalism honestly-- he was a Pharisee.

Pharisees taught that faith was an outside job. What you wore, how you acted, the title you carried, the sound of your prayers, the amount of your gifts-- all these were the Pharisees' measure of spirituality.

Had they been farmers, they would have had the most attractive acreage in the region-- painted silos and sparkling, new equipment. The fences would have been whitewashed and clean. The soil overturned and watered. They would have spent hours at the cafe discussing the best practices of farming. Is it best to fertilize before or after a rain? Do you fallow a field every other year or every third year? Should a farmer wear overalls or jeans? Cowboy hats or baseball caps?

The Pharisees had only one problem. For all their discussion about the right techniques, they harvested little fruit. In fact, one untrained Galilean had borne more fruit in a few short months than all the Pharisees had in generations. This made them jealous. Angry. Condescending. And they dealt with him by ignoring his results and insulting his methods.

That is, all the Pharisees except Nicodemus. He was curious. More than curious, he was stirred; stirred by the way people listened to Jesus. They listened as if he were the only one with truth-- as if he were a prophet.

Nicodemus was stirred by what he saw Jesus do. Like the time Jesus stormed into the temple and overturned the tables of the money changers. Nicodemus once knew such passion. But that was a long time ago-- before the titles, before the robes, before the rules.

Nicodemus is drawn to the carpenter, but he can't be seen with him. Nicodemus is on the high court. He can't approach Jesus in the day. So Nicodemus goes to meet him at night. He goes in the darkness.

Appropriate. For legalism offers no light.

Nicodemus begins with courtesies, "Teacher, we know You are a teacher sent from God, because no one can do the miracles you do unless God is with him'.

Jesus disregards the compliment. I'll tell you the truth, unless one is born again, he cannot be in Gods kingdom'.

That's Jesus at his best. No sugar coating, no mincing of words. Straight to the point. Straight to the heart. Straight to the problem.

You can't help the blind by turning up the light, Nicodemus.

You can't help the deaf by turning up the music, Nicodemus .

You can't change the inside by decorating the outside, Nicodemus.

You can't grow fruit without seed, Nicodemus.

You must be born again.

The meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus was more than an encounter between two religious figures. It was a collision between two philosophies. Two opposing views on salvation.

Nicodemus thought the person did the work; Jesus says God does the work.

Nicodemus thought it could be possessed only with dedication and hard work. Jesus says it is a gift.

Nicodemus thought man's job was to earn it. Jesus says man's job is to accept it.

A legalist believes the supreme force behind salvation is you. If you look right, speak right, and belong to the right segment of the right group, you will be saved. The brunt of responsibility doesn't lie within God; it lies within you.

The result? The outside sparkles. The talk is good and the step is true. But look closely. Listen carefully. Something is missing. What is it? Joy.

What's there? Fear. (That you won't do enough.)

Arrogance. (That you have done enough.)

Failure. (That you have made a mistake.)

Legalism is a dark world.

Perhaps you didn't know that. You may be reading with a puzzled expression asking, "What is this story doing in the Bible? Nicodemus isn't hurting. He's got clout. He's got friends. He studies the Bible. He's not in pain, is he?"

If you asked that question, be thankful. If you have never known the crush of legalism, be grateful. You have been spared.

Others of you haven't. Others of you could answer the above question better than I. Legalism is slow torture, suffocation of the spirit, amputation of dreams. Legalism is just enough religion to keep you, but not enough to nourish you.

So you starve. Your teachers don't know where to go for food, so you starve together. Your diet is rules and standards. No vitamins. No taste. No zest. Just bland, predictable religion.

Legalism doesn't need God. Legalism is the search for innocence-- not forgiveness. It's a systematic process of defending self, explaining self, exalting self, and justifying self. Legalists are obsessed with self-- not God.

Legalism: Turns my opinion into your burden. Turns my opinion into your obligation.

So when Nicodemus made his daily trip to the temple the morning that Jesus confronted the money changers and animal sellers and drove them out, he saw for the first time someone who spoke up in defense of God rather than the law. He had courage. He seemed to know something that Nicodemus did not. The clatter of tables falling, the clanking of coins and the cracking of the whip had awakened something inside Nicodemus. He had to know what this man knew.

He went at night because he feared the displeasure of his peers. Legalism puts the fear of man in you. It makes you approval hungry. You become keenly aware of what others will say and think, and you do what it takes to please them. Conformity is not fun, but it's safe. You don't know where you are going-- but who are you to ask questions? So you just keep moving and continue down that familiar path of least resistance.

And if you dare explore another trail, you must do so at night, like Nicodemus did. He snuck through the shadows and crept through the dark streets until he stood in the presence of Christ. In the conversation, Nicodemus, the renowned teacher of the law, speaks only three times: once to compliment and twice to question.

After a lifetime of weighing the tittles of Scripture in the scale of logic, the scholar becomes suddenly silent as Jesus opens the gate and the light of grace floods the catacomb.

Salvation is God's business. Grace is his idea, his work, and his expense. He offers it to whom he desires, when he desires. Our job in the process is to inform the people, not to screen the people.

The question must have been written all over Nicodemus's face. Why would God do this? What would motivate him to offer such a gift? What Jesus told Nicodemus, Nicodemus never could have imagined. The motive behind the gift of new birth? Love. "God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life" .

Nicodemus has never heard such words. Never. He has had many discussions of salvation. But this is the first in which no rules were given. No system was offered. No code or ritual. "Everyone who believes can have eternal life in him," Jesus told him. Could God be so generous? Even in the darkness

of night, the amazement is seen on Nicodemus's face. Everyone who believes can have eternal life. Not "everyone who achieves." Not "everyone who succeeds." But everyone who believes."

Note how God liberates the legalist. Observe the tender firmness of his touch. Like a master farmer, he shoveled away the crusty soil until a moist, fertile spot was found, and there he planted a seed, a seed of grace.

Did it bear fruit?

Well, consider the rest of the story. After the crucifixion, Nicodemus went with Joseph to claim the body. He bought about seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes. These two men took Jesus' body and wrapped it with the spices in pieces of linen cloth, which is how Jewish people bury the dead. In the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden. In the garden was a new tomb that had never been used before. The men laid Jesus in that tomb.

Strange how a man can go full circle in the kingdom. The one who'd come at night now appears in the day. The one who crept through the shadows to meet Jesus now comes to the cross to serve Jesus. And the one who'd received the seed of grace now plants the greatest seed of all-- the seed of eternal life.

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, we believe that you will still hear our prayers, that you will be sympathetic without coddling; that you will have mercy without condoning; that you will forgive, but not without a price.

You Yourself paid that price on Calvary's hill, and we, too, must pay a price if we would know your peace-- the price of full confession, the price of real repentance, and the price of the crucifixion of the things within us that destroy our peace of mind, the price of believing in you, and trusting you to lead us out of our darkness and into the glorious light of your eternal kingdom.

So make us willing, Lord Jesus, to believe your promise and to trust you to lead us where we have not been. Change us after your will into likenesses of Christ, for unless we are changed, we shall do the same things again. Only You can correct that within us which makes us do wrong.

Make us over into the persons you want us to be, that we may yet find that destiny for which you gave us birth. For Christ's help, who is generous in mercy, we give You our gratitude. In the name of Christ, who loved us more than life itself, we pledge our hearts and lives and pray as he 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, "Lift High the Cross", number 371 in our *Hymnals*.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"Lift High the Cross"

The Hymnal #371

THE BLESSING

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and give you His peace-- in your coming in and your going out; in your lying down and in your rising up; in your labor and in your leisure; in your laughter and in your tears; until you come to stand before Jesus in that day in which there is no sunset & no dawning. Amen.

*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

"On Eagle's Wings"

And God will raise you up on eagle's wings, Bear you on the breath of dawn,

Make you to shine like the sun, And hold you in the palm of His hand.

*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis